

# Open Space and Recreation

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## Introduction

According to the Massachusetts's Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, open space is "conservation land, recreation land, agricultural land, corridor parks and amenities such as small parks, green buffers along roadways or any open area that is owned by an agency or organization dedicated to conservation." The primary purpose for protecting open space is to retain the rural character. Another purpose is to keep some land available for future unanticipated uses. Recreation opportunities are also of interest to residents and visitors to the area. This serves the purpose of helping the town to identify critical resources in need of protection and direct growth to areas that are most appropriate for it. Therefore, the Open Space and Recreation element must examine a community's desire to ensure a balance between the preservation of open space areas, and the future and current development trends of the community. As communities seek to improve public health, the provision of recreational programs for people of all ages should be accommodated, in keeping with the Age and Dementia-Friendly status of the Town.

The vast majority of this chapter was obtained from the Updated Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). Sterling received input from the residents of the Town through a series of surveys that asked questions regarding the importance of the preservation of open space and actions to preserve open space. The results obtained from these surveys have been incorporated and included in both the Goals and Objectives and as an attachment to the Master Plan itself. Utilizing information from the Updated OSRP, this chapter includes a description of the community's needs for recreational opportunities, suggestions for conserving land for open space and recreation, and an outline of community goals and objectives for preserving open space and preserving the Town's rural landscape character.

The Open Space and Recreation Plan, includes an inventory of conservation and recreation lands, description of the community's environmental resources, and a vision of the future with goals and actions. Open Space and Recreation Plans are required to be updated every seven

years in order to qualify for grant programs for land acquisition or park improvements offered through the Division of Conservation Services.



*Crystal Brook Farm on Tuttle Road*

### **The Importance of Open Space Protection**

Set in north-central Worcester County, Sterling is a residential-agricultural community bounded by the towns Princeton, Holden, Boylston, West Boylston, Clinton, and Lancaster, and the City of Leominster. Forests, farms, historic buildings, and open spaces contribute to Sterling's rural feel. Its hillside roads offer scenic vistas of the Nashua River Valley and Wachusett Mountain, and views of orchards and barns. As one of 32 towns in the Nashua River Watershed, Sterling plays an important part in safeguarding the region's water resources. Sterling lies at the confluence of two tributaries to the Wachusett Reservoir: the Quinapoxet and Stillwater Rivers. As a result, roughly half the town falls under the jurisdiction of the Massachusetts Watershed Protection Act (WSPA). To the north, the Wekepeke Brook flows to the Nashua River. The Wekepeke aquifer is a regionally significant water resource for Sterling, Leominster, Lancaster, and Clinton.

Sterling is inextricably linked to its neighbors through water, transportation networks, public facilities, and outdoor recreation areas. Bisected by Interstate 190, Sterling connects with surrounding towns along the east-west Route 62 and two north-south roadways, Route 140 and Route 12. In addition, Sterling participates in the Wachusett Regional School District for grades 9 to 12 with Holden, Rutland, Paxton, and Princeton. Regional outdoor recreation areas exist at East Lake Waushacum, Leominster State Forest, and the Wachusett Mountain Ski Area to the north, and the Sterling Rail Trail, a component of the Mass Central Rail Trail system.

Finally, Sterling is one of twenty-two cities and towns served by the Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (MRPC).

Sterling's desire is to protect, maintain, and diversify the open space available to its citizenry. Sterling acknowledges the value of existing open spaces—in terms of aesthetics, health, welfare, the economy, and recreation. At the same time, Sterling recognizes the need to maintain lands in active use, and to balance local fiscal needs and tax-base concerns with conservation efforts.

Ultimately, the quality of life for all of Sterling's residents is enriched by the quality of the open space in the Town and region, whether the space is enjoyed for recreational activity or green tranquility. Sterling enjoys a vast array of open space resources, in part a result of large state land conservation.

Sterling faces some major decisions such as determining which land parcels are important to acquire, addressing unmet open space and recreation needs, and also how to put the preservation of town character at the forefront of any growth discussions. Having a solid inventory of open space and recreational facilities and a plan as to how they will be taken care of will be a critical stepping-stone as the town moves towards achieving its goals.

