

Chapter 1

Introduction



Hallowell Fields

Bill Duffy

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1.0 Introduction

1.1 This Plan Provides a Framework For Action

This plan provides a framework for taking strong and proactive action to protect and conserve natural and cultural open space values city-wide and to provide and manage public use areas and outdoor recreation facilities well in the future.

The plan is guided by the deeply-felt, commonly-shared hopes and concerns expressed by citizens, landowners, and organizations that participated in its development and discussed the kind of future they want for our city.

It establishes clear priorities and actions, recognizing that there aren't enough dollars, volunteers, time, or other resources to do everything. It identifies the individuals and organizations that have agreed, or who have been proposed, to undertake each action. It establishes a process for monitoring and evaluating progress to ensure accountability and flexibility as times change.

The plan is timed to provide crucial information just as important long-term decisions about the City's future are being made. The City's 1997 Comprehensive Plan and existing ordinances are currently under revision, and will guide the pattern and intensity of development for generations to come. The 1997 Plan recognized the importance of open space to the city's character, environmental quality, and local economy, and envisioned "a detailed open space plan to assure opportunities at both neighborhood and city-wide levels." When adopted, Hallowell's first-ever Open Space Plan will become an element of the City's Comprehensive Plan and its subsequent revision.

1.2 "Open Space" Means Undeveloped Land

Some open space is protected "in perpetuity" (i.e., as close to "forever" as our legal system allows) for conservation and/or outdoor recreation and public access. Two examples in Hallowell include state-owned Jamies Pond Wildlife Management Area; and Vaughan Woods, owned by the private, non-profit Vaughan Homestead Foundation. Jamies Pond and Vaughan Woods protect valuable natural resource functions and help perpetuate the city's special character and access to nature and the outdoors.

Open space is any undeveloped land free from residential, commercial, industrial or other kinds of intensive development.

But even Jamies Pond can't be counted on "forever," as its status could be changed through an act of the Maine legislature, though this is highly unlikely. And the Vaughan Homestead Foundation could choose to limit public access if adverse impacts occur from over-use or inappropriate use of Vaughan Woods. Other city and state-owned open spaces are likewise subject to change without assurance of long term protection, as the Vaughan Field experience has taught.

Just over a tenth of Hallowell (about 488 acres / 12.5%) is publicly owned or conserved by private landowners through conservation easement (*Map 1 – Existing Public / Dedicated Open Space*). Most open space in the city, however, is privately owned without long term protection. Much of the land in the rural area, in fact, is still in large holdings owned by several families, who have safeguarded and passed it down over many generations. Many citizens take for granted informal use and continued conservation of these areas. This sense of timelessness will not last forever — some landowners may be unwilling or unable to hold their land in an undeveloped state indefinitely.



Photo 1-1: Old trolley line over Granite Hill

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1.3 The Process Focused On Listening

The process began when the Conservation Commission formed a Working Group of its members in 2006 to undertake the plan. The group had clear outcomes in mind. It wanted:

1. Citizens to feel that they have been listened to. The plan has been built upon areas of strong public agreement and common ground. Our goal is that a broad range of citizens, landowners, and organizations will feel a sense of ownership in and commitment to the plan;
2. To communicate the heightened sense of urgency, expressed strongly by citizens and boards who participated in plan development;
3. The plan to give citizens an opportunity to discuss issues which affect the community more broadly, such as how Hallowell can work more closely with its neighbors, and how to create more opportunities to get people out of their cars to reduce CO² emissions and foster health and fitness;

4. The plan to serve as a reference document, providing information about, and the rationale for, enhancing and conserving open space and outdoor recreation opportunities; and
5. The process to serve as a positive model for other planning initiatives in the community such as rewriting the existing comprehensive plan or land use ordinances and entering into a dialogue with the state about the Stevens School.

