

Merrimac Open Space and Recreation Plan

Merrimac, MA

September 2026

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Cover Photo Source: Town of Merrimac, Open Space Committee

SECTION 1 | Executive Summary

Merrimac's 2026–2036 Open Space and Recreation Plan reflects the community's commitment to protecting the natural, agricultural, and recreational resources that define town character. Through public surveys and a community forum, residents identified clear priorities: improved trail maintenance and connectivity; better accessibility for seniors, people with disabilities, and families; expanded recreation at Emery Street Field; and greater public access to the Merrimack River and Lake Attitash. The Plan responds with targeted, achievable actions including: improving trails and signage, upgrading playgrounds and amenities, developing Emery Street Field as a multi-use community hub, increasing access to water recreation, protecting priority conservation lands, and safeguarding water resources. Together, these initiatives advance a resilient, connected, and accessible open space and recreation system for all Merrimac residents.

1.1 Goals & Objectives

Goal 1: Protect and connect open spaces, conservation land, and natural resources

Objective 1.1: Protect priority lands to strengthen connections between natural corridors, farmland, habitats, and existing protected open space

Objective 1.2: Improve stewardship and management of protected lands

Objective 1.3: Improve trail access and connectivity

Objective 1.4: Protect and maintain scenic vistas, viewsheds, and climate-resilient landscapes

Goal 2: Expand parks and recreation access and community use

Objective 2.1: Improve and expand recreation facilities

Objective 2.2: Expand water access for recreation

Objective 2.3: Improve access, parking, and safety at open space and recreation sites

Goal 3: Improve accessibility and connectivity of parks and recreation between neighborhoods, schools, downtown, and open space resources for all

Objective 3.1: Improve accessibility at recreation sites

Objective 3.2: Strengthen connections between neighborhoods and recreation destinations

Objective 3.3: Improve awareness of open space and recreation resources

Goal 4: Safeguard water resources for drinking water, habitat, and recreation while balancing access and resource protection

Objective 4.1: Strengthen water resource protection

Goal 5: Engage residents and Town departments in the implementation of this plan and the stewardship of Merrimac's natural, recreational, historic, and cultural resources

Objective 5.1: Monitor progress in implementing the plan and maintain engagement of other Town departments and the public

Objective 5.2: Expand public involvement in stewardship activities, including volunteer efforts to maintain trails, parks, and open spaces

SECTION 2 | Introduction

2.1 Statement of Purpose

The **2026–2036 Merrimac Open Space and Recreation Plan** (OSRP) is the fourth update to the Town's original 1997 plan, following prior updates in 2005 and 2016. This update was initiated both to maintain eligibility for state grant programs administered by the Division of Conservation Services (DCS) and to reassess community priorities. Nearly a decade after the previous plan, the Open Space Committee undertook a comprehensive review of past goals and objectives, evaluated progress, identified gaps, and responded to emerging needs related to resource protection, recreation access, and open space connectivity. Since the last update, Merrimac has completed a Master Plan (2024) and updated its zoning bylaw, both of which inform this OSRP's priorities and action items.

The OSRP establishes a clear, implementable action plan that reflects Merrimac's current needs, aligns with recent planning efforts, and provides a practical roadmap for protecting natural open space and enhancing recreational opportunities over the next ten years.

2.2 Planning Process and Public Participation

The Merrimac Open Space Committee began work on this OSRP update in winter 2026, holding four meetings and one publicly posted community forum over the planning period. Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC) prepared the mapping for the plan, which can be found in Appendix A. The plan was developed in coordination with Town boards and departments and informed by: a community-wide Open Space and Recreation Survey (spring 2026), a public forum held April 15, 2026 at the Merrimac Public Library, and results from the 2024 Master Plan survey and a 2023 Emery Street Field survey. Full outreach documentation and survey results are included in Appendix B.

Outreach was advertised through the Town website, social media, the Merrimac Bulletin, and physical postings at Town Hall, the Library, the Senior Center, and the Post Office. Paper survey copies were available at Town Hall and the Library. The public forum used a station-based format to collect mapping input, action plan feedback, and open-ended community priorities. Sixty-three residents responded to the open space survey, representing a broad cross-section of the community.

After completing a draft plan, the Open Space Committee submitted it for review and comment to the Board of Selectmen, the Parks and Recreation Department, the Planning Board, the Conservation Commission, and MVPC.

The following people generously contributed their time and knowledge to produce this plan.

Merrimac OSRP Working Group

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Chris Gaudet, Commission on Disabilities
Jerome Mathieu, Conservation Commission
Mary Glennon, Open Space
Bill McGowan, Planning Board
Wayne Adams, Select Board
Tim Simmons, Resident

Merrimack Valley Regional Planning Commission (MVPC)

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Alex Gant

Plan implementation and progress will be monitored by the Open Space Committee and the Parks and Recreation Department in coordination with relevant Town boards and departments. The Committee will conduct periodic reviews of the Action Plan, track progress, adjust priorities based on available funding and emerging needs, and report publicly on implementation activities.

2.2.1 Open Space and Recreation Plan Survey

The Open Space and Recreation Survey provided valuable insight into community priorities, preferences, and perceived gaps in Merrimac's open space and recreation system. Respondents expressed high value for Merrimac's natural landscapes, trails, and passive recreation opportunities. Walking, hiking, and enjoying nature were among the most frequently cited activities, reinforcing the importance of preserving open space and maintaining trail networks.

Survey responses indicated that residents are most frequently visiting the following mix of trail systems, school-based recreation areas, and passive natural spaces: McLaren Trail, Town Forest Trail, Beaver Pond Reservation, Donaghue School/Stevens Field, and Sweetsir School Playground.

Overall, the survey results underscored a strong commitment to preserving Merrimac's rural character and natural assets; while also highlighting the need for strategic investments in accessibility, maintenance, and recreational diversity. These findings directly informed the goals, objectives, and action items outlined in this plan.

2.2.2 Public Forum

The forum was designed as an interactive, station-based event to encourage participation and collect both spatial and action-oriented feedback. The formal part of the forum began with a presentation on what open space is and the purpose of the OSRP update. The interactive portion of the forum included three stations:

- Station 1: Open Space Mapping - Participants engaged in a mapping exercise using a large map of Merrimac's open space network. Participants were asked to highlight favorite locations as well as areas needing improvement. The exercise helped identify both strengths and gaps within the Town's open space system and informed the sections of the plan on quality of facilities, goals and objectives, and the action plan.
- Station 2: Adding to the Action Plan: Participants provided detailed feedback on the draft Action Plan by suggesting improvements, identifying missing actions, and sharing concerns and implementation ideas. This station allowed the Town to evaluate not only which actions are important, but also the level of community support and opportunities to refine or strengthen specific actions.
- Station 3: Existing Action Plan Priorities - Participants reviewed a draft Action Plan and were asked to identify the most important priorities for the coming decade. This exercise provided a clear understanding of which actions the community views as highest priority and where the Town should focus time, funding, and effort.

Together, these methods provided a comprehensive understanding of community preferences and directly informed the OSRP. The feedback received during the public forum is directly in line with the community survey.

2.2.3 Merrimac Master Plan Survey

A community survey conducted in 2024 as part of the Merrimac Master Plan, distributed online, via social media, and in paper form at the Merrimac Public Library, provided input on open space and recreation needs. Results highlighted strong demand for expanded recreational amenities and access, additional playgrounds, improved trails, access to the Merrimack River, reopening the beach at Lake Attitash, as well as enhanced sports

facilities. Walkability and bikeability were also identified as priorities, with recommended improvements such as better sidewalk maintenance, slower speed limits, and expanded bike infrastructure. Important sites for improvement included Lake Attitash and Emery Street Field as well as improved access to the Merrimack River. Land conservation remains a priority, with 72% supporting the protection of natural resources. Respondents emphasized the importance of preserving Lake Attitash and the McLaren Trail (supported by over 75%), while also noting that key natural assets are underutilized due to limited access.

2.2.4 Emery Street Survey

A community survey was conducted in March 2023 by the Merrimac Open Space Committee and was aimed specifically at the Emery Street Field. The Committee developed and disseminated a survey to Merrimac citizens to understand the needs of the community. In summary, the approximately 300 responses indicated a consensus for community uses such as gathering places, community gardens, simple structures, playgrounds, and dog parks. There is interest in expanding walking trails, loops, and nature areas.

2.3 Enhanced Outreach and Public Participation

The Town of Merrimac implemented a multi-pronged engagement strategy designed to reduce barriers to participation and reach Environmental Justice (EJ) populations. The Town reviewed mapping data to identify the EJ block group within the community and ensured that outreach efforts specifically targeted residents in that area. The Town used this information to focus enhanced outreach on the portion of Merrimac identified as an EJ neighborhood, in addition to conducting broader town-wide outreach.

The public forum was held during evening hours to accommodate residents with daytime work or caregiving responsibilities, and was located at the Merrimac Public Library, a centrally located, trusted community space accessible to all residents. The forum was designed to be child-friendly and welcoming.

Outreach channels included the Town website, social media, physical postings at the Post Office, Senior Center, Merrimac Public Library and Town Hall, and notices distributed through community networks. Both the Post Office and the Senior Center are located within the EJ community. This combination of digital and in-person outreach was designed to reach residents with varying levels of internet access, including EJ populations who may rely more on community-based information sources. Emery Street Fields directly abuts the Town's mapped EJ area, and physical postings of the survey and flyers advertising the public forum were posted to reach the Town's EJ community.

Paper survey copies were made available at Town Hall and the Merrimac Public Library to reach residents without internet access or digital literacy. The survey specifically solicited input from residents with disabilities, who consistently identified the following needs: accessible parking close to amenities, smooth and well-maintained paths to accommodate wheels, frequent seating and rest areas, and accessible restrooms. These findings are directly reflected in the plan's goals and action items.

2.4 Public Engagement Summary of Results

Key themes identified through the surveys and public forum include:

- *Accessibility and Inclusivity* - A major theme throughout the forum was the lack of accessible recreational infrastructure. Participants noted that many trails do not accommodate people with disabilities, elderly residents, or families with strollers. Specific needs include: improved trail surfaces, better grading, installation of rails, increased trail width to accommodate wheel-based mobility, and additional seating

such as benches along trails. A broader concern is that there are limited recreational opportunities for seniors and individuals with mobility challenges.

- *Lack of Facilities and Amenities* - Participants identified a shortage of basic amenities, particularly parking and restrooms. Currently, residents often rely on local businesses for restroom access due to the absence of facilities at parks and recreation areas. Parking was identified as a constraint at certain locations, including Carey Park and the McLaren Trail.
- *Lack of Awareness* - Many residents are simply unaware of available parks, trails, programming, and access points. This includes limited understanding of where public open space exists and what amenities are available. Many noted that information about trails, open space locations, and available amenities is not always easy to find.
- *Lack of Trail Maintenance and Connectivity* - Residents expressed strong appreciation for Merrimac's open space and trail network but emphasized the need for improvements in the trail systems. It was reported that there is a general lack of maintenance across many trails, leading to overgrown trails or lost trails, a need for better signage and trail markers, confusion over which lands are publicly accessible, and a lack of trail connectivity.
- *Need for New Recreational Opportunities* - Residents expressed a strong desire for expanded recreational opportunities, particularly for underserved groups. Priorities included: teen recreation (skate park or mountain bike track), community garden, dog park, and senior focused recreation.
- *Recreational Access to Water Resources* - Residents emphasized the importance of the Merrimack River and Lake Attitash as recreational and scenic assets, but access to these resources is limited or non-existent due to private land and the shutdown of the beach on Lake Attitash.

Residents identified several new actions to improve parks and open space, that are directly reflected in the Action Plan.

SECTION 3 | Community Setting

3.1 Regional Context

Merrimac is a small town in Essex County in northeastern Massachusetts. The Town is bordered by Haverhill on the southwest, the state of New Hampshire (NH) on the northwest and north, Amesbury on the east, and West Newbury on the south (***Map 1***). It is seven miles east of Haverhill, 37 miles north of Boston, 39 miles south of Manchester, NH and 78 miles south of Portland, Maine (ME). The Merrimack River and two regional highways (I-495 and Route 110) traverse the width of the southern part of Town, dividing the Town. Merrimacport is joined to the rest of Merrimac by three bridges over I-495.

Merrimac and the surrounding towns are located in the Southern New England Coastal Plains and Hills ecoregion of Massachusetts, as designated by the US Environmental Protection Agency (EPA). The communities in the region share many resources. The most significant is the 180-mile Merrimack River and its watershed. The Merrimack River watershed is New England's fourth largest, covering 5,010 square miles and including more than 200 cities and towns. More than 300,000 people use surface water from the Merrimack River for drinking water. Other communities in the region rely on the Merrimack's groundwater resources. There are unconsolidated sand and gravel aquifers along the Merrimack River and its major tributaries that can sustain well yields of more than 300 gallons per minute.

The EPA and the Merrimack River Watershed Council monitor the river's water quality and its flow. Development, an increase in impervious surfaces, non-point source pollution and combined sewer overflows (CSOs) threaten the water quality of the river south of Manchester, NH.

The Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC) coordinates region-wide planning for 15 communities in the Merrimack Valley, including Merrimac. MVPC plans for the region-wide transportation system, including development of the regional Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP), as well as regional economic development planning including the Comprehensive Economic Development Strategy (CEDS) for the region.

The Essex National Heritage Commission is charged with preserving the region's historic, cultural and natural resources. Merrimac is one of 34 communities within the Essex National Heritage Area, a designation made by the National Parks Service. There are 62 National Heritage Areas in the country. The Commission manages several technical assistance and grant programs to help member communities with landscape and historic inventories, and preservation planning.

3.2 Population Characteristics

Merrimac's demographic profile has direct implications for open space and recreation planning. The Town's population is older than both Essex County and the state, income levels are moderate to high with notable variation, and the community includes a designated Environmental Justice population. Together, these characteristics call for a balanced approach that maintains youth-oriented facilities, prioritizes accessible and passive recreation for an aging population, and provides equitable access across income levels.

3.2.1 Density

Merrimac's 2020 population of 6,723 yields a density of 794 persons per square mile, well below the Essex County average of approximately 1,406 per square mile (**Table 3-1**). This lower density reflects the Town's rural-suburban character and single-family zoning. It also means that residents in many parts of town rely on vehicles

to reach recreation areas, underscoring the importance of expanding trail networks, improving walkability, and providing adequate parking at key sites.

Table 3-1
Population and Density

Metric	Value
2020 Population	6,723
Population Density (individuals/sq. mile)	794

Source: United States Census Bureau

3.2.2 Age

Merrimac's median age of 49.4 is significantly higher than the Essex County median of 40.9 (**Table 3-2**). Residents 65 and older represent over one-quarter of the population, indicating strong demand for accessible trails, benches, universally accessible facilities, and passive recreation opportunities. While the proportion of youth has declined since 2010, families with children remain an important part of the community, supporting continued investment in playgrounds, athletic fields, and safe routes to recreation areas.

Table 3-2
Age

Metric	Value
Median Age	49.4
Under 18 Years Old	16.5%
65 Years and Older	26.7%
Average Family Size	2.88

Source: United States Census Bureau, MVPC Demographics "The Valley in Values"

3.2.3 Family Income

Merrimac's median household income of $102,760 is slightly below the Essex County median of $107,740 (**Table 3-3**). Despite relatively high median income, approximately 24% of households earn less than $50,000 annually, and roughly 9.45% of residents live below the Federal Poverty Level. This variation highlights the importance of maintaining free or low-cost recreational opportunities and minimizing access barriers such as transportation costs and program fees.

Table 3-3
Family Income

Metric	Value
Median Household Income	$102,760
Unemployed	1.0%
Below Federal Poverty Level	9.45%
Earn <$20k/Year	1.2%
Earn <50k/Year	24%
Earn >$200k/Year	16.5%

Source: United States Census Bureau, MVPC Demographics "The Valley in Values"

3.2.4 Environmental Justice Populations

Merrimac contains one designated EJ census block group: Block Group 3, Census Tract 2621, Essex County (***Map 2***). This area qualifies based on income, with a median household income of $49,583, approximately 59% of the statewide median. The block group includes 1,278 residents across 586 households; the minority population is approximately 8% and no households are identified as language-isolated. Additionally, 14.29% of Merrimac residents identify as having a disability, slightly above the Essex County rate of 12.29%.

The presence of an income-based EJ population reinforces the Plan's commitment to equitable access, particularly walkable connections to parks, free public recreation, and ADA-compliant infrastructure. Planning efforts will focus on improving trail connectivity and access in and near this block group and promoting the equitable distribution of future open space investments across the community.

3.3 Growth and Development Patterns

3.3.1 Open Space-Based Infrastructure

TRANSPORTATION NETWORK

Merrimac's transportation network includes a combination of regional roadway access, limited public transit, and a growing system of sidewalks, trails, and open space corridors that support both recreation and alternative transportation.

Within Town, Merrimac's roadway network is composed of arterial, collector, and local roads, many of which retain a rural character with narrow widths and mature tree cover. The Town is served by nearby major highways, including Route 110 and Interstate 495, as well as regional transit options such as the Massachusetts Bay Transportation Authority (MBTA) commuter rail stations in Haverhill and Newburyport and bus service provided by the Merrimack Valley Transit Authority. Commuting patterns indicate a strong reliance on personal vehicles, with only 2% of residents using public transit and the majority traveling outside of Merrimac for work. This reliance reflects both regional commuting patterns and local limitations in pedestrian and bicycle connectivity.

PEDESTRIAN NETWORK

Merrimac has over 14 miles of sidewalks concentrated primarily in and around downtown. The Merrimac Square reconstruction project added approximately 2,500 feet of ADA-compliant sidewalks, improving pedestrian safety in the town center. Outside downtown, sidewalk infrastructure is limited, discontinuous, and in some locations in poor condition, constraining safe walking between neighborhoods, schools, open space areas, and transit stops.

TRAIL NETWORK

The Town's trail network (**Table 3-4**) provides important recreational opportunities and has the potential to serve as an alternative transportation system. Merrimac has about 130 miles of trails, which are managed and maintained by the Open Space Committee. Trails are used for walking, biking, horseback riding, and seasonal uses such as cross-country skiing and snowmobiling. However, the system is not yet cohesive or fully connected, and trails function primarily as recreational amenities rather than an integrated network.

Key assets include the 311-acre Town Forest, the 2-mile McLaren Trail on a former rail bed, the Beaver Pond Reservation, and the Cobbler's Brook Greenway. New wayfinding signage at the Town Forest and McLaren Trail has improved navigation and public engagement. Continued volunteer recruitment and coordination remain essential to trail maintenance.

TABLE 3-4
Merrimac Recreational Trails

Trail Name	Description	Owner
Town Forest Trails	311- acre tract of land that lies in the Cobbler Brook Watershed. There are several trails in the Town Forest: Red Oak Trail, Town Forest Trail, Long Hill Trail, Cobbler's Brook Trail, and the Currier Trail.	Town of Merrimac
McLaren Trail	2-mile recreational trail encompassing 45 acres on the old West Amesbury Branch Railroad bed.	Town of Merrimac
Marshview and Innis Trail	2 half-mile trails that connect to McLaren Trail. Includes farm fields and runs alongside a wetland. The Innis Trail connects the Marshview Trail with Brush Hill Road.	Town of Merrimac
Beaver Pond Reservation Trail	39-acre reservation that abuts the Merrimac Town Forest. The trail is approximately 0.4 miles.	Essex County Greenbelt Association
Cobbler's Brook Greenway	20 acres of conservation land off of Broad Street. The trail is approximately 0.3 miles.	Town of Merrimac

Source: Merrimac Open Space Committee. Merrimac Trail Infor and Maps, 2023 (with corrections from OSC members). https://sites.google.com/view/merrimac-open-space-committee/merrimac-trail-info-and-maps.

BICYCLE INFRASTRUCTURE

Bicycle infrastructure is limited to short, designated lanes near Merrimac Square. Outside this area, cyclists share travel lanes with motorized vehicles. The lack of dedicated and continuous bicycle facilities limits the use of bicycles as a viable transportation option and may discourage riders due to safety concerns.

RECREATIONAL WATER RESOURCES

Merrimac's water resources, specifically the Merrimack River and Lake Attitash are important recreational assets, but public access is constrained by limited formal access points and private land ownership. Expanding appropriate access to these resources, particularly along the Merrimack River and at Lake Attitash, while balancing environmental protection, is a key opportunity identified in this Plan.

3.3.2 Long-term Development Patterns

Merrimac's long-term development patterns have been shaped by its historic village centers, suburban expansion in the late twentieth century, and a zoning framework that strongly favors low-density residential development (***Map 3***).

Over 90% of Merrimac is zoned for residential use, with commercial and industrial districts concentrated along Route 110 and near I-495. Single-family homes on large lots are the dominant land use, reflecting a pattern of suburban expansion during the 1980s and 1990s that increased vehicle dependence and reduced walkable access to open space. The Town retains significant permanently protected land, including Agricultural Preservation Restrictions (APRs), Town-owned conservation land, and the Town Forest. However, over 490 acres of potentially developable vacant land and lands enrolled in Chapter 61 programs (which carry no permanent protection) represent ongoing pressure on natural resources, habitat connectivity, and scenic landscapes.