## **Recent History of Community Accomplishments**

### **Progress in Sterling**

In December of 2020, the Department of Conservation Services approved the Updated 2019 Open Space and Recreation Plan. This finalized plan is based on the original Open Space and Recreation Plan from 2010 but has been updated by the Open Space Implementation Committee (OSIC) to reflect the accomplishments achieved by Sterling since that date. The Town of Sterling is active in and has made great strides towards accomplishing the community's goals and objectives related to its open space and recreational resources.

From 2010 onwards, the Town has successfully acquired and protected additional land parcels, made progress with the development and improvement of recreational sites and facilities both old and new. The Town has also achieved administrative accomplishments related to Town Hall staffing and the development of planning. Some of the recreation, conservation, and administrative accomplishments since the 2010 Open Space and Recreation Plan are described below:

#### **Accomplishments by the Recreation Department and OSIC:**

- Rebuilt both tennis and basketball courts in 2019;
- Re-seeded the Redstone Hill little league baseball fields;
- Expansion of recreation programs utilizing newly built space in the Sterling Senior Center;
- Developed 10 hiking trails with three of these trails are located on DCR-WP land;
- Developed trail brochures and maintenance of current trails on open lands with permission of landowners, guided hikes for the public;

- Led guided hikes on a regular basis, with the outing events published in local papers;
- Coordinated by OSIC, Sterling DPW is building an ADA compliant trail at Pegs Pond;
- Conservation Commission received grant money to build an ADA compliant trail at Wauschacum Meadow.

#### Conservation Accomplishments:

- Selective cutting in Town-owned forests -Percival, and Hall parcels.
- Acquired an additional 210 acres as protected open space --DCR-DWSP (158 acres), and Sterling Land Trust (52 acres).

#### Administration Accomplishments:

- Hired of a full time Town Planner in 2018;
- Developed a forest management plan for several Conservation Commission properties;
- Organized work on remedying the conditions of the playing fields by the Recreation Committee;
- Developed a five-year Recreation Plan.



*West Sterling Tennis/Pickleball Courts*

## Community Setting

### Surroundings of Sterling

#### Landscape Character

Sterling is a wonderful place to enjoy the outdoors and fish, hike, walk or enjoy a scenic view. In addition to its attractive outdoor features, Sterling's Town Center is a postcard perfect example of the traditional New England Town Center, replete with pristine white churches and meeting houses, and traditional colonial and Victorian homes. The compact development pattern of the properties in the town center is a testament to the colonial, and pre and post-industrial past of rural New England.

Rivers, streams, and ponds offer opportunities for aquatic adventures from fishing and boating to fish and wildlife observation. Popular areas in Sterling attracting birders include Muddy Pond and Sterling Peat near Interstate 190, East and West Waushacum Lake, North Dike on Wachusett Reservoir, and the agricultural fields on Redstone Hill. MassWildlife stocks trout during the spring in the Stillwater River, and West Waushacum Lake for recreation purposes; enhancing trout fishing opportunities, creating reproductive trout populations.

Hunting opportunities have been available in this rural setting. South and east of Interstate 190, Department of Conservation (DCR) Water Supply Protection (WSP) lands were closed to hunting until 2018. Due to high deer densities and resulting forest ecological damage and impeded forest regeneration from over browsed areas, DCR WSP opened lands in Sterling and other Wachusett Watershed towns (~7,000 acres) to hunting. A controlled deer hunt on lands in Sterling directly abutting the Wachusett Reservoir was also initiated.

Developed recreation areas such as Sholan Park and Beach on East Lake Waushacum, the school playgrounds, playing fields and old running track at Houghton Chocksett School are popular but are suffering from overuse and deferred maintenance.

