



What is an Open Space and Recreation Plan?

An Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) offers a comprehensive understanding of a community's existing conservation and recreational resources with an analysis of the current and future needs of the community. Recommendations included in the plan help guide decision-making regarding where investment will be most effective.

An OSRP may recommend protecting unique woodlands, critical plant and animal habitat, river and stream corridors, watersheds, as well as other types of open space. Through a regional perspective, the plan can recognize how habitat corridors can connect to additional nearby open space, encouraging biodiversity and a healthy ecosystem. Coordinating land protection efforts with state environmental agencies and local land trusts adds to the effectiveness of the plan.

Areas that are prone to flooding or subject to erosion also factor into the plan, particularly due to climate change as the potential for flooding increases. Historic and cultural resources, such as agricultural land, are also considered within an Open Space and Recreation Plan.

In many cases, protecting open space provides additional recreational opportunities, through new areas for walking and hiking, snowshoeing and cross-country skiing. However, an Open Space and Recreation Plan considers the broader recreational needs of the community, including organized activities using courts and fields, such as soccer, football, softball, baseball, pickle ball and tennis. All ages and demographics should be considered in an OSRP. For example, assessing whether playground equipment is available that meets a variety of age groups or whether senior citizens have accessible options.

The Value of an OSRP

The Berkshires are graced with historic villages surrounded by vast tracts of rural, undeveloped lands that benefit the community. The region contains scenic landscapes created by its agricultural past, with sweeping open fields and pastures set against dark forested mountains as a backdrop. Iconic farmhouses and barns serve as anchors in these open spaces. Vast tracts of forest land provide wildlife habitats that allow animal populations to move in search of food and breeding areas. These areas also provide residents and visitors with places to enjoy the great outdoors in quiet solitude to hike and birdwatch.

BRPC PROGRAM

Community Planning Program
berkshireplanning.org/programs

GUIDANCE

Details on what to include in an OSRP can be found online:

mass.gov/service-details/open-space-and-recreation-plans

Preparing an Open Space and Recreation Plan

An Open Space and Recreation Plan includes sections on public participation, chapters on community setting, environmental inventory and analysis, inventory of lands of conservation and recreation interest, the community vision, analysis of needs, goals and objectives, and an action plan.

Open Space and Recreation Plans are all reviewed and approved by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Division of Conservation Services to ensure that all plan requirements are met. The plans expire after seven years. Many of the Open Space and Recreation Plans in Berkshire County have expired and will need to be updated to access state funding sources.

Benefits of an Open Space and Recreation Plan

An Open Space and Recreation Plan considers what capital improvements might be needed, such as whether neighborhood parks need capital improvements like benches, trash cans or new plantings. With roads and sidewalks providing recreational opportunities for walking, running, and bicycling, an Open Space and Recreation Plan considers how transportation corridors can be maintained and improved for recreational activities.

With an up-to-date Open Space and Recreation Plan, a community has a much clearer vision for how to accomplish their goals. Additionally, it is much easier to advocate for funding, protection strategies or facilities improvements when proposed projects are noted as priorities within the plan. The financial benefit of an Open Space and Recreation plan is that once a community has an approved Open Space and Recreation Plan, it is eligible for various grant programs for up to seven years.

More information on these grants can be found at <https://www.mass.gov/grant-programs-offered-by-the-division-of-conservation-services>.

OSRPs in Berkshire County

Berkshire Regional Planning Commission recently assisted the town of Dalton in preparing their Open Space and Recreation Plan. During 2022 and 2023, BRPC will work with the town of Lee to update their plan.

Open Space and Recreation throughout the Berkshires



Egremont



Becket



Pittsfield



Adams