Ecologically, low-density residential zoning limits large-scale development but can fragment habitat, increase impervious surfaces over time, and incrementally encroach on wetland buffers and wildlife corridors. The Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) overlay and the Lake Attitash Zoning District represent

context-sensitive tools that help manage density in environmentally sensitive areas and promote open space preservation within new development. Commercial and industrial zones near Route 110 and I-495 require careful attention to stormwater management and buffer protection where development occurs near wetlands and aquifer recharge areas.

Additional zoning and regulatory tools including the Water Resource Protection District (WRPD), Floodplain Overlay District, and Merrimac's local wetlands bylaw, provide important safeguards for groundwater resources, flood storage areas, wetlands, and other sensitive natural resources by limiting development intensity, regulating impervious cover, and requiring enhanced protection of environmentally significant areas. Together, these regulations help direct growth toward more suitable locations while preserving the ecological functions that support Merrimac's open space network.

Merrimac's compliance with the MBTA Communities law requires establishing at least one zoning district allowing multifamily housing by right at a minimum of 15 units per acre with capacity for at least 138 units. This district is located in already-developed areas and will concentrate growth where infrastructure exists and reduce pressure on undeveloped conservation-priority lands.

PLANNING IMPLICATIONS

Future growth in Merrimac will continue to be shaped by zoning, infrastructure, and market pressures. Without careful planning, development of remaining vacant and Chapter 61 lands could result in the loss of open space, reduced access to natural resources, and diminished ecological function. Maintaining and strengthening existing zoning protections, including the WRPD, Floodplain Overlay District, and local wetlands bylaw, will be increasingly important as climate change intensifies flood risks and development pressure continues on privately owned lands containing sensitive natural resources.

This Plan recognizes the need to better align land use regulations with open space and recreation goals. Strategies in the action plan include:

- Supporting land protection efforts for high-priority parcels, particularly those at risk of development (Chapter 61 lands).
- Adopting the Community Preservation Act.
- Coordinating with partners (e.g., Essex County Greenbelt Association, Essex County Trails Association, and Merrimack River Watershed Council) on land acquisition and conservation restrictions (CR).
- Requiring notification to the Open Space Committee when the Town takes tax title properties.
- Distributing and posting materials on the Town website (specifically the Open Space Committee page) informing landowners of the potential tax benefits of donating land or CRs.

By understanding long-term development patterns and zoning impacts, Merrimac can proactively manage growth in a way that protects natural resources, maintains community character, and enhances its open space and recreation system.

SECTION 4 | Environmental Inventory and Analysis

4.1 Soils and Topography

Merrimac's topography was shaped by Wisconsin Glaciation, which retreated from the region approximately 18,000 years ago, depositing alluvium, glacial tills, clays, silts, sands, and gravel over Paleozoic bedrock. The resulting landscape is diverse, ranging from sea level to 315 feet above sea level, with drumlin hills, broad river valleys, and flat outwash plains. Red Oak Hill, the Town's highest point, is a classic drumlin. Cobbler's Brook, the East Meadow River, and the Back River have cut broad valleys through the outwash plains, flowing southeasterly to the Merrimack River.

Merrimac contains a diverse mix of soils that have influenced the Town's agricultural heritage, natural resource functions, and development patterns (***Map 4***). Well and excessively drained soils are distributed throughout much of the community and generally present fewer constraints for development while also providing important groundwater recharge functions. These soils generally provide the most suitable conditions for active recreation areas, trailheads, parking, picnic areas, and trail surfaces as they are less prone to seasonal saturation. These same highly permeable soils are important for groundwater recharge, so new recreational improvements in these areas should be designed to minimize impervious surfaces and protect water quality, as their high permeability can increase the vulnerability of groundwater resources to contamination from septic systems and surface pollutants, underscoring the importance of protecting aquifer recharge areas.

Poorly drained soils are concentrated along streams, wetlands, and other low-lying areas near the Merrimack River. These areas provide important opportunities for passive recreation, wildlife observation, nature study, and scenic trail experiences, but they can limit the location and design of recreation facilities. Trails in these areas may be seasonally wet, more difficult to maintain, and less accessible without improvements such as boardwalks, trail hardening, drainage improvements, or rerouting to nearby uplands. Poorly drained soils also make these areas less suitable for active recreation fields, parking areas, or structures. However, these soils support important ecological functions, including flood storage, wildlife habitat, and water quality protection.

Areas of steep slopes and slow infiltration, including portions of Merrimac's higher uplands and river valley edges, provide scenic value and opportunities for hiking and views, but can also create erosion, runoff, and accessibility challenges. Recreational improvements in these areas should avoid excessive grading, use erosion controls, and favor low-impact trail design such as switchbacks, stable trail surfacing, and slope-sensitive alignments. These areas are generally better suited for passive recreation and conservation than for intensive recreational development.

Prime farmland soils and soils of statewide and local agricultural importance are found across much of Merrimac, reflecting the Town's long agricultural history and supporting both active farmland and the potential for future agricultural uses. The widespread distribution of these productive soils highlights the importance of balancing development with the preservation of agricultural resources and open space. Future recreation planning should balance demand for new facilities with the preservation of productive agricultural soils and open space.

Topography and soils have strongly influenced Merrimac's agricultural and historic development patterns and continue to shape open space and recreation opportunities. The Town's hills provide scenic vistas and recreational terrain, while flatter, well-drained areas have attracted denser development. Steep slopes, wetland soils, and aquifer recharge areas represent natural constraints that should guide future land protection priorities.

4.2 Water Resources

Merrimac has a variety of water resources, including rivers, streams, lakes, ponds, wetlands, aquifers, and flood hazard areas (***Map 5***). Merrimac shares many natural resources with its neighbors, such as the 180-mile-long Merrimack River, its watershed, and Lake Attitash. These water bodies have supported water resources that have been crucial in sustaining both residential livelihoods and economic activities essential for the town's development. These water bodies also contribute to the town's scenic beauty and recreational appeal, providing opportunities for outdoor activities such as fishing, boating, and other water-based recreation, enhancing the overall quality of life for residents.

4.2.1 Watersheds

The Town of Merrimac lies completely within the Merrimack River Watershed. The watershed provides drinking water for several municipalities in the Valley. Therefore, permitting decisions by Town boards and commissions in each of the communities within the watershed affects the drinking water and habitat of the people and wildlife in other municipalities. Because Merrimac lacks authority to regulate activities throughout the watershed, the Town's water resources are vulnerable to decisions made in upstream communities, making regional coordination essential.

4.2.2 Surface Waters

The **Merrimack River** forms Merrimac's entire southern boundary with West Newbury. Classified as Class B by the Massachusetts Division of Water Pollution Control, the river supports fishing, recreational boating, and water-based recreation. The tidal section below Haverhill supports anadromous fish migration, including Atlantic salmon and shad. Public access in Merrimac is limited as most riverfront land is privately owned, but the Town owns several small parcels that provide river access including Carey Memorial Park, Locust Street, and Duck Hole Landing. The nearest public boat ramps are in Amesbury and West Newbury.

Lake Attitash is a modified 360-acre kettle-hole pond in northeastern Merrimac, located within the Powwow River sub-watershed. The Lake supports swimming, boating, water skiing, and fishing in summer, and ice skating and ice fishing in winter, primarily for the moderate-high density residential development along the shoreline. The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) operates a public boat ramp and parking area on the Lake; however, public access to the lake is limited due to privately owned land. Lake Attitash is designated Class A but is hyper-eutrophic, with high nutrient levels, invasive aquatic vegetation, and low dissolved oxygen resulting from non-point source pollution, primarily from stormwater runoff and lawn fertilizers from developed shorelines in both Merrimac and Amesbury. In 2024, the Massachusetts Department of Public Health issued a fish consumption advisory for all species caught in the Lake due to elevated mercury levels. The City of Amesbury also relies on Lake Attitash as a backup drinking water supply.

Cobbler's Brook is a 4.4-mile perennial stream running through central Merrimac to the Merrimack River. According to the Massachusetts Integrated List of Waters, it is classified as a Category 5 impaired waterway due to E. coli, low dissolved oxygen, degraded benthic communities, and elevated water temperatures from stormwater and road runoff.

The **Back River**, a 2.7-mile stream originating in southern New Hampshire, feeds Lake Attitash and is used for canoeing and fishing, though it carries high nutrient loads from agricultural and non-point source pollution.

Smaller ponds scattered throughout Town include Neal Pond on the Haverhill border and Sargent Millpond and Crane Pond in the northeastern corner. Additionally, there are several unnamed stream and wetland systems

throughout central and western Merrimac. These systems are identified as tributaries to the Town of Haverhill's drinking water supply.

4.2.3 Aquifer Recharge Areas

Merrimac's drinking water comes from underground aquifers. Approximately 250 acres of medium- and high-yield aquifers are located at three sites: Bear Hill Road in northeastern Merrimac, south of Lake Attitash on East Main Street, and at Veal's Pond on the Haverhill border. The Merrimac Water Department operates two public wells in the Merrimack River Basin and has identified a potential new groundwater source on a Town-owned parcel off Bear Hill Road near the New Hampshire border that could double production capacity.

Protecting these aquifers is increasingly important as Merrimac faces greater drought risk. The Town's Hazard Mitigation Plan identifies water supply as a top environmental concern and notes that droughts in the Northeast are projected to become more frequent and intense as temperatures rise, increasing evaporation, altering precipitation patterns, and reducing groundwater recharge. Extended drought conditions can lower groundwater levels, diminish drinking water supplies, and reduce baseflows to streams and wetlands, affecting both water quantity and surface water quality. Conserving undeveloped recharge areas and limiting impervious cover are therefore important strategies for maintaining reliable drinking water supplies and improving the Town's resilience to future climate conditions.

In addition to supporting Merrimac's municipal water supply, Merrimac contains groundwater recharge areas and public water supply wellfields owned and operated by the City of Haverhill within the Town's boundaries. These wellfields provide an important regional drinking water resource, demonstrating the interconnected nature of groundwater systems and highlighting the importance of protecting aquifer recharge areas through local land use planning and regional coordination.

Merrimac's Water Resource Protection District (WRPD) encompasses approximately 1,255 acres overlying groundwater and surface water supply areas for Merrimac, Haverhill, and Amesbury. The WRPD prohibits high-risk land uses including hazardous materials storage and landfills, limits impervious cover to 15% or 2,500 square feet per lot without an approved recharge plan, and establishes performance standards for permitted uses. Of the 1,255 acres within the WRPD, the Town owns only 154 acres and Haverhill owns 77.3 acres; the remainder is privately held, underscoring the importance of proactive land protection in this area.

4.2.4 Flood Hazard Areas

The Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA)-designated 100-year floodplains (Zone A) extend along the Merrimack River corridor, the Lake Attitash shoreline, portions of the Cobbler's Brook system, and the unnamed stream system along the western border. These areas are vulnerable to flooding, property damage, degraded water quality, and habitat impacts, but also provide critical natural functions including flood storage, groundwater recharge, and wildlife habitat. Merrimac's Floodplain Overlay District, updated in 2006 with assistance from MVPC, limits development within these areas and FEMA Flood Insurance Rate Maps (FIRM) identify the boundaries. Within the overlay district, low-impact uses are permitted by right, while other uses require a special permit and must demonstrate compliance with floodplain regulations. As climate change increases storm frequency and intensity, flood risks in these areas are expected to worsen. The Town is proactively managing these resources through regulations such as zoning, Wetland Protection Act, and local wetlands bylaw.

4.2.5 Wetlands

Wetlands cover nearly 10% of Merrimac's land area (over 500 acres) and play essential roles in flood storage, water quality protection, groundwater recharge, and wildlife habitat. Significant wetland complexes are found

along the Merrimack River, Lake Attitash, and Cobbler's Brook, as well as in the large wetland between Red Oak Hill and Long Hill, which feeds tributaries to Cobbler's Brook and Silver Stream. Wetland types include red maple swamps, shrub swamps, shallow marshes, and beaver ponds. Merrimac's local wetlands bylaw, adopted in 2003, establishes a 50-foot no-disturbance zone and a 100-foot buffer zone around wetland resource areas, augmenting the state Wetlands Protection Act. The Conservation Commission regulates development within these areas.

4.3 Vegetation

When colonists first settled in the Merrimack Valley, the region was cleared for agriculture and husbandry, which served as the foundations for economic life. Most of this land has now regrown into the post-agricultural southern New England hardwood forest.

4.3.1 General Inventory

Upland forests are predominantly composed of northern red oak, shagbark hickory, beech, red maple, and birch, with stands of hemlock and white pine. Wetland areas support red and silver maple, speckled alder, white and pin oak, sweet pepperbush, and highbush blueberry. Forest composition shifts with elevation, soils, and moisture conditions. Roadsides and fields support a wide variety of native wildflowers including goldenrod, milkweed, , and Solomon's seal, alongside invasive species such as Japaneseknotweed and bittersweet. Also occurring are native species including trailing arbutus, red trillium, and others.

The 311-acre Town Forest, located in the Cobbler Brook watershed in the heart of Town, is Merrimac's most significant forested area and includes wetlands, hemlock groves, and mixed hardwood-pine communities at . The Perkins Conservation Area provides additional town-owned forest. Private landowners, including MerrHill Tree Farm on Route 110 and Sargent Farm, contribute to the Town's working forest landscape.

4.3.2 Public Shade Trees

Street trees are most prominent in Merrimac Square and Merrimacport, where compact development supports a traditional streetscape. Mature shade trees are also found in the Town's cemeteries, parks, and conservation areas. Merrimac does not currently maintain a comprehensive public shade tree inventory or urban forestry management plan; however, future planning should prioritize native, climate-resilient species and targeted planting in areas with limited canopy.

4.3.3 Rare Species

The Massachusetts Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program (NHESP) has documented only one threatened plant species in Merrimac: American Bittersweet (*Celastruss scandens*). The most recent recorded observation of this vascular plant in Merrimac was in 1951.

4.3.4 Agricultural Land

Merrimac's agricultural lands are concentrated in the northern part of Town, where working farms, open fields, stone walls, and pastoral vistas define the landscape. While commercial agriculture is no longer a primary economic driver, two farms are permanently protected through APRs: portions of Sargent Farm on Bear Hill Road and a 68-acre property on Birch Meadow Road. Additional lands are enrolled in Chapter 61A, providing temporary tax relief in exchange for maintaining agricultural use, though these protections are not permanent. The Town holds the right of first refusal on Chapter 61 lands proposed for sale, providing an important opportunity for conservation action.

Merrimac residents value the Town's agricultural traditions and generally want to see productive farmland preserved. Farms create and maintain an agrarian landscape and provide fresh produce and animal products to the local community.

4.3.5 Wetland Vegetation

The wetlands surrounding the lakes ponds, and streams in Merrimac include red maple swamp and shrub swamps that include species such as cattails, Joe Pye weed, pickerel weed and others. The invasive purple loosestrife and phragmites are found in some wetlands.

4.3.6 BioMap Information

BioMap, developed by the Massachusetts Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (MassWildlife) and The Nature Conservancy (TNC), is a statewide, science-based tool used to identify lands and waters critical for biodiversity conservation. BioMap identifies two primary categories: Core Habitat and Critical Natural Landscape. Core Habitat represents areas essential for the long-term persistence of rare species and high-quality natural communities, while Critical Natural Landscape includes larger, minimally fragmented areas that support ecological processes, connectivity, and climate resilience.

Of the Town's approximately 5,698 acres, 1,071 acres (18.8%) are identified as Core Habitat and 1,640 acres (28.8%) as Critical Natural Landscape, together representing nearly half the Town's land area. Despite this ecological richness, only 185 acres (3.2%) of Core Habitat and 434 acres (7.6%) of Critical Natural Landscape are permanently protected. Key BioMap areas include the Merrimack River corridor, Lake Attitash, Cobbler's Brook, and the Haverhill wellfield areas. Connectivity between wildlife habitats in northern Merrimac and the Merrimack River remains a significant gap. Biodiversity is threatened by development, invasive species, pollution, and climate change.

4.4 Fisheries and Wildlife

4.4.1 General Inventory

Merrimac's forests, wetlands, fields, and vernal pools support a diverse array of wildlife, including nesting birds, mammals, fish, amphibians, and reptiles. Common mammals include white-tailed deer, fox, coyote, beaver, otter, mink, muskrat, raccoon, skunk, woodchuck, fisher, and porcupine; bears, bobcats, coyotes, and moose are occasionally reported. A wide variety of breeding and migratory birds use Merrimac's upland forests, forest edges, shrublands, fields, wetlands, and riparian corridors. More than 234 bird species reside in or migrate through Merrimac including the Red-bellied Woodpecker, Downy Woodpecker, and Blue Jay found in upland forested areas, as well as the Bald Eagle, Great Blue Heron, Egrets, and Kingfishers near the Merrimack River. Freshwater species in Lake Attitash include largemouth bass, chain pickerel, brown bullhead, white perch, pumpkinseed, and northern pike. The Merrimack River supports diadromous fish species and functions as an important regional migratory corridor, with species in the broader river system including river herring, alewife and blueback herring, American shad, American eel, sea lamprey, striped bass, and federally listed shortnose sturgeon; Atlantic salmon is also relevant to Essential Fish Habitat screening for the river. Amphibians, reptiles, waterfowl, herons, kingfishers, bald eagles, and ospreys use the Town's ponds and wetlands. Additionally, the Merrimack River is designated as Essential Fish Habitat under the Magnuson-Stevens Fishery Conservation and Management Act for Atlantic salmon and several other federally managed fish species.

4.4.2 Wildlife Corridors

Three principal wildlife corridors support species movement within and through Merrimac. The first follows the Merrimack River riparian corridor along the southern edge of Town. The second is a swath of forest

and farmland west of the McLaren Trail, providing a connection northward into New Hampshire. The third is anchored by the McLaren Trail and extends eastward to Lake Attitash, encompassing the Cobbler's Brook riparian corridor. These corridors are partially protected through conserved lands, wetland regulations, and zoning tools, but connectivity gaps remain, particularly between northern Merrimac and the Merrimack River.

4.4.3 Rare Species

The Massachusetts NHESP has documented six fish and wildlife species in Merrimac that are listed as endangered, threatened, or of special concern under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act (MESA), as outlined in **Table 4-1**. Priority Habitat and Estimated Habitat mapped by NHESP within Merrimac corresponds to river corridors, wetlands, and undeveloped forested lands, underscoring the importance of protecting these landscapes for rare species conservation.

Table 4-1
NHESP Rare Fisheries and Wildlife Species

Species Common Name	Species Scientific Name	Taxonomic Group	Status	Most Recent Observation
Bald Eagle	*Haliaeetus leucocephalus*	Bird	Threatened	2020
Blanding's Turtle	*Emydoidea blandingii*	Reptile	Threatened	2012
Blue-spotted Salamander	*Ambystoma laterale*	Amphibian	Special Concern	2000
Eastern Box Turtle	*Terrapene carolina*	Reptile	Special Concern	1998
Purple Tiger Beetle	*Cicindela purpurea*	Beetle	Special Concern	Historic
Shortnose Sturgeon	*Acipenser brevirostrum*	Fish	Endangered	2016

In addition to state-listed species, three federally listed and proposed species may also occur in Merrimac, as outlined in **Table 4-2**.

Table 4-2
U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service Rare Fisheries and Wildlife Species

Species Common Name	Species Scientific Name	Taxonomic Group	Status
Northern Long-eared Bat	*Myotis septentrionalis*	Mammal	Endangered
Tricolored Bat	*Perimyotis subflavus*	Mammal	Proposed Endangered
Monarch Butterfly	*Danaus plexippus*	Insect	Proposed Threatened

From a planning perspective, these resources should inform local land protection priorities, zoning decisions, and project review processes. Protecting large, contiguous areas of forest, maintaining wetland and riverine buffers, and limiting habitat fragmentation will be critical to sustaining rare species populations.

4.5 Scenic Resources and Unique Environment

Map 6 details Merrimac's unique landscape features.

4.5.1 Scenic Landscapes

The Massachusetts Landscape Inventory designates the area from the Merrimack River north to Route 110 as a "distinctive landscape" worthy of visual protection. This corridor encompasses a mix of natural and built environments, including the historic riverfront village of Merrimacport, the Victorian commercial district of Merrimac Square, and the working agricultural landscapes of northern Merrimac. Narrow, winding roads in the northern part of Town offer scenic vistas across open fields, farmland, and hills. River Road, which runs along the Merrimac River, is Merrimac's only road formally designated under the Massachusetts Scenic Road Act. Additionally, the Town's three historic cemeteries (Church Street, East Main Street, and Locust Grove) contribute to the scenic and historic character of the community.

4.5.2 Major Characteristic of Unusual Geologic Features

The Town's glacial history may be seen throughout the Town in the form of eight drumlin hills, floodplain lowlands and kettle-hole ponds. Red Oak Hill, a smooth, elongated glacial hill called a drumlin, is the highest point. Cobbler's Brook, East Meadow River and the Back River have cut broad valleys through the Town. These tributaries flow southeasterly across Town to the main stem of the Merrimack River.

4.5.3 Cultural, Archeological, and Historic Areas

Merrimac's historic resources span more than 300 years of settlement and reflect the Town's evolution from colonial agricultural village to industrial center to residential community. Merrimacport, settled in the early 18th century along the Merrimack River, is an exceptionally well-preserved village with Georgian, Federal, Greek Revival, and early Victorian architecture.