### Scenic Landscapes

Protecting Massachusetts' scenic beauty plays an important role in the future desirability of the Commonwealth as a place to locate. "The Massachusetts Landscape Inventory" published in 1981 by the Department of Environmental Management (now Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)) remarks that extensive areas of pastoral scenery are becoming rare due to development. These areas are valuable not only for scenic beauty, but for agricultural, historic, and environmental qualities. Several trails in Sterling provide access to the scenic landscapes in the hills and river valleys. These trails are located on state, town and local land trust properties offering a variety of experiences in the fields, forests, wetlands, and waterways that dominate much of Sterling's landscape. Scenic landscapes play a significant role in the way Sterling residents characterize the town. Unfortunately, the loss of agricultural lands to development in the past few decades has adversely impacted Sterling's many scenic vistas.

Working to mitigate the adverse impact on the open spaces and landscape of Sterling is a popular point of view in Sterling. Surveys collected from previous OSRP Updates and most recently in 2018, have expressed a common theme focusing on the preservation and positive aspects on the quality of life of Sterling's "rural character". However, other than the Town Common, respondents identified few specific places or vistas, but rather expressed an overall desire to preserve the rural character and limit development.

Sterling is blessed with numerous unique features that bolster its rural character and charm, among them the many rural roads that offer scenic vistas of its historic farmlands and pastures, barns, and farmhouses. In the highlands of the town, these roads offer longer-range views of the surrounding valleys and nearby hills of neighboring towns, most notably, Wachusett Mountain. The best view of the mountain is afforded from Muddy Pond Road, not far from Chocksett School. Here, open fields and the peat bogs lie in the floodplain lands of the Stillwater River. Across from this area, on the north side of I-190, the Sterling Airport takes advantage of the extensive lowlands for its runways.

Also important to Sterling as a unique environment are the Waushacum Lakes. These beautiful lakes in the southern part of town offer attractive scenery and some wonderful opportunities for fishing. West Waushacum Lake is stocked with trout by the state. At East Lake Waushacum the Town beach at Sholan Park affords residents a range of summer recreational activities including swimming, sunbathing, volleyball, basketball, picnicking, fishing, and boating.

Lastly, there is the Sterling Rail Trail which the non-profit Wachusett Greenways is leading efforts to develop the abandoned rail bed of the Fitchburg and Worcester Railway into a pedestrian rail trail currently referred to as the Sterling Rail Trail. The Sterling Section of the

Mass Central Rail Trail begins at the town center with a round trip distance including the loop trail of 3.8 miles.

Wachusett Greenways has completed a critical trail section between the Sterling Cider Mill across a bridge at the causeway between the Quag and West Waushacum Pond, to Gates Road. The bridge at the causeway was reconstructed from two surplus pedestrian bridges left over from Boston's "Big Dig". The completed trail section, comprised of compacted stone dust, is primarily under the control of the DCR-DWSP except for the cider mill section which is private property.

## Open Space and Recreational Assets

The Town of Sterling continues to develop a robust network of open space and recreational assets, and in order to continue with those efforts, an accurate summarization of existing assets within the Town are described here. Open space assets are largely made up of land parcels within the Town, both privately and publicly owned, as follows:

### Private Parcels

Private Parcels constitute private land that is considered protected, which happens if it has a deed restriction in perpetuity, if an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) has been placed on the property, or if DEP has placed a conservation restriction on it as part of the Wetlands Conservancy Program. Removing land from permanent open space protection status so that it may be developed requires an affirmative vote by two-thirds of the State Legislature. In most cases, the watershed district would be required to show the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection just cause for converting the use of the land. Much of open space land held as private parcels in Sterling are classified as Chapter 61, 61A, or 61B land<sup>1</sup>.

Several privately owned parcels of note are the Allen Properties on Heywood and Tuttle Roads, consisting of 177 acres land under an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR), with another APR on 35.7 acres of land on Chamberlain Road. The Conservation Commission holds an "Orchard CR" on 13.3 acres owned by the Rittenhouse family.

