

Open Space Committee – 2012 Annual Report

The Open Space Committee is charged with implementing the Open Space Plan presented in the town's 2003 Master Plan. It was formed by the Select Board in 2004 in response to a specific Master Plan recommendation that reflected townspeople's support for land conservation as a key component of town planning.

Committee tasks include outreach to owners of land with exceptional natural resource value based on an established ranking system that takes into consideration resources such as farm soils, forestland, water quality (wetlands and shoreline), scenic vistas and wildlife habitat. Linkage with existing conservation land also adds value. Twenty-five acres that link with a block of conserved land has higher conservation value than an isolated parcel because the natural resources remain intact rather than fragmented.

Two land conservation projects were completed in 2012. Total acreage was modest, but each made a definite contribution to the town's mix of conserved land.

The six-acre Community Garden parcel on Route 202N and Scott-Mitchell Road was conserved by means of a conservation easement deed that limits future land uses to agricultural. Since its formation 10 years ago, 24 plots have been tended by Peterborough residents for a modest annual fee—with room for future expansion.

Crotched Mountain as part of its Sunnyfield Farm operations placed conservation easements on three parcels along Route 136 at Bogle Road across from Sunnyfield Farm. Forty acres stretching along the Contoocook River include land worked by the farm. Major river corridors are a conservation priority, as is farmland. Another 16 acres fronting Route 136 includes a one-acre exclusion area for the house where the Sunnyfield Farm managers live.

The Bogle Road neighborhood has been an Open Space Committee priority area given the existence of Bogle Brook, the Contoocook River and significant conservation land nearby. The Committee has hosted two gatherings of neighbors where conservation was discussed and stories exchanged by neighbors that clearly communicated how much they value living in one of the town's most rural areas.

Land conservation often involves partners, and Crotched Mountain, the Harris Center and Monadnock Conservancy assisted with those gatherings.

Given their public benefits, the Town Land Acquisition Capital Reserve Fund assisted in funding expenses involved in the 2012 projects—as it has with past conservation projects involving land high in natural resource value.

Conservation easements remain the most popular form of land conservation in Peterborough. Landowners place a deeded conservation easement on their land that specifies permanent limits to future development. The easement must be held by a land trust or conservation commission that monitors the land to ensure the development restrictions are honored. The Harris Center holds the easements described above.

In most but not all cases, landowners are entitled to a federal tax deduction for the appraised value of the easement—again, in recognition of the public benefit of land conservation.

Open Space Committee members are available to discuss the many varieties of land conservation with townspeople and landowners.

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