Merrimac Square developed as the Town's commercial and civic center during the 19th-century horse-carriage industry, which employed nearly half the population at its peak. The Square retains significant Victorian commercial and industrial buildings, including the Poyen Block (1886) and Little & Larkin Block (1882). Sargent Hall (1876), a Gothic Revival structure, continues to serve as Town Hall. The Merrimac Museum and the Old Sawyer House Museum (c.1725–1757) provide important educational and cultural resources. Agricultural landscapes in northern Merrimac, including stone walls, open fields, and active farms, represent a living cultural landscape that connects the Town's heritage to its current open space system. The Merrimac Historical Commission has initiated efforts to identify and document additional properties for state and national historic inventories. Approximately 68 properties in Merrimac have been documented through the Massachusetts Cultural Resource Information System (MACRIS). There are no properties listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

4.5.4 Unique Environments

There are no designated Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACECs) in Merrimac. However, NHESP has identified the Merrimack River riparian corridor as BioMap Core Habitat, critical for rare and endangered species and comprising largely unbroken open space corridors that buffer and connect habitat areas while remaining relatively free from road and development impacts.

4.6 Climate Change Impacts

Climate change is expected to have significant and wide-ranging impacts on Merrimac's natural resources, infrastructure, and community character. Anticipated changes in temperature, precipitation patterns, and the frequency and intensity of storm events will affect water resources, ecological systems, public health, and the long-term sustainability of the Town's open space and recreation assets. Planning for these impacts is critical for Merrimac's natural and recreational resources to remain resilient and continue to provide ecological, social, and economic benefits.

4.6.1 MVP and Open Space

Merrimac has participated in the Commonwealth's Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Program. The MVP planning process identified increased precipitation, more frequent and intense storm events, and stormwater management challenges as primary climate vulnerabilities with direct implications for open space, recreation infrastructure, water quality, and habitat. Key MVP recommended actions with open space relevance include updating subdivision regulations to improve stormwater management and developing a natural resource management plan to support long-term forest health and climate resilience. Merrimac's Open Space Residential Development (OSRD) bylaw was identified as an important resilience tool, though it has not been updated in many years and may not adequately address future climate conditions.

4.6.2 TNC Resilient Lands & Hot Spots

Map 7 integrates TNC Resilient and Connected Network data and the Statewide Land Surface Temperature Hot Spots dataset with existing protected open space.

Approximately 31.7% of Merrimac's land area (1,793 acres) is identified within TNC's Resilient and Connected Network, including areas with high resilience, strong landscape connectivity, and biodiversity value. However, only a small fraction of these lands (approximately 54 acres) is permanently protected, representing a significant conservation gap. Key resilient landscapes include the Town Forest, Sargent Farm APR, Haverhill wellfields, and Perkins Conservation Area. Priority unprotected areas include parcels adjacent to Sargent Farm and the Back River in northern Merrimac and Brandy Brow Hill in the southwestern corner of Town, which contains BioMap Core Habitat and NHESP rare species habitat.

Four urban heat hot spots have been identified in Merrimac: along East Main Street (Route 110) near Merrimac Commons, in Merrimac Square, along Church Street, and at Sweetsir School. These areas have more intensive development, higher impervious surface coverage, and reduced tree canopy. Targeted tree planting, green infrastructure, shaded seating, and cooling amenities such as splash pads represent opportunities to mitigate heat impacts while enhancing recreational quality in these locations and is reflected in the Action Plan.

SECTION 5 | Conservation and Recreation Lands Inventory

From the historic farms and scenic vistas of the northern part of Town to the banks of the Merrimack River, the Town's open space network encompasses forests, wetlands, trails, agricultural lands, and recreational facilities that define community character and support quality of life for Merrimac's residents. This section inventories the Town's existing conservation and recreation holdings and assesses the equity of access across the community.

5.1 Open Space and Protected Property

Open space refers to conservation land, forested land, recreation land, agricultural land, and any predominantly undeveloped area owned by or dedicated to conservation or recreation. The term also encompasses undeveloped land with conservation or recreation potential, including vacant lots and brownfields that could be redeveloped into recreational areas or community green spaces. Open space supports passive recreation including walking, hiking, and nature study, as well as active recreation such as sports and playground use.

Open space is classified by level of protection. Permanently protected land includes conservation land held by federal, state, or nonprofit organizations, and privately owned land subject to conservation easements or restrictions. Publicly owned land acquired for, dedicated to, or managed for conservation or recreation purposes may also be protected under Article 97 of the Massachusetts Constitution.

Temporarily or limitedly protected land includes parcels under revocable restrictions such as Chapter 61, 61A, or 61B designations, as well as land uses such as cemeteries or ballfields that are unlikely but not legally prohibited from being redeveloped. Unprotected open space carries no legal restriction against future development. Protecting open space is essential to preserving Merrimac's natural resources, recreational opportunities, wildlife habitat, water quality, climate resilience, and the scenic and historic character that defines the community.

There are four properties across Merrimac that are protected by a CR. Merrimac owns Perkins Conservation Area, but Essex County Greenbelt Association holds the CR, Beaver Pond Reservation and Silver Brook Farm are owned by Essex County Greenbelt Association, but the Town of Merrimac holds the CR, and the McLaren Trail/Church Street parcel has a CR, and the Town of Merrimac owns the trail itself. The Town Forest is the only property protected under Article 97 of the Massachusetts Constitution. Merrimac currently has two APRs, and approximately 260 acres are temporarily protected through Chapter 61 programs.

Map 8 shows lands of conservation interest in Merrimac, including those already protected, public lands and private parcels that need additional protection, and privately-owned parcels currently in Chapter 61. The sections and tables below summarize the open space holdings in Merrimac shown on the map.

5.2 Municipally Owned Conservation and Recreation Properties

Merrimac has approximately 1,475 acres of open space, of which the Town owns roughly 781 acres (45%). Many Town-owned parcels are not permanently protected. The Perkins Conservation Area, Beaver Pond Reservation, Silver Brook Farm, and the McLaren/Church Street parcel are protected by a CRs, and the Town Forest, the largest Town-owned parcel at 311 acres, was protected under Article 97 of the Massachusetts Constitution in 2024. Other significant Town-owned properties, including the Cobbler's Brook Greenway, McLaren Trail, Carey Park, and Locust Street Landing, have limited protection and remain vulnerable to future changes in use.

Key properties are described below. **Table 5-1** provides an inventory of municipally owned properties.

CAREY PARK / LOCUST STREET LANDING

Carey Park and Locust Street Landing are the Town's two public access points to the Merrimack River, both offering canoe and kayak launch opportunities. Carey Park is used primarily for passive recreation and river viewing. The Town has erected signage to encourage public use of the river. Locust Street Landing functions primarily as an emergency river access point; its recreational use is constrained by reliance on on-street parking and concerns from the Fire Department and neighboring residents. Both sites are limited by small size and minimal parking.

CHURCH STREET / EAST MAIN / LOCUST GROVE CEMETERIES

The three Town cemeteries provide passive reflection and walking. The cemeteries are overseen by the Cemetery Trustees, and dogs and active recreational activities are prohibited.

EMERY STREET FIELD

The Emery Street Athletic Fields are maintained by the Department of Public Works, with private sports leagues assisting in facility upkeep and fundraising. The fields currently include a baseball field, football practice field, and walking track. Public engagement identified Emery Street Field as a significant opportunity for expanded community use, with potential improvements addressed in the Needs Analysis and Action Plan.

HOYT FARM/SILVER BROOK FARM

Essex County Greenbelt Association successfully acquired Hoyt Farm, one of the largest remaining unprotected farms in the Merrimack Valley. Spanning more than 120 acres of working farmland and forest, the property will be renamed Silver Brook Farm, honoring its original colonial name and the stream that winds through the landscape. The Town of Merrimac Conservation Commission holds the Conservation Restriction.

INDIAN HEAD PARK/WELLFIELD

Indian Head Park, a town parcel once open to public use, has closed to the public and will likely remain closed. The primary concern cited by state agencies and the Town is the potential risk to municipal drinking water infrastructure, specifically the nearby wellfield, including risks of vandalism or contamination. In addition, the site lacks reliable public access, as surrounding properties are privately owned and not under Town control. As a result, the former public beach is no longer accessible. Residents have consistently expressed a desire for renewed public access to Lake Attitash; this is addressed in the Needs Analysis and Action Plan.

JAY MCLAREN MEMORIAL TRAIL

The McLaren Trail is a popular 2-mile rail trail on an 18-acre former railroad right-of-way, open to pedestrians, bicycles, cross-country skiers, and equestrians. The trail begins behind the Church Street Cemetery, follows Cobbler's Brook, and continues north into Newton, NH. Trail conditions vary: the southern section passes through developed areas; the northern end includes scenic wetland views but suffers from erosion, washouts, and drainage problems. Trailheads are in poor condition with limited accessibility. Illegal motorized vehicle use is a persistent problem. The trail is currently maintained by volunteers. A more formal maintenance program is needed and is addressed in the Needs Analysis and Action Plan.

PERKINS CONSERVATION AREA

The Perkins Conservation Area includes the approximately 0.75-mile Marshview Trail and the Innis Trail, which connects to Brush Hill Road. The trails pass through wooded areas, farm fields, and wetland edge and are suitable for walking, biking, and horseback riding. The area is underused and requires annual trail clearing. Volunteer maintenance is currently the primary management mechanism. A more formal maintenance program is needed and is addressed in the Needs Analysis and Action Plan. While Merrimac owns Perkins Conservation Area, Essex County Greenbelt Association holds the CR.

TOWN FOREST

The 311-acre Town Forest is Merrimac's largest open space holding and was permanently protected under Article 97 in 2024, voted unanimously during a Special Town Meeting, and transferred to the Conservation Commission. Trail access points are located at the Town soccer field on Town Forest Road, the end of Winter Street, and the end of Battis Road. Trails include the Red Oak, Town Forest, Long Hill, Valley, Cobbler's Brook, and Currier Trails. Recent beaver activity has created a pond along the Cobbler's Brook Trail, flooding some existing trails and prompting users to create informal alternatives. A formal trail maintenance program is needed to manage the extensive network and is addressed in the Needs Analysis and Action Plan.

Table 5-1
Municipally Owned Conservation and Recreation Properties

Property Name	Current Use	Recreation Potential	Condition	Public Access	Grant Received
Carey Park	Passive recreation, picnicking, river viewing, canoe/kayak launch	Increased river access, dedicated parking, shade structures	Excellent	Open to all	N/A
Church Street Cemetery	Cemetery, passive reflection	N/A	Good	Open to all	N/A
Cobbler's Brook Greenway	Nature Preserve, trails	Trail improvements, benches	Fair	Open to all	N/A
Duck Hole Landing	Inaccessible by the public, no current recreation use	Public river access, canoe/kayak launch	Unimproved	Limited – no formal public access route	N/A
East Main Street Cemetery	Cemetery, passive reflection	N/A	Fair	Open to all	N/A
Emery Street Field	Baseball field, football practice field, walking track	Accessible walking path, dog park, skate park, community garden, community event space	Fair	Open to all	N/A
Hoyt Farm/Silver Brook Farm	Working farm, passive recreation	Walking trails	Excellent	Open to all	N/A
Indian Head Park/Wellfield	No current recreation use - closed Lake Attituash beach	Reopen beach, restore public access	Fair	Closed to public	N/A
Kimball Park	No current recreation use	Passive recreation, picnicking, benches	Excellent	Open to all	N/A
Landfill (Closed)	Leave and brush recycling	Passive recreation, walking trails	Unimproved	Open to all	N/A
Locust Grove Cemetery	Cemetery, passive reflection	N/A	Excellent	Open to all	N/A

Table 5-1
Municipally Owned Conservation and Recreation Properties

Property Name	Current Use	Recreation Potential	Condition	Public Access	Grant Received
Locust Street Landing	River Access / Emergency Boat Launch	Canoe/kayak launch, parking, picnicking	Good	Open to all	N/A
Madison Way Open Space	Nature preserve	N/A	Unimproved	Limited – no formal public access route	N/A
McLaren Trail	Rail Trail	Accessible walking trail, benches, restrooms	Fair	Open to all	N/A
Nixon Set Aside	Nature Preserve	N/A	Unimproved	No formal public access	N/A
Perkins Conservation Area	Nature Preserve, non-motorized vehicle recreation trail (Marshview and Innis Trail), CR	Improved trail, benches	Good	Open to all	N/A
River Road Peninsula	River Protection	N/A	Unimproved	Limited – no formal public access route	N/A
Standpipe	Water standpipe	N/A	Unimproved	Closed to public	N/A
Town Forest	4 Soccer Fields, Trails (including motorized vehicles) including Red Oak Trail, Town Forest Trail, Long Hill Trail, Valley Trail, Cobbler's Brook Trail, and Currier Trail	Accessible trails, benches, restrooms	Good	Open to all	State Purchase
Wells/Pumping Station	Wellfields / Water Supply	N/A	Unimproved	Closed to public	N/A

5.3 Public Properties Providing Conservation and Recreation Amenities

There are several properties open to the public that provide conservation and recreation amenities that are not under the control of the Town of Merrimac Conservation Commission. Key properties are described below. **Table 5-2** provides a full inventory.

BEAVER POND RESERVATION

Beaver Pond Reservation is an Essex Country Greenbelt property on Battis Road that abuts the 311-acre Merrimac Town Forest, where Cobbler's Brook winds its way through mature woodlands and boggy wetlands on its way to the Merrimac River. Greenbelt's Stewardship Department is working with the Town of Merrimac to get the property ready for visitors with parking and trail improvements. While Essex County Greenbelt owns the property, the Town of Merrimac holds the CR.

DONAGHUE SCHOOL/STEVENS ATHLETIC FIELDS

The Merrimac Department of Public Works maintains the Stevens Athletic Fields and playground. Private sports leagues using the Town's playing fields assist with facility upgrades, cleaning and general maintenance. Each sports league is governed by its own Board of Directors, which manages league play and takes responsibility for fundraising. The Pentucket Regional School District maintains recreation facilities on school property.

DCR LAKE ATTITASH BOAT RAMP

There is a state-operated boat ramp on Lake Attitash; however, Merrimac's former public beach was closed in 2002. The closure occurred because access to both the beach and its associated parking area required crossing land designated for protection of the Town's wellfields and water filtration facilities, raising concerns about the security and integrity of the public drinking water supply.

SWEETSIR SCHOOL

The playground located at Sweetsir School, along with the playground at the Donaghue School, is one of only two parks in Town with swings, climbing bars, and other recreation equipment for young children. The Pentucket Regional School District maintains recreation facilities on school property.

Table 5-2
Public Properties Providing Conservation and Recreation Amenities

Property Name	Landowner	Current Use
Beaver Pond Reservation	Essex County Greenbelt	Conservation, trails, CR
Birch Meadow Road	Essex County Greenbelt	Conservation
Donaghue School / Stevens Field	Town of Merrimac	Tennis Court, Baseball Field, Softball Field, Basketball Court, Playground
Town Improvement Society	Town Improvement Society	Historic Buildings, Natural Trail
Haverhill Wellfields	City of Haverhill	Wellfields / Water Supply
Lake Attitash Boat Ramp	Commonwealth of Massachusetts	Motorboat ramp and parking
Long Pond Conservation Area	Long Pond Conservation Trust	Retention Pond, passive recreation
Sweetsir School	Town of Merrimac	Playground
Winter Street	Town Improvement Society	Conservation

5.4 Permanently/Temporarily Protected Private Parcels

Merrimac currently has two APRs totaling approximately 435 acres. Approximately 260 acres are temporarily protected through Chapter 61 programs. Two private open space parcels are associated with subdivisions on Abbey Road and Poplar Hill. There are no Wetland Preservation Restrictions (WPRs) currently recorded in Merrimac.

Specific private parcels of high conservation interest to the Town include Smith Farm, Tamarack Farm, and the portions of Sargent Farm not already under APR.

Table 5-3
Permanently/Temporarily Protected Private Parcels

Property Name	Landowner	Current Use
Abbey Road Open Space	Merrimac Ruby Tuesday, LLC	Private – Subdivision Open Space – Passive recreation
56 Birchmeadow Road	Thomas Rezza	Agricultural (61A) – Private Farm
81 Church Street	Ronald and Patricia Ramsden, Sargent Reality Trust	Agricultural (61A) – Private Farm
Church Street McLaren Trail Access	Church Street Neighborhood Association	Trail Access (CR) - protected in perpetuity
Hadley Road	Marjorie Scherbon	Agricultural (61A) – Private Farm
53 Hadley Road	Nancy Knettell & William Andrulitis	Agricultural (61B) – Recreation Land
Hoyt Farm / Silver Brook Farm (Multiple Parcels - Birchmeadow Road, 11 Birch Meadow Road)	Essex County Greenbelt, Jason Sargent, Jeffrey and Constance Hoyt	Agricultural (APR, CR, Ch61A) - APR and CR: in perpetuity
Poplar Hill Open Space	Poplar Hill Development, LLC	Private – Subdivision Open Space – Passive recreation
Sargent Farm (Bear Hill Road) *(multiple parcels)*	Jane & Robert Sargent / Sargent Reality Trust	Agricultural (APR) and (61A) Private Farm
Smith Farm (Highland Road)	Robert Smith	Agricultural (61A) – Private Farm
Tamarack Farm (Locust Street)	Nannette and Robert Becker	Agricultural (61A) – Private Farm
West Main Street	James and Ellen Colburn	Agricultural (61A) – Private Farm
118 West Main Street	Alan Gosselin and Lauren Page	Agricultural (61A) – Private Farm

5.5 Park and Open Space Equity

5.5.1 Access and Proximity

Overall, parks and open spaces are evenly distributed across neighborhoods in Town.

Merrimac's designated EJ population, as discussed in Section 3.2.4, is located in the southeastern corner of Town and qualifies as an EJ area based on income. The EJ block group abuts Lake Attitash, providing

geographic proximity to a significant natural resource, though public lake access at this location is limited mostly to homeowners along the shoreline. The Lake Attitash shoreline within Merrimac is mapped EJ area. Other key open space and recreation areas including the McLaren Trail, Perkins Conservation Area, and Town Forest, are accessible by walking, biking, or a short drive. Parking constraints at Carey Park and Emery Street Field currently limit access for residents without alternative transportation. The sidewalk and bicycle network to parks and open space is limited, which may be a barrier for access for residents without vehicles.

5.5.2 Quality of Facilities

Merrimac's recreation facilities are in generally good condition but lack basic amenities across most sites, particularly restrooms, benches, shaded areas, and accessible surfaces.

An analysis of existing recreation facilities is included in Table 5-4 below. The quality analysis is limited to publicly accessible properties. Privately protected Chapter 61 lands, water supply infrastructure, unimproved parcels, and cemeteries are excluded.

Table 5-4
Quality of Facilities

Property Name	Quality Rating	Gaps in Facility Quality
Beaver Pond Reservation	Fair	Trail markers, maintenance
Carey Park	Excellent	Parking, accessible water access, picnic tables
Cobbler's Brook Greenway	Fair	Trail markers/maintenance
Donaghue School / Stevens Field	Fair	Splash pad, expanding/updated playground equipment
Emery Street Field	Fair	Skate park, dog park, community garden, accessible walking path, picnic facilities, restrooms
Indian Head Park/Wellfield	Fair	Beach access (constrained by wellfield)
Kimball Park	Excellent	Benches, shade
Lake Attitash Boat Ramp	Good	Expanded parking
Locust Street Landing	Good	Parking, accessible waterfront access
McLaren Trail	Fair	Accessible trail, benches, trail maintenance, expanded parking
Perkins Conservation Area	Good	Restrooms, benches, trail maintenance
Sweetsir School	Fair	Splash pad, expanding/updated playground equipment
Town Forest	Fair	Accessible trail, restrooms at playing fields, benches, trail maintenance, improve signage

5.5.3 Maintenance and Safety

The Town conducts regular maintenance at park and open space sites, including landscaping, tree removal, trash collection, pathway upkeep, and inspection of recreational amenities. Public engagement identified trail maintenance as a particular concern as residents cited downed trees, standing water, beaver activity, and overgrown paths at the Town Forest, McLaren Trail, and conservation areas as barriers to regular use. A more

formal, coordinated trail maintenance program is needed across all trail systems and is reflected in the Action Plan.

5.5.4 Inclusive Design

Approximately 14.29% of Merrimac residents live with a disability. None of the Town's approximately 130 miles of trails are paved, rendering them inaccessible for many users with mobility aids, elderly residents, or families with strollers.

The Merrimac Square reconstruction added ADA-compliant sidewalk improvements in the downtown area; however, sidewalk infrastructure outside of downtown remains limited and discontinuous. School playgrounds under Pentucket Regional School District jurisdiction are not fully ADA-accessible. The Town's 2021 ADA Transition Plan identifies specific opportunities for improvement that should be incorporated into future capital investments. Actions to mitigate this concern are reflected in the Action Plan.

5.5.5 Free Access

All of Merrimac's municipal open space and recreation facilities are free and open to the public. Participation in organized sports leagues, however, may involve registration fees that can present barriers for lower-income families. The Town should continue to maintain free access as a baseline standard and explore fee assistance options for organized programming where needed.