There is also Davis Farmland on Redstone Hill Road which is a 129-acre family farm operating as a farming-oriented recreation center aimed at children aged one to twelve. Any adult must be accompanied by a child under the age of twelve to be permitted entrance. They also run a large field maze, named the Mega Maze, in a field of sorghum. Another privately owned parcel is the Sterling National Country Club, Albright Road. The property sits on 243-acres,

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<sup>1</sup> Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 61, 61A and 61B is designed to encourage the preservation and enhancement of the Commonwealth's forests, agricultural land and privately-owned recreation parcels by offering tax incentives to property owners for managing these lands for those purposes and allowing the municipality the first option to buy (and protect) the land if landowner decides to sell.



partly in Lancaster and mostly in Sterling. It is designated as an Audubon International Cooperative Sanctuary.

Eight Point Sportsmen's Club is a private membership-based sporting organization on Beaman Road, owns 66 acres in the Chapter 61B program dedicated to the use of hunting and fishing enthusiasts. The DCR-WSP holds a Watershed Protection Restriction on a large portion of the club's property.



*Meadowbrook Orchard at Chace Hill. Wachusett Reservoir in the distance.*

### Public and Non-Profit Parcels

Public and Non-Profit Parcels account for protected open space in Sterling totaling 6,974 acres and is comprised only of land owned by the Conservation Commission, the Water Department, a state conservation agency, or a nonprofit land trust; land purchased by the town with state or federal funds; or land with a deed restriction in perpetuity or DEP Wetland Conservancy conservation restriction.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts is the largest landowner in Sterling. Three state agencies, DCR (Divisions of Watershed Supply Protection and State Forests), MassWildlife and MassDOT own in fee or hold conservation restrictions on just over 30% of Sterling's land mass (see Table 1 for complete list). The majority of acres were procured by DCR-DWSP (4,985 acres) for the protection of the upland watershed of the Stillwater River, the Quag, and West Lake Waushacum, as well as the Wachusett Reservoir. The DCR-DWSP controls an additional 552.6 acres through conservation restrictions. Some portions of the DCR-DWPS properties are open to the public for passive recreation such as fishing, hiking, hunting, or bird watching; however, the DCR-DWPS restricts other activities and dogs to protect against pollution of the Stillwater River and Wachusett Reservoir watersheds.

**Table 1: Land Under Protection**

<b>Land Permanently Protected from Development</b>	
Department of Fish and Game, Division of Fisheries & Wildlife Land Owned in Fee	93.0
Department of Fish and Game, Division of Fisheries & Wildlife Conservation Restrictions (w/Town of Clinton Waterworks Land owned in fee)	487.4
DCR-DWSP Lands Owned in Fee	498.5
DCR-DWSP Watershed Protection Restr.	552.2
DSR-Leominster State Forest	63.0
Sterling Conservation Commission Lands Owned in Fee	303.3
Sterling Conservation Commission Conservation Restrictions	29.4
Sterling Town Forest	121.3
Sterling Land Trust Lands Owned in Fee	144.0
Sterling Land Trust Con Restrictions	65.2
Agricultural Preservation Restrictions	226.1
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>6,974.3</b>
<b>Land with Limited Protection from Development</b>	
Cemetery	28.8
Sterling Active Recreation Areas	77.7
Sterling Parks for Passive Recreation	15.6
Other State Open Spaces	15.3
Other Municipal Open Spaces	172.2
<b>Subtotal</b>	<b>318.4</b>
<b>Land Temporarily Protected from Development</b>	
Chapter 61 - Forestry	291.0
Chapter 61A -Agriculture	2,203.4
Chapter 61B - Recreation	60.4
<b>Total</b>	<b>2,554.8</b>
<b>Total Open Space Land</b>	<b>9,847.5</b>

**Recreational Programs**

The Town of Sterling Recreation Committee operates numerous programs for all ages that are spread out over five different locations. All of these locations, with the exception of the Sholan Beach, are under the control of other authorities which permit the Recreation Committee’s programs to be run as a secondary function. Table 2 contains a selection of several recreational programs at each of the various recreational facilities in the Town:

**Table 2: Sterling Recreational Programs**

<b>Sterling Recreational Programs</b>	
<b>Sholan Park</b>	Summer Lake Programs
	Morning Yoga on the Beach
	Super Safari Adventure



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<b>West Sterling Tennis Courts</b>	After School Tennis Academy Pickleball
<b>Chocksett Middle School</b>	Togo Palazzi Basketball Clinic Girls Skills, Drills, & Scrimmage Basketball Clinic New Heights Skills Clinic Kinderball Ultimate Sports High School Pick-up Basketball Cupcake Wars Center Stage Sterling
<b>Houghton Primary School</b>	Sterling Rec Basketball After School Tennis for Houghton Lego Robotics Science Mysteries
<b>Houghton Primary School Field</b>	Mini Soccer Flag Football
<b>Upper Griffin Field/Track</b>	Sterling Rec Road Race Pre-K Minisports
<b>Conant Library</b>	The Children's Story Hour Guided-hike Programs
<b>Sterling Senior Center</b>	Babysitting & CPR Minecraft Mania Power Yoga A.M. Boot Camp Cribbage for all ages
<b>First Church in Sterling</b>	Music Together Summer Pickleball
<b>Additional Programs</b>	Y.A.H.O.O. (Young Adults Helping Out Others) Summer Concert Series at Memorial Park Sterling Youth Baseball Sterling Youth Soccer Wachuset Youth Football & Cheer

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## Analysis of Needs: Open Space

The Town of Sterling has an abundance of natural resources, open space and recreation opportunities that need to be protected. The small-town character, rural charm and quality of life that have defined Sterling for decades are worth preserving and protecting.

Sterling is now located at the so-called 'sprawl frontier,' situated as we are close to the I-495 corridor in eastern Massachusetts. This sprawl frontier location indicates that Sterling can expect development pressures, both residential and industrial. While the benefits of new residential and industrial developments should not be ignored, the impact on farms, open space and quality of life must also be taken into consideration and should be addressed proactively and in a well-planned fashion, often referred to as smart growth.

Sterling will also, unavoidably, be facing the effects of climate change, which will require a range of measures to improve both resilience and sustainability. One aspect of this will be to improve the economic aspects of local food production at Sterling farms. Another aspect will be the increased importance of preserving and protecting open space, and decisions will need to be made from a holistic point of view, such that ecosystem and wildlife corridor conservation, protection of water resources and development of interconnecting walking and bicycle paths are considered in a balanced way. The resource protection needs should be considered from this perspective.

A priority goal is to establish which existing, unprotected open spaces in Sterling need to have priority in terms of preserving ecosystems and wildlife habitat. Such an effort will involve the Town Administrator, the Select Board and other boards, but the initiative can come from Open Space Implementation Committee (OSIC).

Steps should be taken to preserve much of the 1/3 of mainly agricultural land in Sterling that is neither developed nor conserved. Once this land is sold for development, it can be considered lost for good. A specific initiative will be to calculate how much "prime agricultural" land has already been lost to development, and how much is still available, and then formulate a plan to preserve prime agricultural land in a systematic way.

The average age of active farmers in Massachusetts is 60 years, so large tracts of land will soon be passed on or sold. OSIC needs to work closely with Sterling's Agricultural Commission, and together should work to develop a farm transfer program modeled after other programs established elsewhere.

In terms of Smart Growth, OSIC should work with the Planning Board to promote the idea of Open Space Residential Design (OSRD)/cluster zoning which clusters buildings in new developments protecting remaining land set aside for open space.

## Analysis of Needs: Recreation

The Sterling Master Plan Community Engagement Report, dated June 2019 and prepared by Barrett Planning Group LLC, states that 25 Sterling citizens answered yes to the statement: "Sterling needs better communication between town departments about responsibility for maintaining open space and recreation facilities" 24 citizens answered yes to the statement: "Sterling needs a community recreation center." In prior years there has been much talk in town about renovating the decrepit playing fields. At 2020 town meeting the voters approved \$70,000 to engage a landscape architect to begin design work.