The Working Group made significant efforts to involve city boards and organizations, large landowners, and as many citizens as possible in the process. It publicized meetings broadly and:

- Held two public meetings in October of 2006 for organizations and citizens to identify the places and activities they most value for open space and outdoor recreation and gather some preliminary ideas about the issues that most concern them about the availability and management of these resources (see Appendix A). Thirty six people participated;
- Followed with a third public meeting in April 2007, attended by 35 people, to gauge citizen opinions about objectives, priorities and potential actions to be taken (see Appendix B);
- Distributed a survey at the April 2007 meeting, and more widely to citizens and organizations throughout the community, making it available at key events, gathering places, and city meetings (see Appendix C);
- Sent representatives to at least one meeting and requested comments from the Planning Board, Elementary School Trails Committee, Row House, Friends of Vaughan Field, City Council, Vaughan Homestead Foundation and the Tree Board to encourage participation and gather opinions and direction related to the missions of the other organizations. The chair has also coordinated with the Comprehensive Plan Committee, Ordinance Revision Committee, recently formed by the City Council, and the Housing Committee. The working group met in joint session with these last three mentioned committees at a November 27 meeting;
- Created a website, published articles and announcements in the paper, posted posters throughout the city, emailed community group representatives, and personally handed notices and surveys to neighbors and those underrepresented;
- Conducted informal landowner outreach;
- Invited the public to over 10 work sessions for plan development held between March and October, 2007; and

- Is holding a final public meeting on December 6, 2007, for citizens and organizations to review the complete draft plan before sending it along to the City Council for the consideration of its adoption.

1.4 Open Space Matters to Everyone

The open space assets which citizens most value may soon be lost or too expensive to replace or restore later. Time is of the essence.

Hallowell is among the smallest of Maine communities, encompassing only 5.77 square miles. Our city is also one of those in Central Maine most poised for change in the next few years. Its location, livability, relatively large blocks of undeveloped land in the rural area, and proximity to transportation links is a combination which will attract new development and growth. Recently, the pace of development has picked up, especially in the rural business zone where new businesses are sprouting up and in the rural area where new homes are interspersed with fields and woods.

Hallowell's quality of life, spillover from Augusta, and the relative affordability of the Central Maine area in general, compared with communities nearer the coast, will continue to add pressure. According to a report for GrowSmart Maine by the Brookings Institute:¹

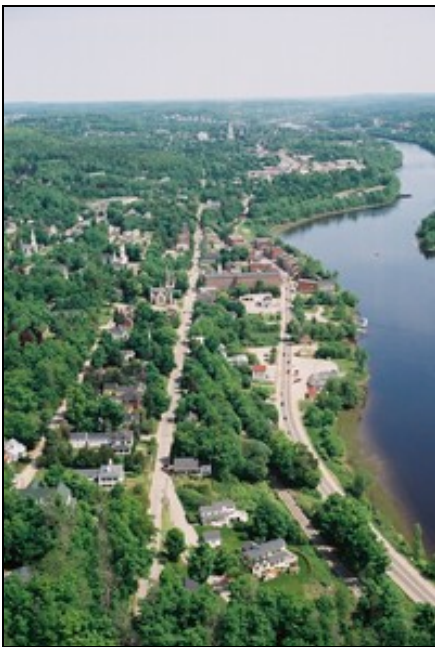


Photo 1-2: Kennebec Rivers Edge

Photo by Fox Photography Service, City of Hallowell Website

“the populations of many traditional regional centers [such as Augusta] are beginning to grow again, but the suburban towns and rural areas that surround them are growing even faster. Such growth validates the attractiveness of these places, but the resulting reach and low-density tenor of suburbanization is exacting some large costs. Excessive school construction projects, redundant expenditures on service provision, and rising transportation costs—all driven by sprawl—are increasing the pressure on town coffers and family checkbooks. Moreover, the suburbanization of so much of Maine threatens to degrade the very qualities of the state’s countryside and settlement areas that make them so appealing. Strip development along once-scenic roads, development in Maine’s forests and agricultural lands, and the threat of residential conversion . . . all endanger the value of Maine’s distinct quality of place—a critical asset for future competitiveness.”

¹ Brookings Institute Metropolitan Policy Program, 2006. Charting Maine’s Future: An Action Plan for Promoting Sustainable Prosperity and Quality Places.

From Hallowell's perspective, there is much to be gained and little to be lost from planning open space and development well. Open Space:

- Safeguards environmental functions;
- Promotes health and fitness;
- Is essential for psychological well-being;
- Requires fewer services / public expenditures;
- Sustains community character and prosperity; and
- Is good for business and community diversity.