SECTION 6 | Analysis of Needs

Merrimac's open space, natural resource, and outdoor recreation needs are informed by the 2026 community survey and public forum, the 2024 Master Plan survey, the 2023 Emery Street survey, and the 2023 Massachusetts Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP). Overall, Merrimac's identified needs closely align with SCORP priorities, particularly in expanding water access, enhancing trail networks, improving neighborhood recreation facilities, and increasing access to passive recreation opportunities.

Together, these sources reveal strong community support for land conservation and trail improvements alongside clear gaps in access, amenities, maintenance, and municipal capacity. Section 7 translates these findings into a ten-year Action Plan.

6.1 Summary of Natural Resource Protection Needs

6.1.1 Land Conservation and Habitat Protection

Merrimac's forests, farms, and scenic landscapes are interconnected conservation priorities. Proactive management of conservation lands including invasive species control (particularly purple loosestrife and phragmites) and habitat restoration is needed across the Town Forest, Perkins Conservation Area, and Cobbler's Brook corridor. Approximately 60% of Merrimac's land area is ecologically significant habitat, yet only a small fraction is permanently protected. Approximately 72% of survey respondents identified natural resource protection as a priority. The Town owns several large, connected tracts including the Town Forest and Perkins Conservation Area, but there remains a lack of connectivity along the Merrimack River and an opportunity for connectivity between wildlife habitats in northern Merrimac.

Priority ecological connections for protection include the Merrimack River corridor, the McLaren Trail–Lake Attitash corridor, and the open space west of the McLaren Trail that sustains habitat connectivity and biodiversity into New Hampshire. Priority wildlife habitats include grassland and forest blocks supporting songbirds; riparian wetlands and vernal pools critical for Blanding's Turtle, Blue-spotted Salamander, and Eastern Box Turtle; and riparian land sheltering the Bald Eagle and protecting aquatic habitat in the Merrimack River. Merrimac needs to evaluate ways to connect protected open space to improve habitat connectivity.

Merrimac's remaining farms are valued for their scenic and agricultural character but face ongoing economic pressure. Currently, farmlands fall under a mix of unprotected, limited, and permanent protection. Expanding use of APRs and supporting the viability of local agriculture will help maintain these landscapes. Stone walls, open fields, and farm roads contribute to Merrimac's rural character and cultural heritage and should be considered in land protection strategies. Specific parcels of high conservation interest that have been identified as a need to protect include: Smith Farm on Highland Road, Tamarack Farm on Locust Street, the Wallace Property on North Street, Town Improvement Society land, and the parcels of Sargent Farm not already under APR protection.

Residents also care strongly about protecting viewsheds in northern Merrimac and the open vistas toward New Hampshire and Amesbury. River Road is the Town's only designated Scenic Road; designating additional roads and viewsheds merits consideration.

Merrimac lacks a dedicated funding source for land conservation. The Town will need to pursue a combination of tools including APRs, CRs, Community Preservation Act adoption, grant programs, and partnership with Essex County Greenbelt and other regional organizations to advance these priorities strategically.

6.1.2 Water Resource Protection

Water resource protection is a major concern in Merrimac. Protection of drinking water supply areas, including wellfields and associated buffer zones, aquifer recharge zones, and surface water resources, remains essential. The Water Resource Protection District (WRPD) encompasses approximately 1,255 acres, but the Town owns only 154 of those acres. A significant portion of the WRPD is for the protection of Haverhill's water supply. Haverhill has acquired land in Merrimac within the WRPD for the protection of their water supply. The remainder of land within the WRPD is privately held and potentially vulnerable to development. There is a need to protect as much of the WRPD as possible. There is a need to safeguard drinking water supplies, including wellfields and associated protection areas, while balancing appropriate public access where feasible, as seen in Indian Head Park.

In addition, Lake Attitash and the Merrimack River are both important ecological and recreational assets within the watershed and require continued coordination with Amesbury, Haverhill, and regional partners to manage non-point source pollution, nutrient loading, and stormwater impacts.

6.2 Summary of Community Outdoor Recreation Needs

6.2.1 Water-Based Recreation Access

Improved access to water-based recreation is one of the most frequently cited community needs and aligns directly with SCORP's statewide priority of expanding water-based recreation opportunities, particularly as extreme heat events make water access more critical for public health.

Merrimac currently has no public swimming area, and residents without direct access to Lake Attitash seeking water-based recreation must travel to Amesbury or other surrounding communities. Residents consistently identified a desire for access to Lake Attitash and the Merrimack River for swimming, boating, kayaking, and fishing. Locations such as Carey Park and Locust Street Landing, which are directly on the Merrimack River, were noted as needing improved public access and enhanced facilities to enjoy water-based recreation. Duck Hole Landing, also adjacent to the Merrimack River, was identified as currently inaccessible, representing an opportunity for future improvement and water access. Indian Head Park was closed in 2002 due to wellfield protection concerns; while its reopening as a beach may be infeasible given the need to protect the water supply, strong community interest warrants continued exploration.

6.2.2 Recreation Facilities and Fields

Residents expressed broad interest in expanding and improving recreation facilities, with SCORP's priorities around trail support and neighborhood park renovation closely mirroring local needs.

Playgrounds and active recreation facilities are a clear deficit. Merrimac has only two parks with playground equipment for young children (Donaghue/Stevens Field and Sweetsir School), and residents frequently travel to Amesbury, Haverhill, or West Newbury for recreational amenities such as larger playgrounds and splash pads. Additionally, access to Pentucket Regional Middle and High School facilities across the Merrimack River in West Newbury is constrained by the absence of sidewalks and bike lanes on the Rocks Village Bridge, preventing safe travel by foot or bicycle. Improvements and expansions to existing playgrounds and sports fields at Sweetsir School and Donaghue School were consistently identified as needs.

Teen-focused amenities, including a skate park or mountain bike track, are a significant unmet need; teens currently lack dedicated recreational space and gather informally on private property or in the town center.

Emery Street Field has been widely identified as the best opportunity to address multiple facility gaps including community gathering space, accessible trails, a dog park, community gardens, a skate park, StoryWalk, and basic amenities, and is a central priority in the Action Plan.

Trail improvements and connectivity are a high priority. Existing trail systems are well used but suffer from inadequate maintenance, poor accessibility, insufficient signage, parking constraints, and a lack of connectivity between neighborhoods and open space areas. Specific issues include: erosion, washouts, and drainage problems on the McLaren Trail's northern end; the need to rebuild and improve drainage on the Red Oak Trail; overgrowth and inadequate trail marking at Perkins Conservation Area and Cobbler's Brook Greenway; and the need for additional access easements along the McLaren Trail to provide connections from neighboring areas. Residents also expressed a strong desire for safer walking and biking infrastructure throughout Town, including improved sidewalks, crosswalks, and bike routes.

Basic amenities are lacking across nearly all sites. A consistent finding from both the survey and public forum was the absence of public restrooms, as residents currently rely on nearby businesses. Parking is inadequate in many locations but especially noted at Carey Park and Emery Street Field. Benches, picnic facilities, and shaded areas are also identified as gaps at most parks and trails.

6.2.3 Passive Recreation and Inclusive Access

Residents value passive recreation such as walking, picnicking, and nature observation, and want improved access to existing conservation lands. SCORP identifies passive recreation as a statewide priority for mental and physical well-being, and Merrimac's public input reflects the same trend. Improving trailheads, signage, parking, and amenities such as benches and picnic tables would make existing conservation areas more accessible and welcoming. Additionally, many residents reported limited awareness of available open space for passive recreation, highlighting a need to better promote these resources and to make up-to-date maps and information readily accessible on the Town’s website.

A major theme from public engagement that aligns closely with the SCORP, is the need for inclusive and accessible recreation. Many trails do not accommodate people with disabilities, older adults, or families with strollers. Specific improvements identified include paved or packed-surface trail sections, improved grading, wider trail corridors, installation of railings, and more frequent rest seating. Seniors represent over one-quarter of Merrimac's population; improving accessible walking paths, particularly near the Senior Center, and maintaining free, welcoming recreational spaces for this age group is a priority. Residents with disabilities emphasized the importance of accessible parking close to amenities, smooth continuous surfaces, frequent seating, and accessible restrooms.

6.3 Management Needs

Merrimac’s ability to implement the goals and objectives of this OSRP depends on strengthening its organizational capacity, improving coordination among boards and departments, and securing adequate financial and technical resources. While the Town benefits from strong volunteer engagement and regional partnerships, there are opportunities to address structural and operational needs to effectively manage open space and recreation assets.

6.3.1 Local Capacity and Coordination

As of April 2026, Merrimac has reestablished its Parks and Recreation Department, marking an important step toward more coordinated management of the Town's recreational assets. The Department will oversee maintenance and programming of parks and recreation facilities, while the Open Space Committee continues

its role in stewardship and conservation of open space lands. Dedicated departmental funding is not anticipated until Fiscal Year 2028; in the interim, operations will be supported by existing staff, volunteers, and partnerships. It will be critical that the Parks and Recreation Department and the Open Space Committee work closely.

Prior to the Department's reestablishment, responsibility for recreational assets fell primarily to the Department of Public Works (DPW), supplemented by private sports leagues and the Pentucket Regional School District. The DPW will need to collaborate with the Parks and Recreation Department, the Open Space Committee, and the Pentucket Regional School District to accomplish many of the goals of the OSRP, particularly as they pertain to both schools.

The Town has limited staff capacity for grant pursuit, land protection coordination, and capital project implementation. Merrimac relies heavily on its volunteer boards such as the Open Space Committee, Conservation Commission, and Playground Committee to advance conservation, trail development, and public engagement, but the scale of identified needs exceeds available volunteer capacity.

Improved coordination among Town boards and departments is needed. The Conservation Commission, Planning Board, Zoning Board of Appeals, DPW, School District, and newly reestablished Parks and Recreation Department should communicate proactively on development review, capital projects, Chapter 61 land transitions, and conservation opportunities.

The Open Space Committee serves as the primary implementation body for this Plan; periodic Action Plan reviews and annual reporting will help track progress and maintain accountability.

6.3.2 Stewardship and Resource Management Needs

Existing conservation areas and trail systems face ongoing challenges including invasive species encroachment, trail erosion, inadequate signage, and limited trailhead infrastructure. The Town currently relies on volunteer efforts for trail maintenance, cleanups, and minor repairs. While community interest in volunteer stewardship activities is strong, more structured programs including organized trail crews, long-term maintenance planning, and seasonal inspection protocols are needed.

6.3.3 Partnerships and Regional Collaboration

Coordination with regional partners, including Lake Attitash Association, Essex County Greenbelt, the Merrimack River Watershed Council, and MVPC, will be important to support land management, technical assistance, and grant administration. Merrimac has previously shared a Conservation Agent with another community; similar regional staff-sharing arrangements could provide cost-effective access to professional expertise.

6.3.4 Financial Needs

Merrimac does not have a dedicated funding source for open space acquisition or stewardship and will not have a dedicated funding source for parks and recreation until 2028. The Town will need to pursue conservation funding strategically through state and federal grant programs (including LAND, PARC, MassTrails, and the Land and Water Conservation Fund), partnerships with land trusts, and potential adoption of the Community Preservation Act. The Town is also considering a conservation fund or revolving fund to support ongoing stewardship needs. Because resources are limited, acquisitions must be prioritized based on ecological significance, vulnerability to development, and alignment with the Action Plan's goals.

SECTION 7 | Ten Year Action Plan

This Ten-Year Action Plan translates the goals and objectives of Merrimac's 2026–2036 Open Space and Recreation Plan into specific, prioritized, and implementable actions. The goals and objectives reflect Merrimac resident input from public surveys and the public forum, as well as direct input from the Open Space Committee and various Town staff members. Merrimac residents value the Town's trails, open space, and natural resources, and want improved maintenance, better accessibility, expanded recreational amenities, and greater public access to the Merrimack River and Lake Attitash.

7.1 Goals and Objectives

Goal 1: Protect and connect open spaces, conservation land, and natural resources

Objective 1.1: Protect priority lands to strengthen connections between natural corridors, farmland, habitats, and existing protected open space

Objective 1.2: Improve stewardship and management of protected lands

Objective 1.3: Improve trail access and connectivity

Objective 1.4: Protect and maintain scenic vistas, viewsheds, and climate-resilient landscapes

Goal 2: Expand parks and recreation access and community use

Objective 2.1: Improve and expand recreation facilities

Objective 2.2: Expand water access for recreation

Objective 2.3: Improve access, parking, and safety at open space and recreation sites

Goal 3: Improve accessibility and connectivity of parks and recreation between neighborhoods, schools, downtown, and open space resources for all

Objective 3.1: Improve accessibility at recreation sites

Objective 3.2: Strengthen connections between neighborhoods and recreation destinations

Objective 3.3: Improve awareness of open space and recreation resources

Goal 4: Safeguard water resources for drinking water, habitat, and recreation while balancing access and resource protection

Objective 4.1: Strengthen water resource protection

Goal 5: Engage residents and Town departments in the implementation of this plan and the stewardship of Merrimac's natural, recreational, historic, and cultural resources

Objective 5.1: Monitor progress in implementing the plan and maintain engagement of other Town departments and the public

Objective 5.2: Expand public involvement in stewardship activities, including volunteer efforts to maintain trails, parks, and open spaces

7.2 Action Plan

This Action Plan establishes a realistic, prioritized, and implementable roadmap for the next ten years (2026–2036). Action plan items were developed through a review of Merrimac's previous OSRP. Projects that remained incomplete but continued to be priorities for the Town were carried forward and refined with input from the Open Space Committee and the public during the public forum. Additional actions were identified through meetings, the public forum, and the community survey. Public input served as the primary driver of the action plan, with the needs analysis directly shaping actions to address identified gaps and priorities. Actions are organized to reflect logical progression, while allowing flexibility to respond to emerging opportunities.

Actions are prioritized as High, Medium, or Low. High-priority actions address the most urgent community needs, have clear funding paths, or are achievable in the near term. Medium-priority actions are important but may depend on funding availability or sequencing with other actions. Low-priority actions are desirable but longer-term or lower-urgency.

The Open Space Committee, in coordination with the newly reestablished Parks and Recreation Department, Conservation Commission, and Department of Public Works, is designated as the primary body responsible for overseeing implementation of this Plan. Each year, the Open Space Committee will review implementation progress, evaluate complete and ongoing initiatives, and adjust priorities based on funding, staffing, and emerging needs.

Table 7-1				
Ten Year Action Plan				
	Priority	**Target Year**	**Responsible Party**	**Potential Funding Source**
Goal 1: Protect and connect open spaces, conservation land, and natural resources				
Objective 1.1: Protect priority lands to strengthen connections between natural corridors, farmland, habitats, and existing protected open space				
Objective 1.1.1: Secure protection of priority parcels and farmland at risk of development, including properties transitioning out of Chapter 61, through APRs, partnerships, and CRs	High	2026-2036	Open Space Committee, Conservation Commission	Local Acquisitions for Natural Diversity (LAND) Grant; CPA*; Conservation Partnership Grant; partner land trust funding; APR
Objective 1.1.2: Coordinate with partners (e.g., Essex County Greenbelt Association, Essex County Trails Association, and Merrimack River Watershed Council) on land acquisition and CRs, grant writing, and land stewardship	High	Ongoing	Open Space Committee	Conservation Partnership Grant; Town general fund; staff time; partner land trust funding
Objective 1.1.3: Identify and maintain an inventory of priority farmland parcels, including large, centrally located, and at-risk properties, and Chapter 61 land transitions, to guide preservation and protection opportunities; update annually	High	2026-2027; Annual update	Assessors, Open Space Committee, Conservation Commission	Staff time; MVPC technical assistance
Objective 1.1.4 Require notification to the Open Space Committee when the Town takes tax title properties	Low	2027	Select Board, Tax Collector	Staff time
Objective 1.1.5: Identify and map greenway corridors and linkages to guide future trail and land protection efforts	High	2026-2028	Open Space Committee, Planning Board, Conservation Commission	MassTrails; MVPC technical assistance
Objective 1.1.6: Evaluate and peruse adoption of the Community Preservation Act to provide funding for open space, recreation, and historic preservation	High	2026 - 2028	Open Space Committee, Select Board	Staff time
Objective 1.1.7: Identify parcels for acquisition that overlap BioMap's identified high-value ecological areas	Low	2028 - 2029	Open Space Committee, Conservation	LAND Grant; Staff time; MVPC technical assistance

			Commission, Partner Land Trusts	
Objective 1.1.8: Prioritize protection of unprotected climate-resilient lands, with a focus on the remaining Sargent Farm parcels, adjacent land along the Back River, and the Brandy Brow Hill area	Low	2030 - 2036	Open Space Committee, Conservation Commission, Partner Land Trusts	CPA*, LAND Grant, Land Trust Funding
Objective 1.2: Improve stewardship and management of protected lands				
Objective 1.2.1: Develop management plans all for town-owned open space, informed by trail condition assessment	Medium	2028 - 2031	Open Space Committee, Conservation Commission	Town Budget and Volunteers
Objective 1.2.2: Develop a formal trail maintenance program (clearing overgrowth, sign posting, trail blaze, etc.)	High	2027-2028	Open Space Committee, DPW	Town Budget; Volunteers; MassTrails
Objective 1.2.3: Conduct a town-wide trail condition assessment to prioritize improvement needs	High	2026 - 2027	Open Space Committee, DPW	Town Budget; Volunteers; MassTrails
Objective 1.2.4: Maintain all parks and trails through a dedicated annual budget line item	High	Ongoing	Open Space Committee, Conservation Commission, DPW	Town Budget
Objective 1.2.5: Develop a forest or tree management plan to support long-term ecosystem health, reduce vulnerability to pests and disease, and improve climate resilience	Low	2029 - 2031	Conservation Commission, Consulting Forester	DCR Forest Stewardship Program; ECO OneStop Grant; Urban & Community Forestry Grants
Objective 1.3: Improve trail access and connectivity				
Objective 1.3.1: Secure trail easements and access agreements for McLaren Trail connections from neighboring areas	High	2028 - 2032	Open Space Committee, Conservation Commission, Planning Board	CPA*; LAND Grant; Private Partnerships; Town Budget
Objective 1.3.2: Create new trail connection between McLaren Trail and Perkins Conservation	Medium	2032 - 2035	Open Space Committee, Conservation	MassTrails; CPA*; Volunteers

			Commission, Planning Board	
Objective 1.3.3: Develop a town-wide trail connectivity plan to link existing open space areas and create loop trails where feasible	High	2027 - 2030	Planning Board, Conservation Commission, Open Space Committee	MassTrails; MVPC technical assistance
Objective 1.4: Protect and maintain scenic vistas, viewsheds, and climate-resilient landscapes				
Objective 1.4.1: Revitalize and maintain scenic vistas throughout Town including clearing and signage	Medium	2029 - 2032	Open Space Committee, Conservation Commission, Planning Board	Volunteers, Town Budget
Objective 1.4.2: Use the Massachusetts Scenic Roads Act M.G.I. c.40 15C to designate Scenic Roads along Bear Hill Road, Birch Meadow Rd (along the APR farm), Hadley Road, Heath Road, and Locust Street	Medium	2028-2030	Select Board, DPW	N/A – regulatory action, no direct cost
Objective 1.4.3: Preserve land that supports flood storage, heat mitigation, and ecological resilience, including consideration of hot spot areas for targeted tree planting and green infrastructure	Low	2030 - 2036	Conservation Commission, Planning Board, Open Space Committee	ECO OneStop Grant; LAND Grant; Urban and Community Forestry
Goal 2: Expand parks and recreation access and community use				
Objective 2.1: Improve and expand recreation facilities				
Objective 2.1.1: Upgrade Sweetsir and Donaghue School playgrounds with updated equipment, seating, and shade; Evaluate opportunities for splash pad at Sweetsir School	High	2027 - 2029	DPW, Pentucket Regional School District, Parks and Recreation Department	PARC Grant; School District Budget; Town Budget
Objective 2.1.2: Add designated parking, benches, picnic tables, and shade structures at Carey Park	Medium	2030 - 2031	DPW, Open Space Committee	Town Budget
Objective 2.1.3: Create a recreation site plan with alternatives, phasing, and funding options for a multi-use community gathering space at Emery Street Park with:	High	2026 - 2029	DPW, Parks and Recreation Department, Select Board	PARC Grant; Town Budget; MVPC technical assistance

accessible walking paths, Storywalk, restrooms, community garden, open lawn, dog park, skate park, space for events (music, market, festivals, etc.), and parking *(Planning Phase)*				
Objective 2.1.4: Construct phased improvements at Emery Street per approved site plan (Implementation Phase)	High	2030 - 2035	DPW, Parks and Recreation Department, Select Board	PARC Grant; Community Development Block Grant (CDBG)
Objective 2.1.5: Evaluate the feasibility of acquiring and redeveloping the former Wallace Boat Yard as a publicly accessible waterfront recreation area supporting activities such as boating, fishing, picnicking, passive recreation, and community events.	Medium	2030-2031	Select Board, Parks and Recreation Department, Planning Boardgive	Land and Water Conservation Fund (LWCF); PARC Grant; CPA*
Objective 2.2: Expand water access for recreation				
Objective 2.2.1: Develop accessible canoe/kayak launches with signage at Locust Street and Carey Park to improve access to the Merrimack River	High	2028 - 2030	Open Space Committee, Select Board, DPW	PARC Grant; (LWCF
Objective 2.2.2: Secure public easement / public access improvements at Duck Hole Landing	High	2029 - 2032	DPW, Open Space Committee	PARC Grant; LWCF; Town Budget
Objective 2.2.3: Officially determine if options can be found to reestablish public access to the beach at Indianhead Park *(The Commonwealth currently states that the beach will not be re-opened to the public due to risk of Town wells/well water being vandalized.)*	High	2026-2028	DPW, Select Board	Town Budget
Objective 2.2.4: Improve safe access along River Road by evaluating potential walking paths, sidewalks, bike lanes, traffic, and parking	High	2027-2032	DPW, Planning Board	MassDOT Complete Streets, ECO OneStop Grant; Transportation Alternatives Program
Objective 2.3: Improve access, parking, and safety at open space and recreation sites				
Objective 2.3.1: Expand and formalize parking at McLaren Trail, Carey Park, Emery Street Fields, DCR Boat Ramp and Perkins Conservation Area	Medium	2028 - 2031	DPW; DCR	Town Budget; PARC Grant