There is a strong interest in town to pursue the renovation of the Griffin Road and Muddy Pond playing fields which would include, but not be limited to, new top soil, more area drains, regrading to remove rainwater more quickly, an irrigation system, area lighting and better equipment storage.

Due to the popularity of the recreation sports programs in Sterling, the fields are heavily scheduled. In particular the Upper Griffin Playing field is used the most frequently hosting lacrosse in the spring and field hockey, football and soccer in the fall. The field is poorly graded without sufficient storm drains and the two-season use makes turf-recovery difficult.

More playing fields will help solve the problem of overuse, allowing a rotation scheduled for the ground to recover. Re-arranging the fields to take better advantage of the available acreage is a consideration, but the fields should be reconstructed and a turf management plan put in place. During the summer of 2019, a committee was formed to evaluate the conditions of the playing fields at Griffin Road and Muddy Pond and the feasibility of a new location for a future Recreation Center.

The Recreation Department left the 1835 Town Hall in 2016 when renovations were underway. As a result, the Recreation Department lost their meeting space, indoor program space, equipment storage, control of their own space and their identity.

The Recreation Director's office was moved to the basement of the Municipal Building and monthly meetings are held in any available room of the Municipal Building. Programs that used space in the Town Hall were halted. Some equipment stored in the basement of the Town Hall was permitted to stay. Other equipment storage was scattered at the playing fields in lock boxes.

The 1835 Town Hall renovation permitted the safe, accessible use of the building. There is office space, some meeting space, a large meeting room and equipment storage in the basement. However, until the sanitary waste disposal system is improved, the number of occupants in the building will be limited.

Indoor recreation programs during the school year are spread over four locations:

1. Sterling Senior Center;
2. Chocksett Middle School;
3. Houghton Elementary School;
4. First Church in Sterling.

The Recreation Committee pays a fee or donation to some of the facilities that provide space, yet it has no management of those facilities. And of course, the schools, are not in full control of their building in the afternoon and the evenings. There is an advantage that the children can conveniently walk to their chosen after-school activity without leaving the school.

The Senior Center program spaces are completely booked. There are eight recreation programs that are run out of the Senior Center, competing with senior programming.

The First Church in Sterling provides overflow programming space as a public service to the town at their discretion. Unexpected church needs (such as a funeral) have made recreation programs to forfeit the space, which is understandable, but problematic.

A Recreation Center would impact the lives of all Sterling residents. The benefits include opportunities to:

- Expand the number of programs offered, increasing the variety of programs and the target age;
- Provide a place for outdoor activities that would otherwise have to be canceled due to inclement weather;
- Provide an income to the town through rentals and fees;
- Offer a before and after school program, which could be an income generator;
- Relieve the burden of usage of other town facilities such as Town Hall for meetings and the Senior Center programs;
- Increase marketing opportunities by providing an outlet for central communications;
- Provide space for large town events such as Town Meeting and polling (currently held in the school gym), town wide holiday events (currently held in the First Church), and an emergency shelter (currently the First Church).

A Recreation Center would be a true center for the citizens of Sterling and make the town an attractive place for families to live.

From a town government organization standpoint, the Recreation Committee reports to the Select Board, who are answerable only to Town Meeting. Where they control recreation programs, the Department of Public Works has responsibility for the grounds (and any buildings). The Recreation Committee ends up bearing the responsibility for the playing fields but without the control. Changes need to be made to the structure of Town government to give the Recreation Committee full control over the playing fields and facilities and bring them under the protection of the Select Board.

## Goals and Actions

### Open Space and Recreation Goals & Actions

**Goal 1:** Encourage responsible protection and stewardship of publicly accessible lands and waters for natural resource conservation, recreation, and water supply protection.

*Action Item #1:* Continue to increase awareness of open space and recreation opportunities in Sterling by engaging in public outreach.

*Action Item #2:* Promote or host events, activities and programs that address stewardship needs on publicly accessible properties.

**Goal 2:** Enhance athletic fields and other recreation facilities.

*Action Item #1:* Create a comprehensive maintenance plan for all the town playing fields.