The city has a choice: let development continue to full build-out under current zoning, depending upon only 12.5% of the land area to provide all of the environmental and open space functions - or - plan ahead, conserving and, where appropriate, providing public access to all of the open space that the city will need to maintain its quality of life and economic vibrancy as it grows and changes.

The challenge is to find ways to achieve balance and foresight in a manner which benefits all concerned, from local wildlife and backyard gardeners, to large landowners who hope to manage their resources wisely, and children who need green space for imaginative play, maintaining a healthy weight, and finding nurture in the great outdoors.



Photo 1-3: Palm Warbler

Bill Duffy

The benefits to be gained are substantial:

1. Open Space safeguards essential environmental functions.

Concern for open space is not just about places where people may enjoy the outdoors, though many of us are motivated to support conservation for this reason. Trees, forests, grasslands, wildlife and other fauna, plant communities, vernal pools, wetlands, surface

and ground waters, and the rest of the mosaic of nature are essential for life, human health, and healthy ecosystems. While we could spend millions of public dollars cleaning contaminated air and water or growing bionic food products, the natural environment will keep on doing it at comparatively little cost if we but protect what most matters.

Few stop long enough on a daily basis to think about the importance of open space to human existence, but we cannot survive without it. The natural landscape is essential in:

- moderating climate change;
- pollinating food crops and other plants;
- breaking down organic wastes;
- filtering pollutants from soil and water;
- buffering air pollutants;
- conserving soil and water;
- storing and slowing down floodwaters;
- preserving plant and animal species with which we cohabit the planet;
- nurturing human spirit and health;
- abating noise; and
- revealing stars in the night sky for wayfinding and for wonder.

Natural functions are being compromised. Good planning and stewardship are no longer a luxury but an imperative. Changes in our climate and the multitude of disasters which are resulting, and invasions of undesirable species are but three alarm bells which are changing the way we must all think and live. And we may not have long to forestall, and at best well manage, unacceptable change.

Fortunately, Hallowell's existing settlement pattern still includes a distinct city "core" and considerable rural open space where streams still run clear, and woodlands and fields still play a strong role in protecting environmental and visual qualities. This plan provides an opportunity to identify and safeguard the most essential places — the objective which was ranked #1 in the public opinion survey.

2. Open Space promotes fitness and health

Mainers face a growing health crisis. Many do not exercise enough. Many eat unhealthy foods and make other unfavorable lifestyle choices. And as a society we are creating

The Amount of Open Space Matters...

... research has revealed that when the percentage of impermeable surfaces in a watershed is 10 percent or less, streams typically retain good water quality and stable channels. When the proportion is between 10 and 25 percent, storm-fed flows cause noticeable erosion. Major floods tend to widen a stream's channel, spill over its banks, and scour away waterside vegetation.

Streams in watersheds where more than 25 percent of the surface area is impermeable usually show severe physical and ecological damage.

Sources:

<http://www.sciencenews.org/articles/20040904/bob8.asp>

and Center for Watershed Protection

landscapes which compromise our emotional well-being. These choices are costing us lives and tax dollars.

According to the Maine Physical Activity and Nutrition Plan (2005-2010), lack of exercise and poor nutrition has made obesity the #2 killer in Maine.² Almost two thirds (61%) of Maine adults are overweight – that is they weigh more than 110% of their normal body weight. Maine now has the highest rate of overweight and obese (over 120% of normal body weight) adults of any state in New England. And children are a large part of the growing epidemic.³

Only about 20% of Maine adults do the minimum amount of physical activity needed for a strong body and long life – defined as exercising for 30 minutes a day, three to four days a week.⁴

Fortunately, Hallowell’s existing settlement pattern promotes walking and enjoyment of the outdoors, and many people take advantage. We have something very good going on here. This plan is about sustaining what we have and creating more inviting, safe open spaces and pathways for healthy outdoor activities like walking, running, cycling, skateboarding, pick-up games, skating, and cross-country skiing.