Objective 2.3.2: Install clear signage for parking and access points for all municipally owned and publicly accessible facilities	Medium	2027-2028	DPW	Town Budget; PARC Grant
Goal 3: Improve accessibility and connectivity of parks and recreation between neighborhoods, schools, downtown, and open space resources for all				
Objective 3.1: Improve accessibility at recreation sites				
Objective 3.1.1: Conduct a full ADA accessibility assessment of all parks and trails to identify barriers and ADA-compliant improvements	High	2027 - 2028	DPW, Open Space Committee, Commission on Disabilities	Town Budget; CDBG; PARC Grant; AARP Community Challenge
Objective 3.1.2: Upgrade at least one priority trail (McLaren Trail and/or Town Forest) for full accessibility including widening trails, improving grading, installing railings, adding appropriate surface materials, installing signage, adding benches, and expanding parking	Medium	2030 - 2035	Select Board, Commission on Disabilities, DPW, Open Space Committee	PARC Grant; MassTrails; AARP Community Challenge
Objective 3.1.3: Evaluate existing playgrounds for accessibility and inclusivity, and implement phased improvements (e.g., accessible surfacing, ramps, inclusive play features, and seating) to better serve children of all abilities and their caregivers	Medium	2029 - 2032	DPW, Pentucket Regional School District, Parks and Recreation Department	PARC Grant, CDBG
Objective 3.1.4: Develop senior-focused recreational amenities, including accessible walking paths and passive recreation areas near the Senior Center	Medium	2030 - 2033	Council on Aging, Open Space Committee	PARC Grant; AARP Community Challenge
Objective 3.1.5: Evaluate the feasibility, design, and siting of public restroom facilities at key recreation areas and parks including the McLaren Trail, Emery Street Field, and the recreation fields at Town Forest	Medium	2029 - 2030	Open Space Committee, DPW, Select Board	Town Budget
Objective 3.1.6: Install benches / rest areas along McLaren Trail to support seniors and users with mobility challenges	High	2028 - 2029	DPW, Open Space Committee	Tonw Budget; Donations
Objective 3.2: Strengthen connections between neighborhoods and recreation destinations				

Objective 3.2.1: Improve management and maintenance of Town roads and sidewalks to maintain access to parks and open space facilities	High	Ongoing	DPW	Town Budget; MassDOT
Objective 3.2.2: Identify areas to connect existing sidewalks to major amenities such as schools and outdoor recreation areas	Medium	2029-2031	Open Space Committee DPW	MassDOT; MVPC technical assistance
Objective 3.3: Improve awareness of open space and recreation resources				
Objective 3.3.1: Develop a downloadable and printable town-wide trail and open space map and trail maps	High	2026 - 2027	Open Space Committee, Parks and Recreation Department	Town Budget; MVPC technical assistance
Objective 3.3.2: Update Town website with maps, amenities, parking, and accessibility information for all open space and recreation sites	High	2026	Open Space Committee, Parks and Recreation Department	Town Budget; MVPC technical assistance
Objective 3.3.3: Develop and install a consistent trial signage and wayfinding system for all trails with clear identification of public land access	High	2028 - 2030	DPW, Open Space Committee	Town Budget; MassTrails
Goal 4: Safeguard water resources for drinking water, habitat, and recreation while balancing access and resource protection				
Objective 4.1: Strengthen water resource protection				
Objective 4.1.1: Prohibit underground sprinkler systems from connecting to the public water supply, and require all new construction/major rehabilitation projects to use water-conservation fixtures	Low	2026	DPW	N/A – regulatory action
Objective 4.1.2: Adopt septic system cleaning/maintenance regulations	Low	2026	Board of Health	N/A – regulatory action
Objective 4.1.3: Pursue acquisition or CRs on priority parcels within the WRPD	Low	2030 - 2036	Open Space Committee, DPW, Conservation Commission	CPA*; LAND Grant; Drinking Water Supply Protection Grant

Goal 5: Engage residents and Town departments in the implementation of this plan and the stewardship of Merrimac's natural, recreational, historic, and cultural resources				
Objective 5.1: Monitor progress in implementing the plan and maintain engagement of other Town departments and the public				
Objective 5.1.1: Annually review action items and priorities and periodically seek public input about open space and recreation issues	High	Ongoing	Open Space Committee	Town Staff Time; Volunteers
Objective 5.1.2: Bi-annually meet with other Town committees and departments to determine the status of action items and the possible need for modifications	Medium	Ongoing	Open Space Committee	Town Staff Time; Volunteers
Objective 5.2: Expand public involvement in stewardship activities, including volunteer efforts to maintain trails, parks, and open spaces				
Objective 5.2.1: Work with youth groups to encourage adoption of projects that result in permanent trail improvements	Medium	Ongoing	Open Space Committee	Volunteers
Objective 5.2.2: Establish a volunteer trail stewardship program to support ongoing maintenance, including clearing, marking, and monitoring of trails	High	2027 - 2028	Open Space Committee, Conservation Commission, Volunteer Groups	Town Budget; Volunteers; MassTrails
Objective 5.2.3: Distribute and post materials on the Town website (specifically the Open Space Committee page) informing landowners of the potential tax benefits of donating land or CRs	Medium	2026 - 2027	Open Space Committee, Essex County Greenbelt Association	Town Staff Time
Objective 5.2.4: Expand community outreach and programming to increase awareness and use of open space resources, including partnerships with schools and youth organizations	Medium	Ongoing	Pentucket Regional School District, Open Space Committee	Town Budget; Volunteers

** A note on CPA throughout this table: CPA adoption is listed as a funding source for many actions because it would be transformative for Merrimac's conservation and recreation capacity. Since Action 1.1.6 targets CPA adoption in 2027–2028, CPA is listed as a potential source for actions beginning in 2029 and later. If CPA is not adopted, the Town will need to rely more heavily on state grant programs and regional partnerships for those actions.*

7.2.1 Management and Implementation

Successful implementation of this Plan will rely on coordinated effort across the Open Space Committee, Parks and Recreation Department, Conservation Commission, and Department of Public Works. The Open Space Committee will establish an annual review process to track progress, evaluate successes and challenges, and adjust priorities as needed based on funding availability, staffing, and emerging opportunities.

Volunteer support will continue to be essential, particularly for trail maintenance, stewardship projects, and community outreach.

Strategic partnerships with MVPC, Essex County Greenbelt Association, the Lake Attitash Association, and the Merrimack River Watershed Council will provide technical expertise, grant assistance, and extended capacity throughout the ten-year planning period.

Together, this collaborative management structure will allow Merrimac to implement its OSRP effectively over the ten-year planning period while adapting to evolving needs and opportunities.

SECTION 8 | Public Comments

Request for public comments on the draft Open Space & Recreation Plan were directly sent to the following entities:

- Merrimac Select Board
- Merrimac Parks and Recreation Department
- Merrimac Planning Board
- Merrimac Conservation Commission
- Merrimack Valley Planning Commission

Public comments on the draft Open Space & Recreation Plan were received from the following entities:

- Merrimack Valley Planning Commission

Copies of the comment letters are displayed on the following pages.

The draft plan was posted to the Town of Merrimac's website so that residents had easy access to meeting notes and could provide comments.

The draft plan was sent to the Division of Conservation Services (DCS) on Tuesday, June 16, 2026 for review and state approval. DCS returned comments to Merrimac on September 3, 2026. Those comments were addressed and sent to DCS for final approval on September 30, 2026. The Town of Merrimac received final approval from DCS on October 1, 2026.

The final OSRP is posted to the Town website, and the Town library retains two hard copies of the plan on file for general reference.

TOWN OF MERRIMAC
OFFICE OF THE SELECT BOARD
2-8 School Street, Merrimac, MA 01860
TEL (978) 346-8862
E-MAIL selectboard@townofmerrimac.com

June 25, 2026

Open Space Committee
4 School St.
Merrimac, MA 01860

Re: Review of the Draft 2026 Town of Merrimac Open Space and Recreation Plan

To Whom It May Concern,

On behalf of the Select Board of the Town of Merrimac, this letter confirms that the board has had the opportunity to review the draft of the 2026 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) for the Town of Merrimac.

The Select Board reviewed the draft OSRP on June 23, 2026 and has had the opportunity to provide input into the plan.

Following our review, the Select Board has no comments or recommended changes to the draft OSRP at this time and supports its submission for approval.

We appreciate the opportunity to participate in the planning process and support the Towns's efforts to update its Open Space and Recreation Plan.

Sincerely,

Janet M. Bruno

Janet M. Bruno
Chairperson
Merrimac Select Board

TOWN OF MERRIMAC
Parks and Recreation Commission
Town Hall, 2 School St. Merrimac, MA 01860

July 13, 2026

Re: Review of the Draft 2026 Town of Merrimac Open Space and Recreation Plan

To Whom It May Concern,

On behalf of the Merrimac Parks and Recreation Department, this letter confirms that Parks and Recreation Commission has had the opportunity to review the draft 2026 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) for the Town of Merrimac.

The Parks and Recreation Commission reviewed the draft OSRP on July 13, 2026 and has had the opportunity to provide input into the plan.

Following our review, the Parks and Recreation Commission has no comments or recommended changes to the draft OSRP at this time and supports its submission for approval.

We appreciate the opportunity to participate in this planning process and support the Town's efforts to update its Open Space and Recreation Plan.

Sincerely,

Denise L. Parry

Denise Parry
Chair
Merrimac Parks and Recreation Commission

TOWN OF MERRIMAC
PLANNING BOARD

2 School Street
Merrimac, MA 01860

June 17, 2026

Lucy Abisalih
Open Space Committee
Town of Merrimac
4 School Street
Merrimac, MA 01833

RE: Review of the Draft 2026 Open Space and Recreation Plan

To Whom It May Concern:

On behalf of the Planning Board of the Town of Merrimac, this letter confirms that the Planning Board has had the opportunity to review the draft 2026 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) for the Town of Merrimac.

As part of the review of the draft OSRP, the Planning Board has had the opportunity to provide input pertaining to the Plan. Following our review, the Planning Board has no comments or recommended changes to the draft OSRP at this time and supports its submission for approval.

We appreciate the opportunity to participate in this planning process and support the Town's efforts to update its Open Space and Recreation Plan.

Sincerely,

David Cressman

David Cressman, Chair
Merrimac Planning Board

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
THE TOWN of MERRIMAC
4 School St., Merrimac
MASSACHUSETTS 01860

June 22, 2026

Open Space and Recreation
4 School St.
Merrimac, MA 01860

Re: Review of the Draft 2026 Town of Merrimac Open Space and Recreation Plan

To Whom It May Concern,

On behalf of the Merrimac Conservation Commission of the Town of Merrimac, this letter confirms that

Merrimac Conservation Commission has had the opportunity to review the draft 2026 Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) for the Town of Merrimac.

The Merrimac Conservation Commission reviewed the draft OSRP on June 22, 2026 and has had the opportunity to provide input into the plan.

Following our review, the Merrimac Conservation Commission has no comments or recommended changes to the draft OSRP at this time and supports its submission for approval.

We appreciate the opportunity to participate in this planning process and support the Town's efforts to update its Open Space and Recreation Plan.

Sincerely,

Jerome Mathieu
Chairman
Merrimac Conservation Commission

Merrimack Valley Planning Commission
Plan • Innovate • Promote
160 Main Street, Haverhill, Massachusetts 01830 | P: 978.374.0519 | F: 978.372.4890 | mvpc.org

July 30th, 2026

Lucy Crocker Abisalih
Merrimac Open Space Committee Chair
4 School St
Merrimac, MA 01860

Re: Merrimac Open Space and Recreation Plan

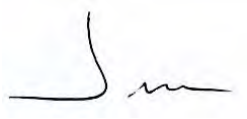
Dear Chairwoman Abisalih and Merrimac Open Space Committee,

The Merrimack Valley Planning Commission (MVPC) has reviewed the most recent draft of the 2026 Town of Merrimac Open Space & Recreation Plan. The Commission would like to commend the Town for their comprehensive process to consider local and regional planning efforts, as well as conduct broad community engagement to update the information, goals, and action steps outlined in the plan. The actions identified within the plan provide a clear path to advance open space and natural resource protection, as well as improve accessibility and recreation opportunities for the residents of Merrimac.

MVPC has been pleased to review this updated plan and is supportive of the plan implementation goals and strategies which are consistent with those identified through other parallel efforts in Merrimac and in the Merrimack Valley Region. We look forward to working with the Town in the years ahead to support implementation of plan recommendations.

Thank you again for your work and dedication to this plan update. Please don't hesitate to contact MVPC if we can be of any further assistance.

Sincerely,



Jerrard Whitten
Executive Director

Merrimack Valley Planning Commission
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160 Main Street, Haverhill, Massachusetts 01830 | P: 978.374.0519 | F: 978.372.4890 | mvpc.org

June 30th, 2026

Lucy Crocker Abisalih
Merrimac Open Space Committee Chair
4 School St
Merrimac, MA 01860

RE: Merrimac Open Space and Recreation Plan

Dear Lucy and Kristin,

Thank you for the opportunity to review the 2026 update of Merrimac's Open Space and Recreation Plan. The OSC and Tighe & Bond have done a tremendous job ensuring the process has been thoughtful and comprehensive, with attention paid to both the need to build resilience and the needs of Merrimac's residents. We are happy to provide a letter of support for your plan update. Below, we have also included a few recommendations for refinement of the plan. Please feel free to review these comments and integrate as you see fit.

Best,



Kay Emery
Environmental Planner
Merrimack Valley Planning Commission

Recommendations to consider for Draft 2026 Merrimac Open Space and Recreation Plan

1. Table 3-4: Consider including trail mileage for Beaver Pond Reservation Trail and Cobbler's Brook Greenway to provide a complete picture of Merrimac's trail assets.
2. Section 3.3.2: Consider mentioning the Water Resource Protection District, Floodplain Overlay District, and other bylaws discussed later in the document here so that this section gives a comprehensive overview of local zoning laws and how they impact open space in Merrimac.
3. Section 4.2.3: Consider including mention of how drought impacts Merrimac's drinking water resources and/or surface water quality. The OSRP handbook encourages identification of known water quality and supply issues and Merrimac identifies drought as a hazard of top concern in their Hazard Mitigation Plan. This mention may also provide strength to applications for funding to support acquisition of open space that serves as aquifer recharge lands.
4. Section 4.4: The Merrimack River is considered federally designated Essential Fish Habitat for Atlantic Salmon and several other species under the Magnuson-Stevens Fisheries Act. Including this information is not necessary per DCS' OSRP requirements, but including a nod to this may provide additional reasoning for protecting riparian habitat along the Merrimack River. More information can be obtained using NOAA's Essential Fish Habitat mapping tool.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114

Maura T. Healey
GOVERNOR

Kimberley Driscoll
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

Rebecca L. Tepper
SECRETARY

Tel: (617) 626-1000
Fax: (617) 626-1081
http://www.mass.gov/eea

September 3, 2026

Kristin Yankauskas
Tighe and Bond
25 Kingston Street, Floor 5
Boston, MA 02111

Re: Open Space and Recreation Plan

Dear Ms. Yankauskas:

Thank you for submitting the draft Open Space and Recreation Plan for Merrimac to this office for review and compliance with the current Open Space and Recreation Plan Requirements. This plan has been conditionally approved through September 2036. Conditional approval will allow the town to participate in DCS grant rounds through September 2036, and a grant award may be offered to the town. However, no final grant payments will be made until the plan is completed.

Once the following items are addressed, your plan will receive final approval:

1. Introduction – the Enhanced Outreach for EJ Neighborhoods section doesn't describe how that portion of the population was outreached to. Please review this section and describe the process the town went through to outreach only to the EJ block group.
2. Soils and Topography = more specifics are needed on the effect of these topics on recreation.
3. Fisheries and Wildlife – a more robust inventory must be added.
4. Section 5 – please note that land dedicated to recreation purposes is also protected under Article 97. Are there only two CRs in the town? Only two are listed.
5. Letters of Review – letters from the Regional Planning Agency, Conservation Commission, Recreation Commission, Planning Board, and Chief Municipal Officer are needed.
6. Maps – the Inventory map should denote state ownership, i.e., which agency owns the land.

Please contact me at melissa.cryan@mass.gov if you have any questions or concerns, and I look forward to reviewing your final plan.

Sincerely,

Melissa Cryan

Melissa Cryan
Grant Programs Supervisor

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts
Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs
100 Cambridge Street, Suite 900
Boston, MA 02114

Maura T. Healey
GOVERNOR

Kimberley Driscoll
LIEUTENANT GOVERNOR

Rebecca L. Tepper
SECRETARY

Tel: (617) 626-1000
Fax: (617) 626-1081
http://www.mass.gov/eea

October 1, 2026

Kristin Yankauskas
Tighe and Bond
25 Kingston Street, Floor 5
Boston, MA 02111

Re: Open Space and Recreation Plan

Dear Ms. Yankauskas:

Thank you for submitting the Open Space and Recreation Plan for Merrimac to this office for review and compliance with the current Open Space and Recreation Plan Requirements. I'm pleased to write that the plan has received final approval and the town is eligible to apply for DCS grants through September 2036. Please contact me at melissa.cryan@mass.gov if you have any questions or concerns.

Sincerely,

Melissa Cryan

Melissa Cryan
Grant Programs Supervisor

SECTION 9 | References

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Source: Town of Merrimac, Open Space Committee

Appendix A: Maps

Town of Merrimac
Map 1 - Regional Context

Derry, NH
Kingston, NH
South Hampton, NH
Seabrook, NH
New Hampshire
Massachusetts
Newton, NH
Amesbury
Salisbury
Merrimac
Atkinson, NH
Plaistow, NH
Windham, NH
Salem, NH
Newburyport
Atlantic Ocean
West Newbury
Haverhill
Newbury
Groveland
Pelham, NH
Methuen
Georgetown
Rowley
Lawrence
Dracut
Boxford
North Andover
Ipswich
Andover
Topsfield
Essex
Hamilton
Tewksbury
Wenham
Middleton
North Reading

0 2,000 4,000 Feet

Merrimack Valley Planning Commission

Merrimack Valley Planning Commission does not make any warranty, expressed or implied, nor assume any legal liability or responsibility for the accuracy, completeness, or usefulness of the Geographic Information System (GIS) Data or any other data provided herein. The GIS data is illustrative only material and should not be considered for any other purpose. The data does not take the place of a professional survey and has no legal bearing on the true shape, size, location, or existence of a geographic feature, property line, or political representation. Merrimack Valley Planning Commission requests that any use of this information be accompanied by a reference to its source and the Merrimack Valley Planning Commission's caveat that it makes no warranties or representations as to the accuracy of said information. Any use of this information is at the recipient's own risk.

Legend

- MVPC Region
- Municipal Boundaries
- State Line
- Interstate
- Major Roads
- Local Roads
- Active Rail Lines
- Hydrographic Features
- Streams
- Open Space

Town of Merrimac
Map 2 – Environmental Justice Populations

Newton, NH

Amesbury

Haverhill

Brush Hill Road
Quail Ridge Road
Huse Road
Batts Road
Hadley Road
West Hadley Road
Highland Road
Harriman Road
Red Oak Acres
Hansom Drive
Church Street
Nichols Street
Abbott Street
Maple Street
Pine Street
Prospect Street
Winter Street
Liberty Street
Grove Street
Bear Hill Road
Lakewoods Drive
Lake Attitash
Lane Ten Acres Road
Merrimac Avenue
Attitash Avenue
Wallace Way
First Avenue
Second Avenue
Emery Street
Burnside Avenue
Champion Street
Federal Way
Broadway
Mill Street
School Street Ter
Walnut Street
Locust Street
Orchard Street
110
495
North Street
High Street
South Pleasant Street
Middle Road
Skunk Road
Birch Meadow Loop
Birch Meadow Road
Heath Road
Chase Crescent
Clement Place
Forrester Parish Lane
Noyes Lane
Jana Way
River Road
Merrimack River
Spring Hill Road
Little Pond Road
Merrimac Street

At least 25% of households have a median household income 65% or less than the state median household income

Legend

Population Density (people/acre)
- ≤ 2
- ≤ 5
- ≤ 10
- ≤ 25

- Environmental Justice Community
- Open Space
- Interstate
- Major Roads
- Local Roads
- Municipal Boundaries
- State Line
- Hydrographic Features
- Streams

Population data comes from the 2020 Census and is based on place of residence. Census Blocks were used for population density representation.