*Action Item #2:* Conduct a Needs Assessment for indoor recreation program space.

*Action Item #3:* Work with the Select Board and Department of Public Works to align goals and maintenance plans.

*Action Item #4:* Develop plans for renovating the Griffin Road Playing Fields.

**Goal 3:** Identify and consider new approaches to Sterling's zoning and planning and other protective bylaws that affect Sterling's open space and recreation needs.

*Action Item #1:* Consider the adoption of the Community Preservation Act at Town Meeting.

**Goal 4:** Make local trails more accessible.

*Action item #1:* Develop a plan for a network of interconnecting hiking trails, including trails in adjoining towns and the proposed Mass Central Rail Trail currently under development.

*Action item #2:* Develop a maintenance plan for existing Sterling Trails, including staffing and possible budget.

*Action item #3:* Keep the website for OSIC's Sterling Trails current, with updates for trail conditions, schedules for trail clean-up days, listing of scheduled hikes, and trail brochures ready for download.

*Action item #4:* Expand the list of trail leaders and continue an active program of scheduled hikes with leaders and augmented with (amateur) naturalists for fauna and flora commentaries.

**Goal 5:** Formulate a proactive and balanced decision-making regarding acquisition of open space.

*Action item #1:* Prioritize unprotected open space parcels that may become available for acquisition by the town in terms of preserving ecosystems, wildlife corridor conservation and wildlife habitat and protection of important water resources.

*Action item #2:* Review administrative procedures that inform decision making about the community's open space and recreation priorities and needs.

**Action item #3:** Prioritize unprotected parcels of agricultural land in terms of soil quality and suitability for farming.

**Action item #4:** Explore additional options available to the town for acquiring non-protected land.

**Action item #5:** While resilience and sustainability are typically infrastructure-related issues, decisions regarding open space protection need to consider: (i) Protecting and not overtaxing aquifers, lakes, and other water resources, (ii) providing buffer for the more frequently occurring heavy downpours; (iii) having a strong farming community that is well-integrated into the local food network.