Photo 1-4: Kennebec Rail Trail Promotes Health of All Ages *Holly Dominie*

² Maine Physical Activity and Nutrition Plan, 2005-2010, Maine Healthy Partnerships.

³ Maine Physical Activity and Nutrition Plan, 2005-2010, Maine Healthy Partnerships.

⁴ Maine BRFSS Community Health Profile 2000, Healthy Maine 2010.

3. Open Space is essential for psychological well-being.

Hallowell's present pattern of open space brings most citizens into relatively close contact with nature. People enjoy getting off the street, into the woods and fields, and seeing the greenery of the downtown and city heights, without having to drive far, if at all. Even if people don't physically use open space, studies show they feel good "just knowing it's there." Just the act of driving by parks and green spaces has been found to relieve stress.⁵

But, again, it is the children who may be in greatest danger from the attrition and loss of open space if we do not plan ahead. Author Richard Louv describes this threat as "nature-deficit disorder." In *Last Child in the Woods*, he describes "the human costs of alienation from nature, among them: diminished use of the senses, attention difficulties, and higher rates of physical and emotional illnesses." He has studied the disorder in individuals, families, and communities and investigated related research.⁶

Open Space is not a luxury – kids especially need it!

We who live in Hallowell are lucky: children still have the run of woods and fields and brooks. They are still nourished and sustained by the green around them. But development pressures are growing and these experiences may not be available to the next generation.

In *Last Child in the Woods*, Richard Louv describes a young girl whom he interviewed in his research: "She was one of those exceptional children who do still spend time outside, in solitude. In her case nature represented beauty — and refuge."

"When I'm in the woods," she said, "...It's so peaceful out there and the air smells so good. I mean, it's polluted, but not as much as city air. For me, it's completely different there. . . It's like you're free when you go out there. It's your own time. Sometimes I go there when I'm mad—and then, just with the peacefulness, I'm better. I can come back home happy, and my mom doesn't even know why."

—Richard Louv, *Last Child in the Woods*

⁵*Parks & Recreation* - Research Update from April 03: Parks, Recreation and Public Health : the benefits are endless, by Ching-Hua Ho, Laura Payne, Ph.D., Elizabeth Orsega-Smith, Ph.D. Geoffrey Godbey, Ph.D. (<http://www.nrpa.org/content/default.aspx?documentId=791>)

⁶ Richard Louv, 2005. *The Last Child in the Woods*. Workman Publishing.

Recent scientific studies point to the positive role of nature on child development:⁷

- **Nature can be a stress reducer.** A 2003 study published in Environment and Behavior concluded that green plants and vistas reduce stress among children in rural areas...
- **Nature can make kids more focused.** University of Illinois research found that children with attention-deficit disorder can focus more effectively after outdoor activities such as camping and fishing. Other studies have yielded similar results: Urban kids have shown increased cognitive ability when they have access to natural settings, and Swedish preschoolers who played in more natural settings suffered fewer attention lapses -- being distracted, interrupting, not listening -- than those who played in less natural areas...
- **Nature can enhance a child's emotional and social development.** If young children have regular opportunities for unstructured play, then they are likely to have a greater chance of getting along with others and being happier, healthier and smarter, report researchers at the Children's Hospital of Philadelphia.

4. Open Space requires fewer services and public expenditures.

A nationwide survey of Cost of Community Service studies in 83 communities, found that open space cost an average of \$0.36 in services per dollar of revenue raised while residential development cost \$1.15 for each dollar raised.⁸ The net effect of open space can be lower taxes. A study of all 234 incorporated townships in New Hampshire found that, on average, the towns with the most open space have the lowest tax bills.⁹ A 1998 study in Massachusetts also demonstrated that, on average, the residential property tax rate is lower in places where there are more acres of open land per capita.¹⁰

If data for Hallowell hold with studies of other Maine communities, the city's concentrated settlement pattern allows more effective delivery of services than if development were spread throughout the community. Response times and miles traveled in providing public safety and emergency services are lower per capita when most development is located in the core of a community.

⁷ Mother Nature: Raising Healthier Kids, November 18, 2007 USA Weekend Magazine. See http://www.usaweekend.com/07_issues/071118/071118healthy-kids-report.html

⁸ Cost of Community Services Studies: Making the Case for Conservation. 2002. American Farmland Trust.