0 500 1,000 Feet

Merrimack Valley Planning Commission

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Town of Merrimac

Map 3 - Zoning

Newton, NH

Amesbury

Haverhill

West Newbury

Brush Hill Road
Highland Road
Harriman Road
Quail Ridge Road
Huse Road
Batts Road
Hadley Road
West Hadley Road
Red Oak Acres
Hansom Drive
Church Street
Winter Street
Nichols Street
Maple Street
Pine Street
Prospect Street
Libery Street
Grove Street
Orchard Street
School Street
Mill Street
Broad Street
Walnut Street
Locust Street
Federal Way
Real Hill Road
Lakewoods Drive
West Shore Road
Lane Ten Acres Road
Lake Attitash
Merrimac Avenue
Attitash Avenue
Weatherbee Way
First Avenue
Second Avenue
Emery Street
Burnside Lane
Champion Street
North Street
High Street
South Pleasant Street
Middle Road
Skunk Road
Birch Meadow Loop
Birch Meadow Road
Heath Road
Meadowbrook Lane
Clement Place
Crescent
Jane Way
Little Pond Road
Spring Hill Road
Merrimac Street
River Road
Merrimack River

AR
SR
VR
VC
RH
HS
OI
L

110
495

Legend

- Municipal Boundaries
- State Line
- Parcels
- Hydrographic Features
- Streams
- Interstate
- Major Roads
- Local Roads

Zoning Districts

- AR - Agricultural Residential
- SR - Suburban Residential
- VR - Village Residential
- VC - Village Center
- RH - Rural Highway
- HS - Highway Services
- OI - Office/Industrial
- L - Lake

Zoning Overlays

- Birchmeadow Overlay District
- Rural-Agricultural Preservation Overlay District
- Water Resource Protection District
- MBTA Communities Multi-Family Overlay District

0 500 1,000 Feet

Merrimack Valley Planning Commission

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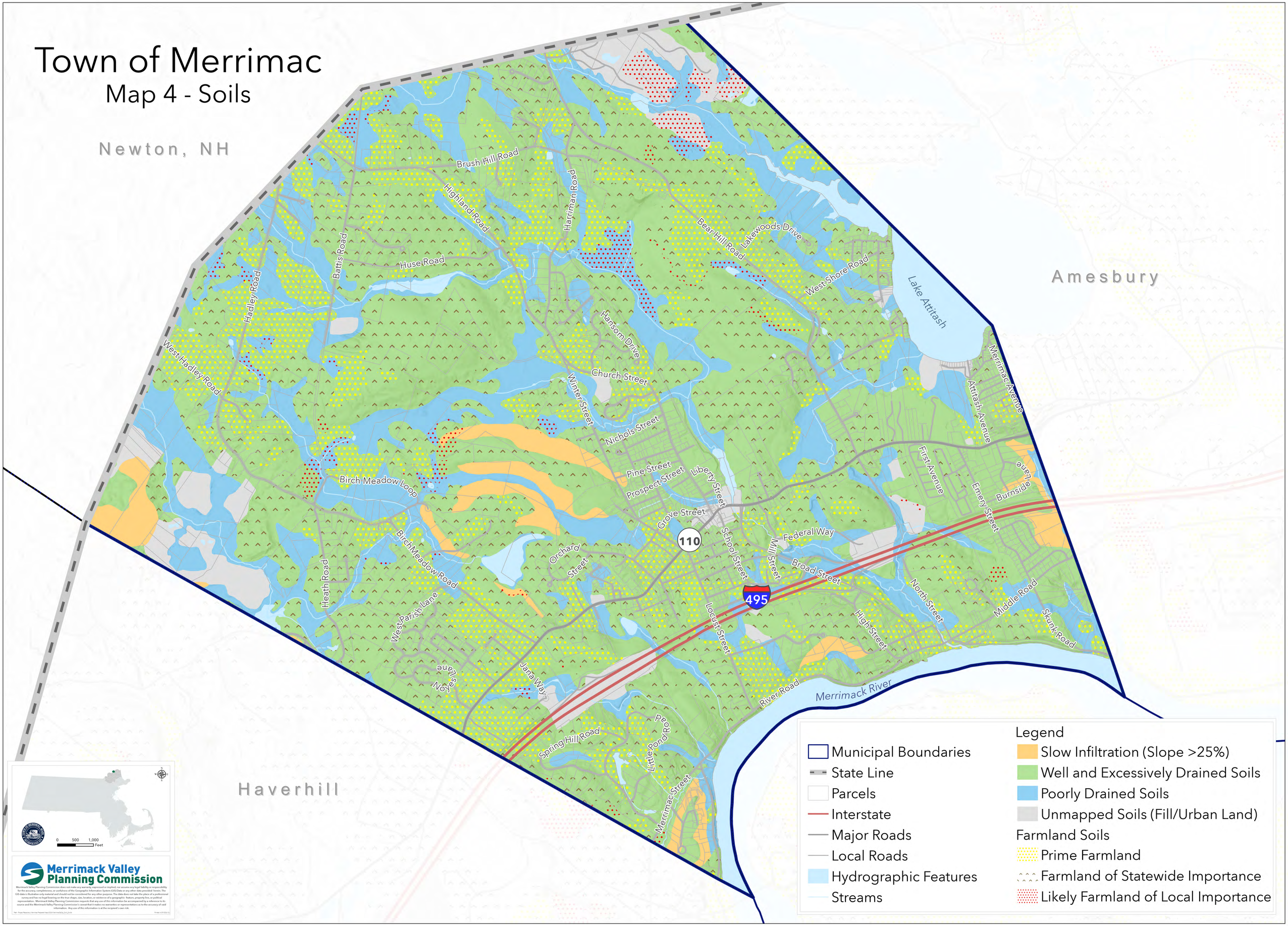

Town of Merrimac
Map 4 - Soils
Newton, NH
Amesbury
Haverhill
Lake Attitash
Merrimack River
Brush Hill Road
Highland Road
Harriman Road
Bear Hill Road
Lakewoods Drive
West Shore Road
Battis Road
Huse Road
Hadley Road
West Hadley Road
Hansom Drive
Church Street
Winter Street
Nichols Street
Pine Street
Prospect Street
Liberty Street
Grove Street
Birch Meadow Loop
Birch Meadow Road
Heath Road
West Parish Lane
Noyes Lane
Orchard Street
Jana Way
School Street
Mill Street
Federal Way
Broad Street
Locust Street
High Street
North Street
Middle Road
Skunk Road
Emery Street
Burnside Lane
First Avenue
Attitash Avenue
Merrimac Avenue
River Road
Spring Hill Road
Little Pond Road
Merrimac Street
110
495
Legend
Municipal Boundaries
State Line
Parcels
Interstate
Major Roads
Local Roads
Hydrographic Features
Streams
Slow Infiltration (Slope >25%)
Well and Excessively Drained Soils
Poorly Drained Soils
Unmapped Soils (Fill/Urban Land)
Farmland Soils
Prime Farmland
Farmland of Statewide Importance
Likely Farmland of Local Importance
0 500 1,000 Feet
Merrimack Valley Planning Commission

Town of Merrimac

Map 5 - Water Resources

Newton, NH

Amesbury

West Newbury

Back River

Brush Hill Road

Highland Road

Harriman Road

Quail Ridge Road

Huse Road

Battis Road

Hadley Road

West Hadley Road

Red Oak Acres

Hanson Drive

Bear Hill Road

Lakewoods Drive

West Shore Road

Lake Attitash

Cobbler Brook

Lane Ten Acres Road

Merrimac Avenue

Attitash Avenue

First Avenue

Second Avenue

Emery Street

Burnside Lane

Champion Street

Church Street

Nichols Street

Maple Street

Pine Street

Prospect Street

Winter Street

Liberty Street

Grove Street

110

Federal Way

Broad Street

Mill Street

School Street

Walnut Street

Locust Street

Orchard Street

Birch Meadow Loop

Birch Meadow Road

Heath Road

West Parish Lane

Clement Place

Chase Crescent

Noyes Lane

Jana Way

495

High Street

South Pleasant Street

North Street

Middle Road

Skunk Road

River Road

Merrimack River

Little Pond Road

Spring Hill Road

Merrimac Street

Legend

- Municipal Boundaries
- State Line
- Parcels
- Interstate
- Major Roads
- Local Roads
- Hydrographic Features
- Streams
- Certified Vernal Pools
- Potential Vernal Pools
- Merrimack River Watershed
- Aquifers
- DEP Approved Zone I
- DEP Approved Zone II

FEMA Flood Hazard Zones

- 100-year floodplain
- 500-year floodplain

MassDEP Wetlands (2005)

- Bog
- Marsh
- Wooded/Shrub Swamp

Public Water Supplies

- Community Groundwater Source

0 500 1,000 Feet

Merrimack Valley Planning Commission

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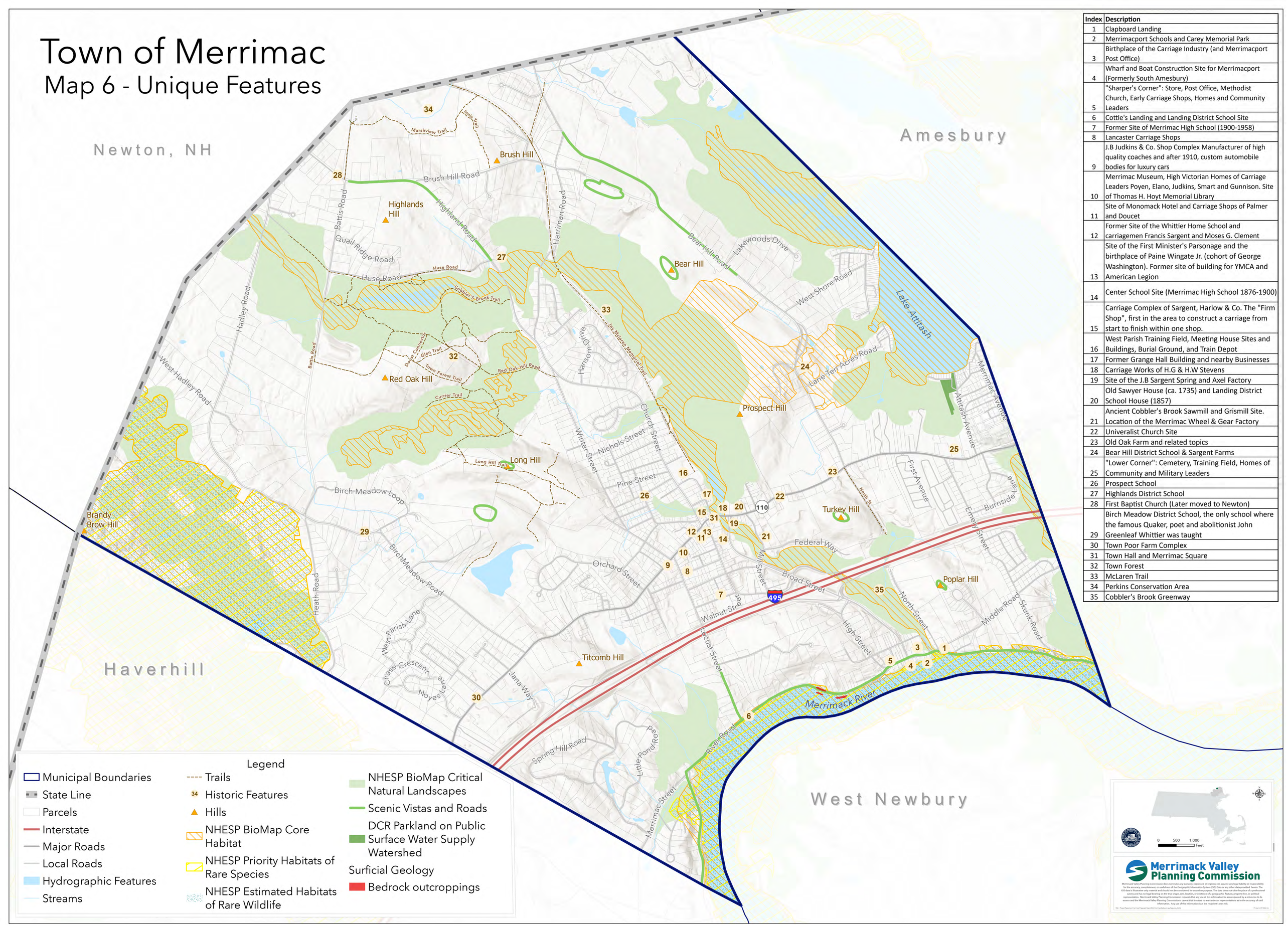
Town of Merrimac

Map 6 - Unique Features



Index	Description
1	Clapboard Landing
2	Merrimacport Schools and Carey Memorial Park
3	Birthplace of the Carriage Industry (and Merrimacport Post Office)
4	Wharf and Boat Construction Site for Merrimacport (Formerly South Amesbury)
5	"Sharper's Corner": Store, Post Office, Methodist Church, Early Carriage Shops, Homes and Community Leaders
6	Cottie's Landing and Landing District School Site
7	Former Site of Merrimac High School (1900-1958)
8	Lancaster Carriage Shops
9	J.B Judkins & Co. Shop Complex Manufacturer of high quality coaches and after 1910, custom automobile bodies for luxury cars
10	Merrimac Museum, High Victorian Homes of Carriage Leaders Poyen, Elano, Judkins, Smart and Gunnison. Site of Thomas H. Hoyt Memorial Library
11	Site of Monomack Hotel and Carriage Shops of Palmer and Doucet
12	Former Site of the Whittier Home School and carriagemen Francis Sargent and Moses G. Clement
13	Site of the First Minister's Parsonage and the birthplace of Paine Wingate Jr. (cohort of George Washington). Former site of building for YMCA and American Legion
14	Center School Site (Merrimac High School 1876-1900)
15	Carriage Complex of Sargent, Harlow & Co. The "Firm Shop", first in the area to construct a carriage from start to finish within one shop.
16	West Parish Training Field, Meeting House Sites and Buildings, Burial Ground, and Train Depot
17	Former Grange Hall Building and nearby Businesses
18	Carriage Works of H.G & H.W Stevens
19	Site of the J.B Sargent Spring and Axel Factory
20	Old Sawyer House (ca. 1735) and Landing District School House (1857)
21	Ancient Cobbler's Brook Sawmill and Grismill Site. Location of the Merrimac Wheel & Gear Factory
22	Univeralist Church Site
23	Old Oak Farm and related topics
24	Bear Hill District School & Sargent Farms
25	"Lower Corner": Cemetery, Training Field, Homes of Community and Military Leaders
26	Prospect School
27	Highlands District School
28	First Baptist Church (Later moved to Newton)
29	Birch Meadow District School, the only school where the famous Quaker, poet and abolitionist John Greenleaf Whittier was taught
30	Town Poor Farm Complex
31	Town Hall and Merrimac Square
32	Town Forest
33	McLaren Trail
34	Perkins Conservation Area
35	Cobbler's Brook Greenway

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Town of Merrimac

Map 7 - TNC Resilient Lands

Newton, NH

Amesbury

Haverhill

Lake Attitash

Merrimack River

Bush Hill Road
Harriman Road
Bear Hill Road
Lakewoods Drive
West Shore Road
Merrimac Avenue
Attitash Avenue
Lane Ten Acres Road
Wallace Way
Road
Highland Road
Quail Ridge Road
Huse Road
Battis Road
Red Oak Acres
Hansom Drive
Church Street
Nichols Street
Abbott Street
Maple Street
Pine Street
Prospect Street
Liberty Street
Federal Way
Mill Street
Broad Street
Green Street
School Street
Grove Street
Orchard Street
Locust Street
High Street
South Pleasant Street
North Street
Middle Road
Skunk Road
River Road
Merrimac Street
Pond Road
Hilltop Road
Long Hill Road
Jane Way
Birch Meadow Loop
Birch Meadow Road
Heath Road
Meadowlark Lane
Clement Place
Chase Crescent
Noyes Lane
Burnside Lane
Emery Street
Champion Street
First Avenue
Second Avenue
West Hadley Road
110
495

TNC Terrestrial Resilience Sites

- Most resilient
- More resilient
- Slightly more resilient
- Average or median resilient
- Slightly less resilient
- Less resilient
- Least resilient
- Developed
- EOEEA Hot Spots
- Open Space
- Municipal Boundaries
- State Line
- Hydrographic Features
- Streams
- Interstate
- Major Roads
- Local Roads

0 400 800 Feet

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Town of Merrimac
Map 8 - Inventory of Open Space

Newton, NH

Amesbury

Haverhill

RR Bear Hill Road
Madison Way Open Space
Madison Way
Wells/Pumping Station
Perkins Conservation
Brush Hill Road
Nixon Set Aside
(Smith Farm) Highland Road
Highland Road
Quail Ridge Road
Bates Road
Huse Road
Beaver Pond Reservation
Hadley Road
Closed Landfill
53 Hadley Rd
Hadley Road
West Hadley Road
Hoyt Farm/Silver Brook Farm
Town Forest
Birch Meadow Loop
Birch Meadow Road
Haverhill Well Fields
Heath Road
56 Birchmeadow Rd
BirchMeadow Road
11 Birch Meadow Road
West Parish Lane
Clement Place
Belmore Road
Chase Crescent
Noyes Lane
Jana Way
Standpipe
West Main Street
118 West Main St
Spring Hill Road
Little Pond Road
Duck Hole Landing
Merrimac Street
Valley Street
Harriman Road
Red Oak Acres
Hanson Drive
Landau Lane
McLaren Trail
Sargent Farm (Bear Hill Road)
Bear Hill Road
Lakewoods Drive
Sweetsir School & Playground
81 Church St
McLaren Trail access
Winter Street
Nichols Street
Abbott Street
Maple Street
Pine Street
Prospect Street
Church Street Cemetery
Church Street
Liberty Street
Town Improvement Society
Winter St
Grove Street
Woodland Street
110
School Street
Green Street
Pleasant Street
Middle Street
Walnut Street
Kimball Park
Donaghue School/Stevens Field
Orchard Street
Mill Street
Federal Way
Broad Street
495
Locust Street
Locust Grove Cemetery
Locust Grove Road
Colonial Drive
(Tamarack Farm) Locust Street
Long Pond Conservation Area
Locust Street Landing
River Road
Merrimack River
Alnette Road
West Shore Road
Lane Ten Acres Road
Lake Attitash
Abbey Road Open Space
Lake Attitash Boat Ramp
Merrimac Avenue
Attitash Avenue
Indian Head Park/Wellfield
Freedom Way
Whittier Way
East Main Street Cemetery
First Avenue
Second Avenue
Dunnevegan Drive
Burnside Lane
Emery Street
Champion Street
Poplar Hill Open Space
Emery Street Fields
Cobbler's Brook Greenway
North Street
High Street
South Pleasant Street
Middle Road
Skunk Road
River Road Peninsula
Carey Park

0 400 800 Feet

Merrimack Valley Planning Commission

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Legend

- Municipal Boundaries
- State Line
- Parcels
- Interstate
- Major Roads
- Local Roads
- Hydrographic Features
- Streams

Protection Level
- Limited Protection
- Legally Protected in Perpetuity

Open Space Ownership
- State (Division of Local Services)
- Municipal Water Supply
- Municipal Conservation
- Municipal Recreation
- Nonprofit
- Private
- Aquifer Restriction
- Deed Restriction
- Article 97
- APR
- CR
- Chapter 61A
- Chapter 61B



Source: Town of Merrimac, Open Space Committee

Appendix B: Public Engagement

HELP SHAPE THE FUTURE OF MERRIMAC



Town Forest

Tell us what matters most to you by filling out the Open Space and Recreation Community Survey by April 30, 2026

https://www.surveymonkey.com/r/2C3G6VV

The Town of Merrimac is updating its Open Space and Recreation Plan, a public process for a shared community vision for land use, natural resources, and recreation facilities.

TOWN of MERRIMAC, MASS.
150
SESQUICENTENNIAL
1876 - 2026

Town of Merrimac Open Space and Recreation Plan Update
Public Engagement Survey

The Town is undergoing an Open Space and Recreation Plan update. This survey is being conducted to understand the needs and concerns of Merrimac's citizens and visitors.

The survey should take 5-10 minutes to complete. The survey closes on April 30, 2026. For paper copies, please drop off your completed survey to the Merrimac Town Hall, 2 School Street, Merrimac, MA 01860.