**Goal 6:** Special considerations for seniors and residents benefitting from ADA.

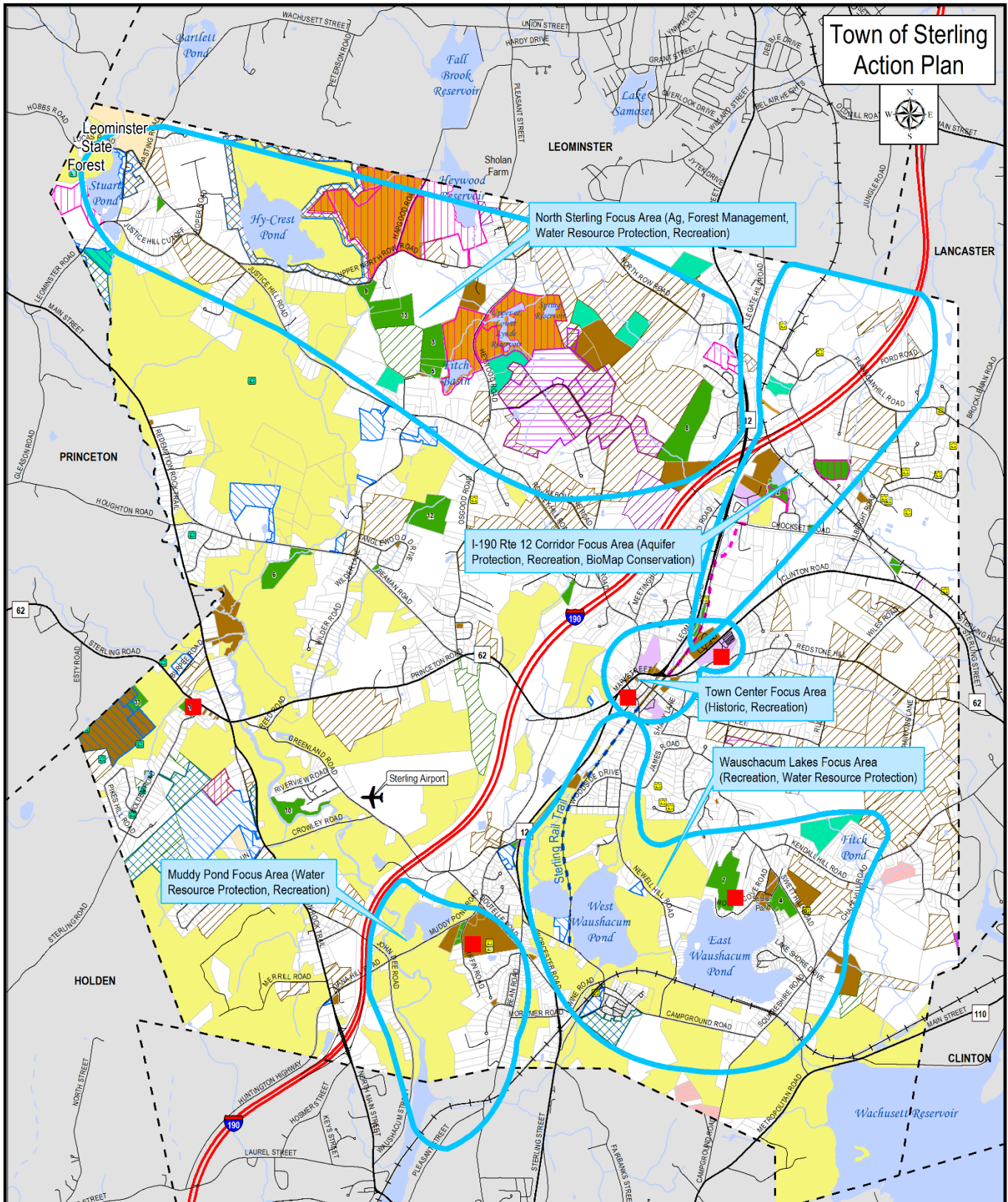
**Action item #1:** Prepare descriptions of a few Sterling Easy Trails that form short sections of the existing Sterling Trails and are particularly suited for inexperienced hikers while being Age and Dementia-Friendly.

**Action item #2:** Improve or create parking access to conservation, town forest properties and hiking trails.

**Action item #3:** Improve and expand upon recreational programming to be more accessible and inclusive.



# Town of Sterling Action Plan



**Legend**

Developed Recreation Facilities	NHESP Certified Vernal Pools	<b>Protected Open Space</b>
Action Items	NHESP Potential Vernal Pools: NOT Equivalent to Certified Vernal Pools	Sterling - ConComm
Airports	Sterling Rail Trail	Sterling Land Trust
Community Boundaries	Sterling Rail Trail - Pending Ext.	Town of Clinton
Active Rail Lines	Agricultural Preservation Restriction	State-DCR - DWSP
Parcel Boundaries	Conservation Restriction - Permanent	State-DCR - State Park
<b>Roadways</b>	Watershed Preservation Restrictions	Other Municipal Land (Clinton)
Interstate Routes	<b>Chapter 61 Lands</b>	Town of Sterling
US & State Routes	<b>Note: Accuracy under critical review</b>	<b>Unprotected Land</b>
Other Roads	61- Forestry	Misc Private or Non Profit
<b>Water</b>	61A- Agriculture	Other Town of Sterling Land
Streams & Rivers	61B- Recreation	
Intermittent Stream		
Lakes, Ponds & Reservoirs		

Mapping efforts coordinated by the Town of Sterling Open Space Implementation Committee ([sterling.openspace@gmail.com](mailto:sterling.openspace@gmail.com))

**DATA SOURCES:** MassGIS, MassDOT, the Town of Sterling, and the MRC.

**DISCLAIMER:** The information depicted on this map is for planning purposes only. All data are representational and are not adequate for boundary definition, regulatory interpretation, or parcel-based analysis.

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