⁹ Building a Healthy Squam Lakes Economy. 1995. Ad Hoc Associates, Salisbury, VT, for the Squam Lakes Association

¹⁰ "Community Choices, Thinking Through Land Conservation, Development and Property Taxes in Massachusetts," prepared for the Trust for Public Land, January 1998.

5. Open Space sustains community character and prosperity.

Communities that are smart about growth and conserve open space and natural resource values remain vital.¹¹ Open space makes a community more attractive to homebuyers and helps keep moderate and upper income homeowners from moving away. Research shows that property values are more stable or increase for properties adjacent to open space and trails. “Community improvements – parks, libraries, education – means an attractive community where people will want to live, and that means a community better able to meet its debts,” according to the managing director of Standard and Poor’s public finance department.¹²

According to one realtor, proximity to Vaughan Woods, the Rail Trail, and other recreation assets in Hallowell are highly valued among prospective homebuyers.¹³ Hallowell is fortunate to still possess an “authentic” community with a distinct and attractive sense of place, free from franchises and strip development and possessing a healthy mix of developed and undeveloped areas.

6. Open Space is good for business and community diversity.

Studies show that business leaders recognize the link between open space and quality of life for their employees. They take the availability of recreation, parks, and open space into account when planning to expand or relocate. In fact, small companies ranked such “green infrastructure” the highest priority in choosing a new location, while corporations cited them as the third most important factor, only after access to domestic and skilled labor.¹⁴ They know that knowledgeable workers and talent are attracted to live and work in “places with a diverse range of outdoor recreational activities.”¹⁵

Central Maine is fortunate to still include places such as Hallowell. But we cannot be complacent — it is becoming increasingly difficult to attract younger workers to replace those retiring in this time of aging workforce. The Augusta Labor Market, like the rest of the country, will need to work hard to attract and retain young workers and families if it is to compete.

Hallowell needs to consider how best to use its open space to advantage in attracting young people and maintaining a diverse population.

¹¹ W. Lucy and D. Phillips, in the *Journal of Planning*, June 1995.

¹² Quoted in City of Burlington, VT, “Open Space Protection Plan,” 2000.

¹³ Delaine Nye, Sprague and Curtis Realtors, personal communication, 2006.

¹⁴ John L. Crompton, Lisa L. Love, and Thomas A. More, “An Empirical Study of the Role of Recreation, Parks, and Open Space in Companies’ Location Decisions,” *Journal of Park and Recreation Administration*, 15:1 (Champaign, IL: American Academy for Park and Recreation Administration, 1997), 37-58.

¹⁵ <http://www.planning.org/cpf/briefingpapers.htm>

1.5 Overview of the Plan

Volume I contains the “guts” of the plan:

Chapter 2: What We Already Have contains background information that will give everyone the same foundation of fact upon which the plan has been built. It describes current open space assets and issues, existing public or dedicated open spaces, and highlights of the public opinion survey results. This section serves as a reference for information for decision makers and those who wish to learn more about the open space values and opportunities in the city.

Chapter 3: What We Plan to Do contains the policy and action framework for moving ahead. It starts with a “Vision” detailing the open space values which citizens want Hallowell to still possess in years to come and the kind of relationship they hope they and their grandchildren will still have with the natural environment. It then identifies guiding principles and action steps for working toward realization of the elements of this shared vision.

Chapter 4: How We Move Forward outlines the actions which are of highest priority and stipulates the responsible entity and timeframes for carrying out each.

Volume II compiles the **Appendices** which include detailed maps and document the various ways that the Working Group engaged the public and other boards and officials in the process.

A Note About “The Res”

Residents and others who walk, swim, play ball, picnic, or otherwise enjoy the City’s land off the Town Farm Road have a lot of names for it. Its official title is the “City Recreation Area,” but some call it the “Town Forest,” “Town Beach,” or “The Res.” Because “**The Res**” seems to be used most prevalently, we have used this name in this plan. To end the confusion, the City might consider finding a new, more interesting name which better fits its use and significance to the City.