1. How important are Merrimac parks and recreation areas to you?

- o Very important
- o Somewhat important
- o Not so important
- o Not important at all

2. How often do you visit/use each park and/or recreation area?

	Often (1-2 times per week)	1-2 times per month	On occasion (more than 3 times per year)	Rarely/Not at all	I have never heard of this facility
Beaver Pond Reservation					
Carey Park					
Cobbler's Brook Greenway					
Donaghue School/ Stevens Field					
Duck Hole Landing					
Emory Street/Carriagetown Park					
Garden behind Public Library					
Hoyt Farm/Silver Brook Farm					
Innis Trail					
Jay McLaren Memorial Trail					
Kimball Park					
Lake Attitash boat ramp					
Locust Street Landing					
Long Pond Conservation Area					
Madison Way Open Space					
Marshview Trail					
Perkins Conservation Area					
River Road Peninsula					
Sweetsir School Playground					

	Often (1-2 times per week)	1-2 times per month	On occasion (more than 3 times per year)	Rarely/Not at all	I have never heard of this facility
Town Forest Fields					
Town Forest Trails					

3. What facilities is your favorite to visit? You can select top three.

- o Beaver Pond Reservation
- o Carey Park
- o Cobbler's Brook Greenway
- o Donaghue School/ Stevens Field
- o Duck Hole Landing
- o Emory Street/Carriagetown Park
- o Garden behind Public Library
- o Hoyt Farm/Silver Brook Farm
- o Innis Trail
- o Jay McLaren Memorial Trail
- o Kimball Park
- o Lake Attitash boat ramp
- o Locust Street Landing
- o Long Pond Conservation Area
- o Madison Way Open Space
- o Marshview Trail
- o Perkins Conservation Area
- o River Road Peninsula
- o Sweetsir School Playground
- o Town Forest Fields
- o Town Forest Trails

4. What keeps you from using conservation and recreation areas or participating in recreational programming?

- o I lack transportation
- o I don't have time to visit
- o I am not aware of the areas / programming available
- o I am not interested in the areas / programming available
- o I have a disability and the areas / programming available is not accessible
- o I am concerned about safety
- o No Opinion / Few things keep me from using areas / programming

5. How satisfied are you with the places for <u>children and youth</u> to play and recreate?

- o Very satisfied
- o Satisfied
- o Neutral
- o Dissatisfied
- o Very Dissatisfied
- o No Opinion

6. How satisfied are you with the places for teens and young adults to play and recreate?

- o Very satisfied
- o Satisfied
- o Neutral
- o Dissatisfied
- o Very Dissatisfied
- o No Opinion

7. How satisfied are you with the places for adults to play and recreate?

- o Very satisfied
- o Satisfied
- o Neutral
- o Dissatisfied
- o Very Dissatisfied
- o No Opinion

8. How satisfied are you with the places for people with disabilities to play and recreate?

- o Very satisfied
- o Satisfied
- o Neutral
- o Dissatisfied
- o Very Dissatisfied
- o No Opinion

9. Please rate the importance of preserving additional lands for conservation purposes, including scenic views, wildlife habitats, walking trails, and other open space values.

- o Very important
- o Somewhat important
- o Not at all important

10. What are the reasons why you do not use parks, recreation facilities, and open space resources in Merrimac more frequently? Check all that apply.

- o Don't know the location(s)
- o Perception of entrance fees
- o Lack of programming
- o Lack of passive recreation spaces
- o Not conveniently located

- o Too crowded
- o Not interesting or enjoyable
- o Poor ADA/Handicapped accessibility
- o Don't have transportation
- o Conditions are poorly maintained
- o Feel unsafe
- o Lack of adequate parking
- o Short operational hours
- o N/A – I am content with current conditions
- o Other (please specify) _____

11. How should the town spend additional resources?

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree
Develop a multi-use community gathering space where people can gather for games, music, picnicking, etc.			
Protect undeveloped land from future development			
Provide more year-round recreation facilities			
Acquiring additional land to expand existing parks, open space areas, and recreation facilities			
Acquiring agricultural land			
Maintaining scenic views and vistas			
Creating/expanding available parking at recreation facilities			
Maintain and enhance existing parks, open space areas, and recreation facilities			
Develop more active recreation (splash pads, playgrounds, courts)			
Develop more water-based recreation (kayaking, fishing, swimming) opportunities			
Provide more bike lanes/bike paths			
Provide more walking and hiking trails			
Increase park area for passive recreation (hiking, walking, bird watching)			
Preserve land for plant and wildlife habitat			
Expand recreational programs for all ages			
Community Services (park maintenance, public safety, restrooms)			
Improve ADA access			
Community Programming (youth programs, senior wellness programs, cultural events, education programs, sports leagues)			

12. What do you consider to be the biggest unmet open space needs in Merrimac. Check all that apply.

- o Multi-purpose field
- o Baseball/softball fields
- o Basketball courts
- o Tennis courts
- o Pickleball courts
- o Skate park
- o Dog park
- o Splash pad
- o Swimming areas (pools)
- o Water access for swimming (natural bodies of water)
- o Water access for kayaks/canoes
- o Hiking trails
- o Playgrounds
- o Playgrounds with handicapped accessibility
- o Picnic Areas
- o Benches/Seating
- o Passive Green Space
- o Public art installations
- o Wildlife/Nature Preserves
- o Pollinator or Community gardens
- o Restrooms
- o Water fountains / water bottle filling stations
- o Outdoor fitness stations
- o Educational programs
- o Other (please specify) _____

13. Do you have children (between ages 0-18)?

- o Yes
- o No

14. Do you have a disability that limits your involvement in parks and recreation?

- o Yes
- o No

If Yes, what improvements would you like to see to access parks and recreation in Town?

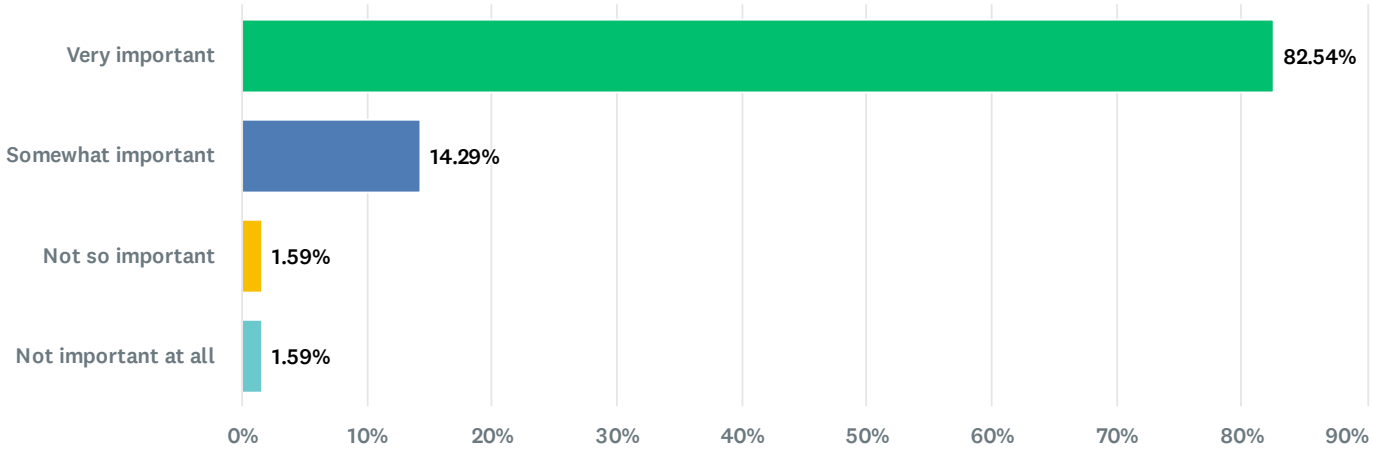
15. Where do you think additional parks and recreation facilities are needed in town, if any?

16. In your own words, please provide additional thoughts, comments, recommendations, or further explanations about the Town's recreation and open space network.

https://tighebond-my.sharepoint.com/personal/kyankauskas_tighebond_com/Documents/MerrimacOSRP_DraftPublicSurvey.docx

Q1 63 responses

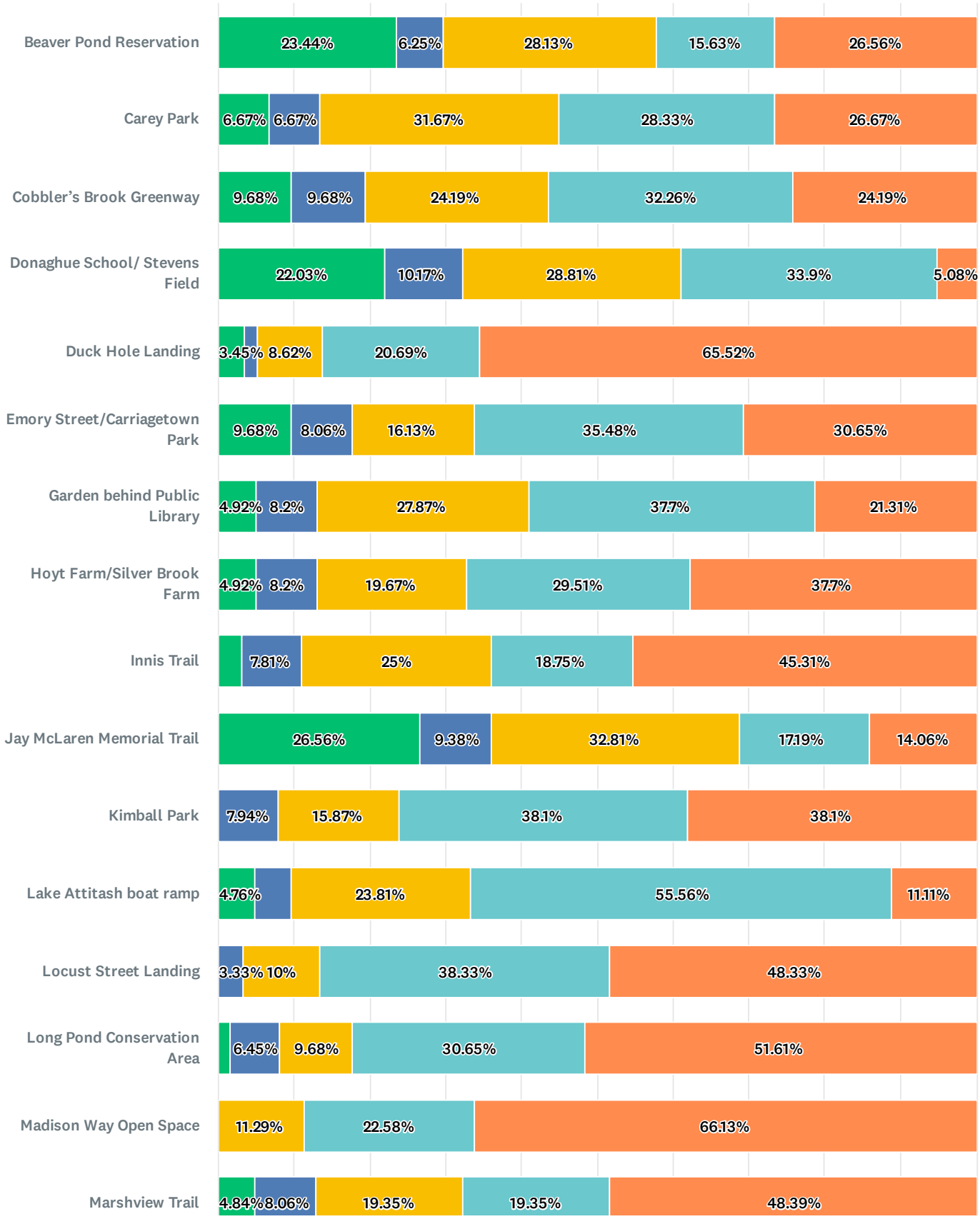
How important are Merrimac parks and recreation areas to you?

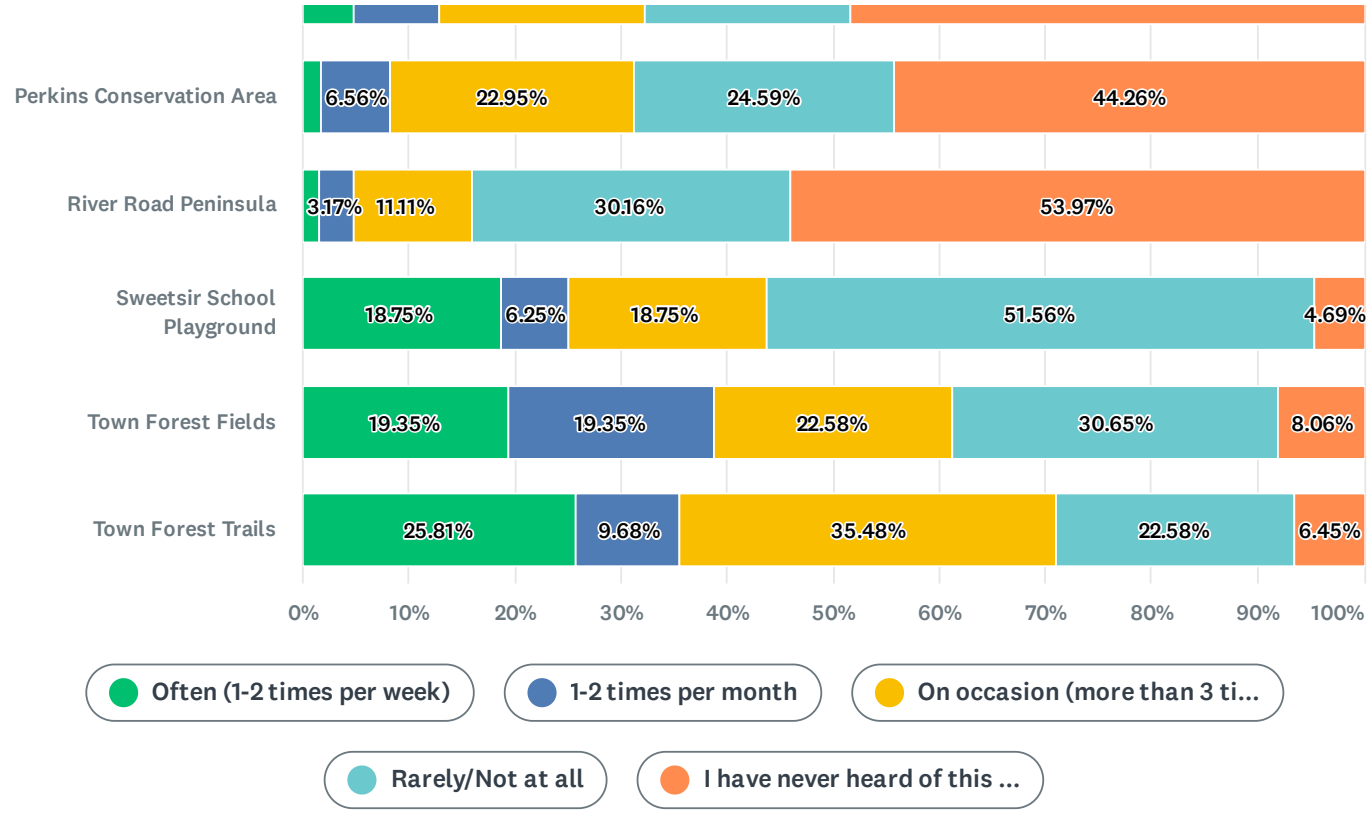


Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
Very important	82.54%	52
Somewhat important	14.29%	9
Not so important	1.59%	1
Not important at all	1.59%	1
Total		**63**

Q2 64 responses

How often do you visit/use each park and/or recreation area?





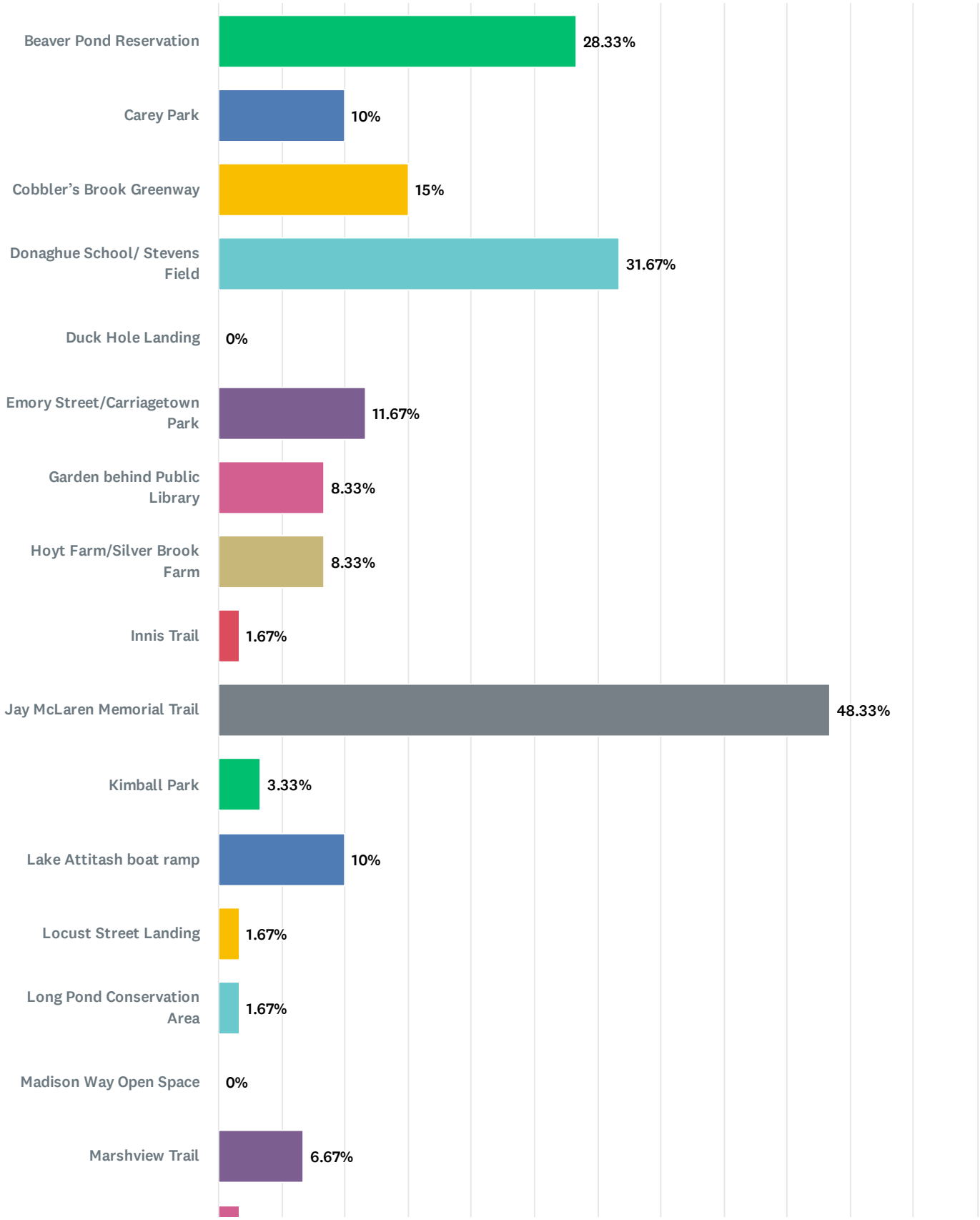
	Often (1-2 times per week)	1-2 times per month	On occasion (more than 3 times per year)	Rarely/Not at all	I have never heard of this facility	Total
Beaver Pond Reservation	23.44% 15	6.25% 4	28.13% 18	15.63% 10	26.56% 17	64
Carey Park	6.67% 4	6.67% 4	31.67% 19	28.33% 17	26.67% 16	60
Cobbler's Brook Greenway	9.68% 6	9.68% 6	24.19% 15	32.26% 20	24.19% 15	62
Donaghue School/ Stevens Field	22.03% 13	10.17% 6	28.81% 17	33.90% 20	5.08% 3	59
Duck Hole Landing	3.45% 2	1.72% 1	8.62% 5	20.69% 12	65.52% 38	58
Emory Street/Carriagetown Park	9.68% 6	8.06% 5	16.13% 10	35.48% 22	30.65% 19	62
						1299

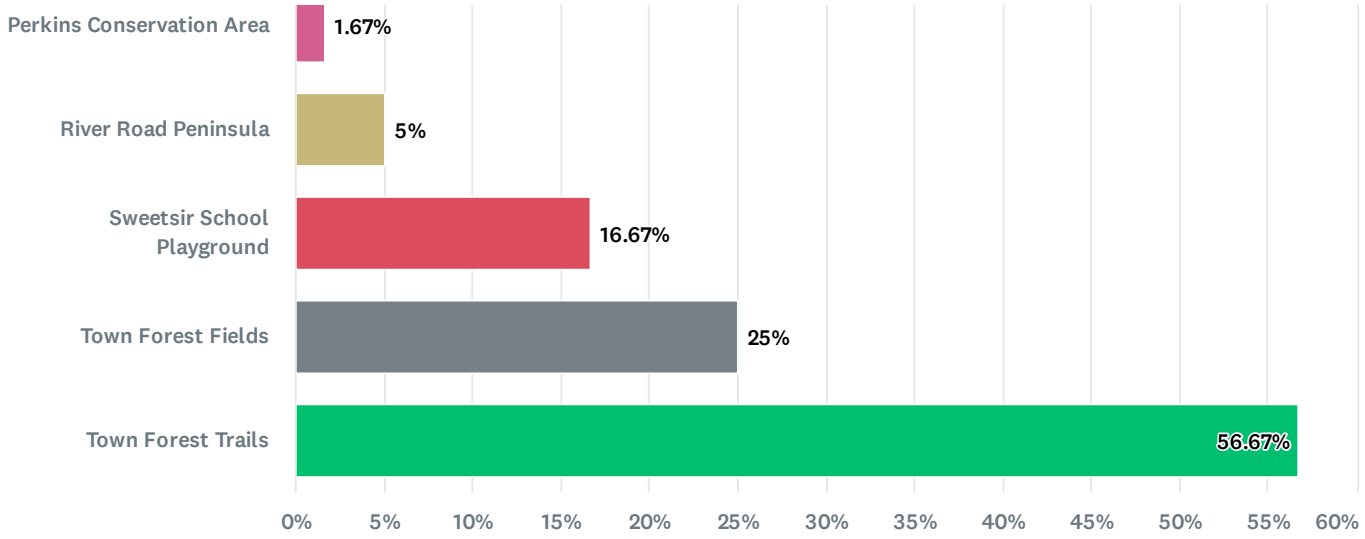
	Often (1-2 times per week)	1-2 times per month	On occasion (more than 3 times per year)	Rarely/Not at all	I have never heard of this facility	Total
Garden behind Public Library	4.92% 3	8.20% 5	27.87% 17	37.70% 23	21.31% 13	61
Hoyt Farm/Silver Brook Farm	4.92% 3	8.20% 5	19.67% 12	29.51% 18	37.70% 23	61
Innis Trail	3.13% 2	7.81% 5	25.00% 16	18.75% 12	45.31% 29	64
Jay McLaren Memorial Trail	26.56% 17	9.38% 6	32.81% 21	17.19% 11	14.06% 9	64
Kimball Park	0% 0	7.94% 5	15.87% 10	38.10% 24	38.10% 24	63
Lake Attitash boat ramp	4.76% 3	4.76% 3	23.81% 15	55.56% 35	11.11% 7	63
Locust Street Landing	0% 0	3.33% 2	10.00% 6	38.33% 23	48.33% 29	60
Long Pond Conservation Area	1.61% 1	6.45% 4	9.68% 6	30.65% 19	51.61% 32	62
Madison Way Open Space	0% 0	0% 0	11.29% 7	22.58% 14	66.13% 41	62
Marshview Trail	4.84% 3	8.06% 5	19.35% 12	19.35% 12	48.39% 30	62
Perkins Conservation Area	1.64% 1	6.56% 4	22.95% 14	24.59% 15	44.26% 27	61
River Road Peninsula	1.59% 1	3.17% 2	11.11% 7	30.16% 19	53.97% 34	63
Sweetsir School Playground	18.75% 12	6.25% 4	18.75% 12	51.56% 33	4.69% 3	64
						1299

	Often (1-2 times per week)	1-2 times per month	On occasion (more than 3 times per year)	Rarely/Not at all	I have never heard of this facility	Total
Town Forest Fields	19.35% 12	19.35% 12	22.58% 14	30.65% 19	8.06% 5	62
Town Forest Trails	25.81% 16	9.68% 6	35.48% 22	22.58% 14	6.45% 4	62
						1299

Q3 60 responses

What facilities are your favorite to visit? Please select top three.



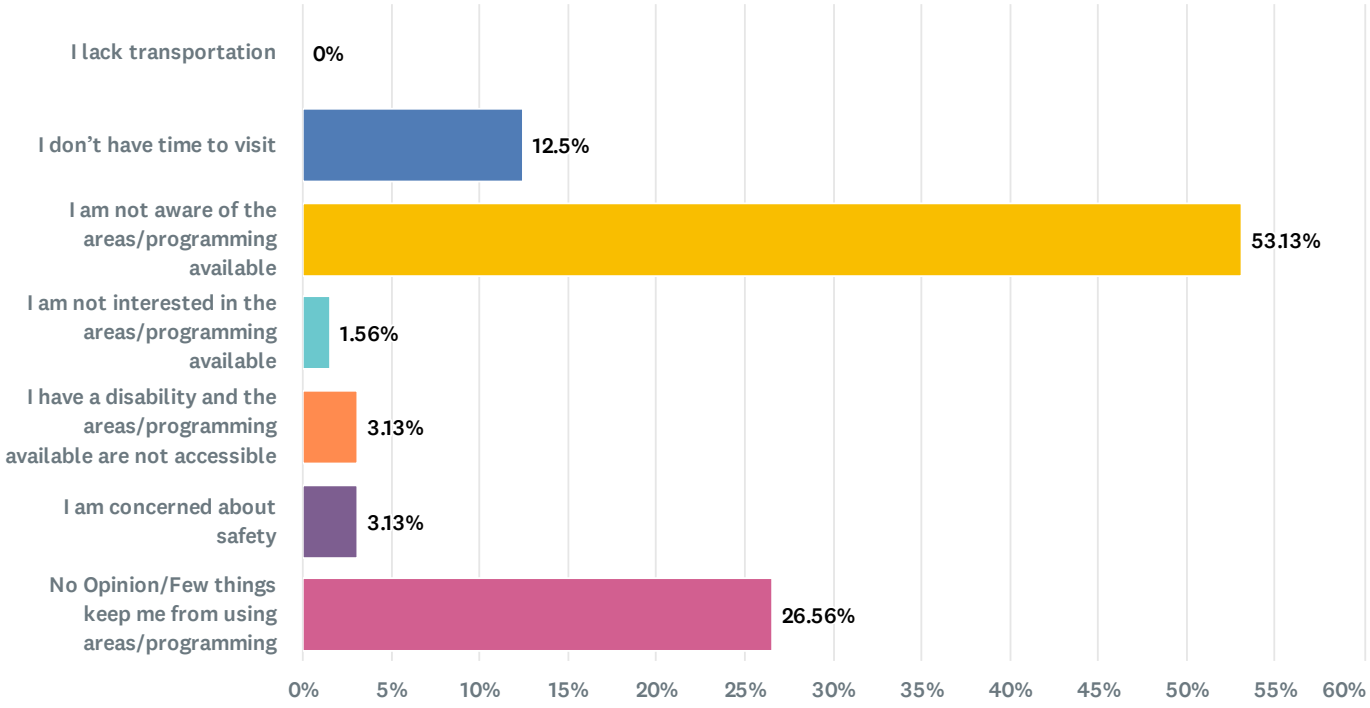


Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
Beaver Pond Reservation	28.33%	17
Carey Park	10.00%	6
Cobbler’s Brook Greenway	15.00%	9
Donaghue School/ Stevens Field	31.67%	19
Duck Hole Landing	0%	0
Emory Street/Carriagetown Park	11.67%	7
Garden behind Public Library	8.33%	5
Hoyt Farm/Silver Brook Farm	8.33%	5
Innis Trail	1.67%	1
Jay McLaren Memorial Trail	48.33%	29
Kimball Park	3.33%	2
Lake Attitash boat ramp	10.00%	6
Locust Street Landing	1.67%	1
Long Pond Conservation Area	1.67%	1
Madison Way Open Space	0%	0
Total		**175**

Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
Marshview Trail	6.67%	4
Perkins Conservation Area	1.67%	1
River Road Peninsula	5.00%	3
Sweetsir School Playground	16.67%	10
Town Forest Fields	25.00%	15
Town Forest Trails	56.67%	34
Total		**175**

Q4 64 responses

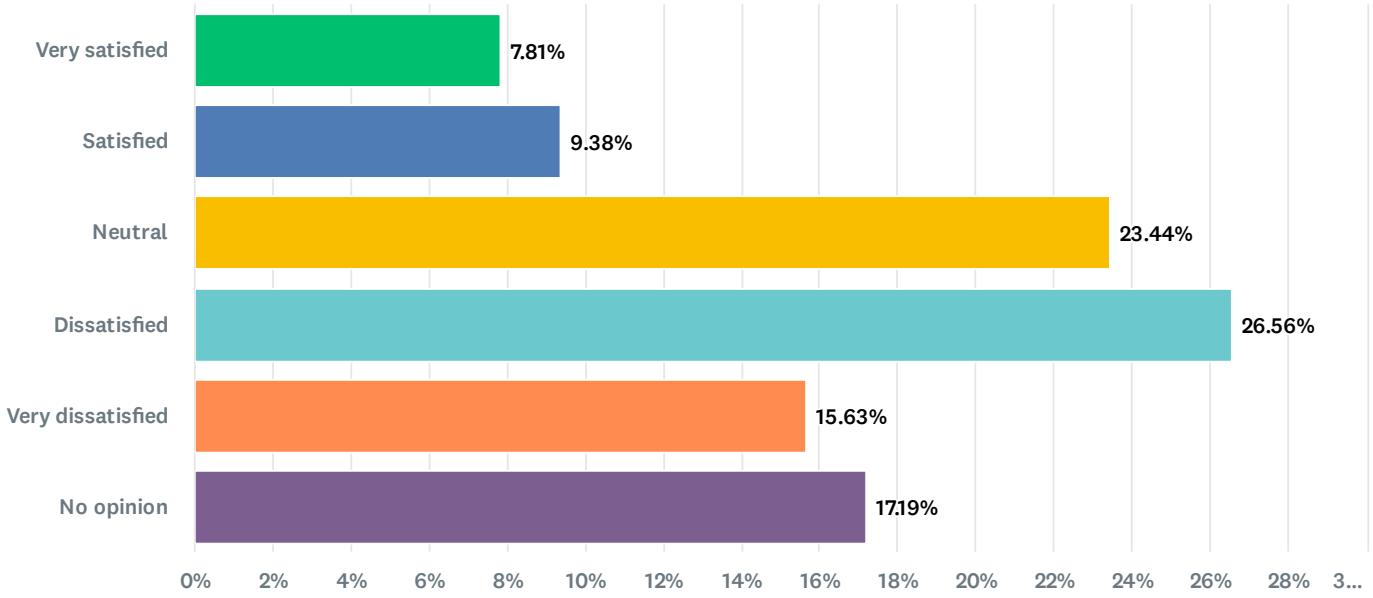
What keeps you from using conservation and recreation areas or participating in recreational programming?



Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
I lack transportation	0%	0
I don't have time to visit	12.50%	8
I am not aware of the areas/programming available	53.13%	34
I am not interested in the areas/programming available	1.56%	1
I have a disability and the areas/programming available are not accessible	3.13%	2
I am concerned about safety	3.13%	2
No Opinion/Few things keep me from using areas/programming	26.56%	17
Total		**64**

Q5 64 responses

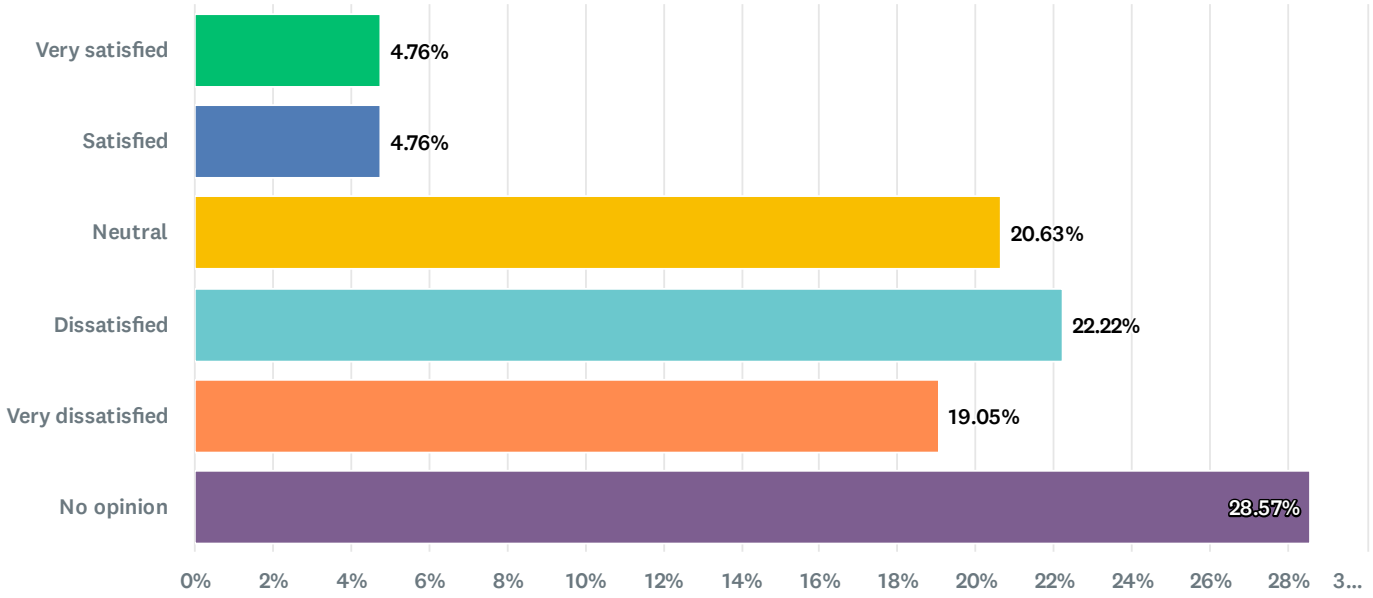
How satisfied are you with the places for children and youth to play and recreate?



Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
Very satisfied	7.81%	5
Satisfied	9.38%	6
Neutral	23.44%	15
Dissatisfied	26.56%	17
Very dissatisfied	15.63%	10
No opinion	17.19%	11
Total		**64**

Q6 63 responses

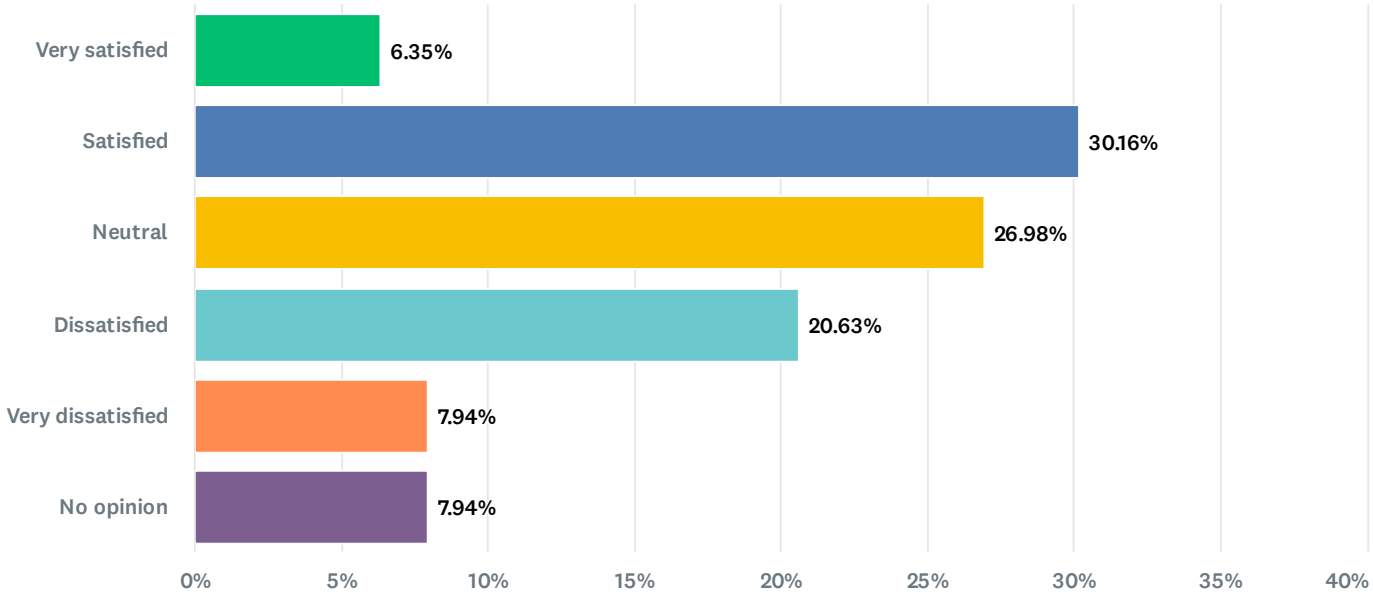
How satisfied are you with the places for teens and young adults to play and recreate?



Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
Very satisfied	4.76%	3
Satisfied	4.76%	3
Neutral	20.63%	13
Dissatisfied	22.22%	14
Very dissatisfied	19.05%	12
No opinion	28.57%	18
Total		**63**

Q7 63 responses

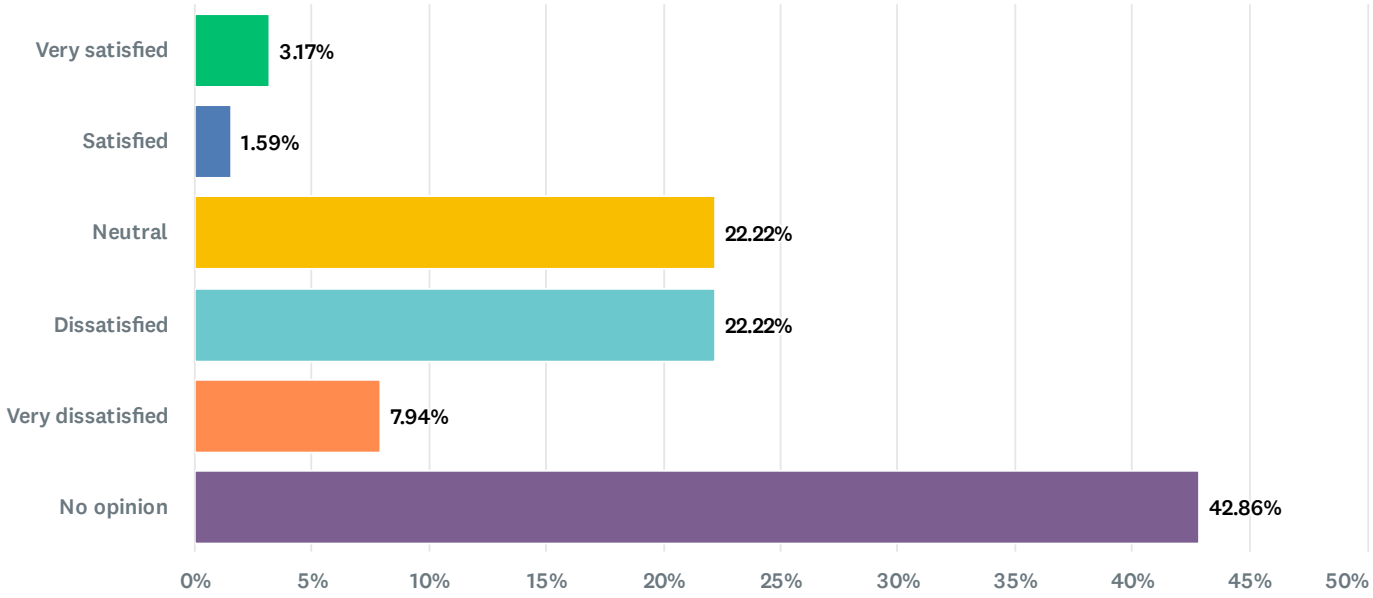
How satisfied are you with the places for adults to play and recreate?



Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
Very satisfied	6.35%	4
Satisfied	30.16%	19
Neutral	26.98%	17
Dissatisfied	20.63%	13
Very dissatisfied	7.94%	5
No opinion	7.94%	5
Total		**63**

Q8 63 responses

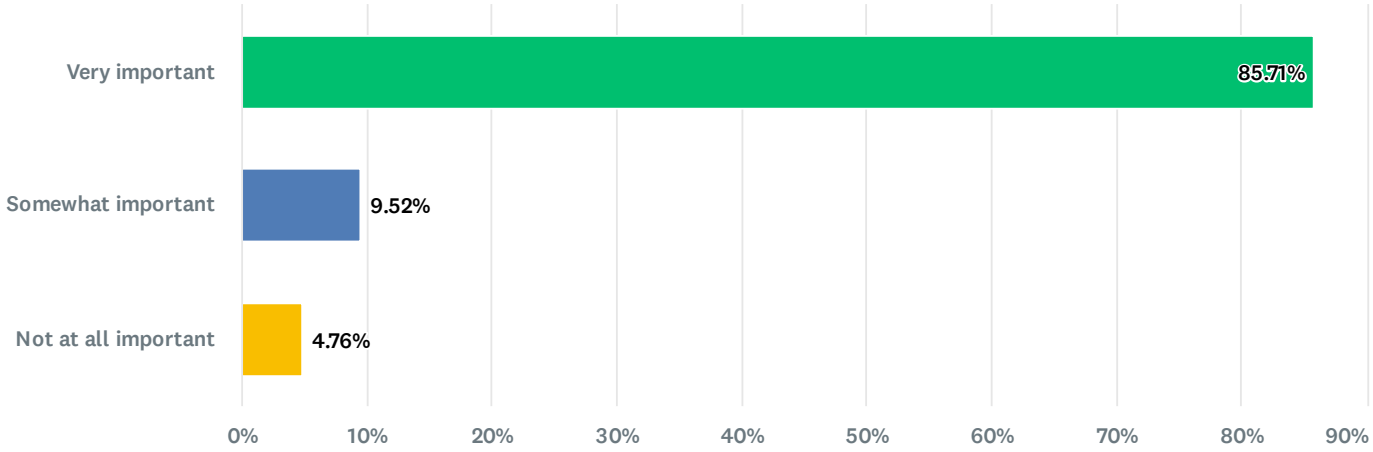
How satisfied are you with the places for people with disabilities to play and recreate?



Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
Very satisfied	3.17%	2
Satisfied	1.59%	1
Neutral	22.22%	14
Dissatisfied	22.22%	14
Very dissatisfied	7.94%	5
No opinion	42.86%	27
Total		**63**

Q9 63 responses

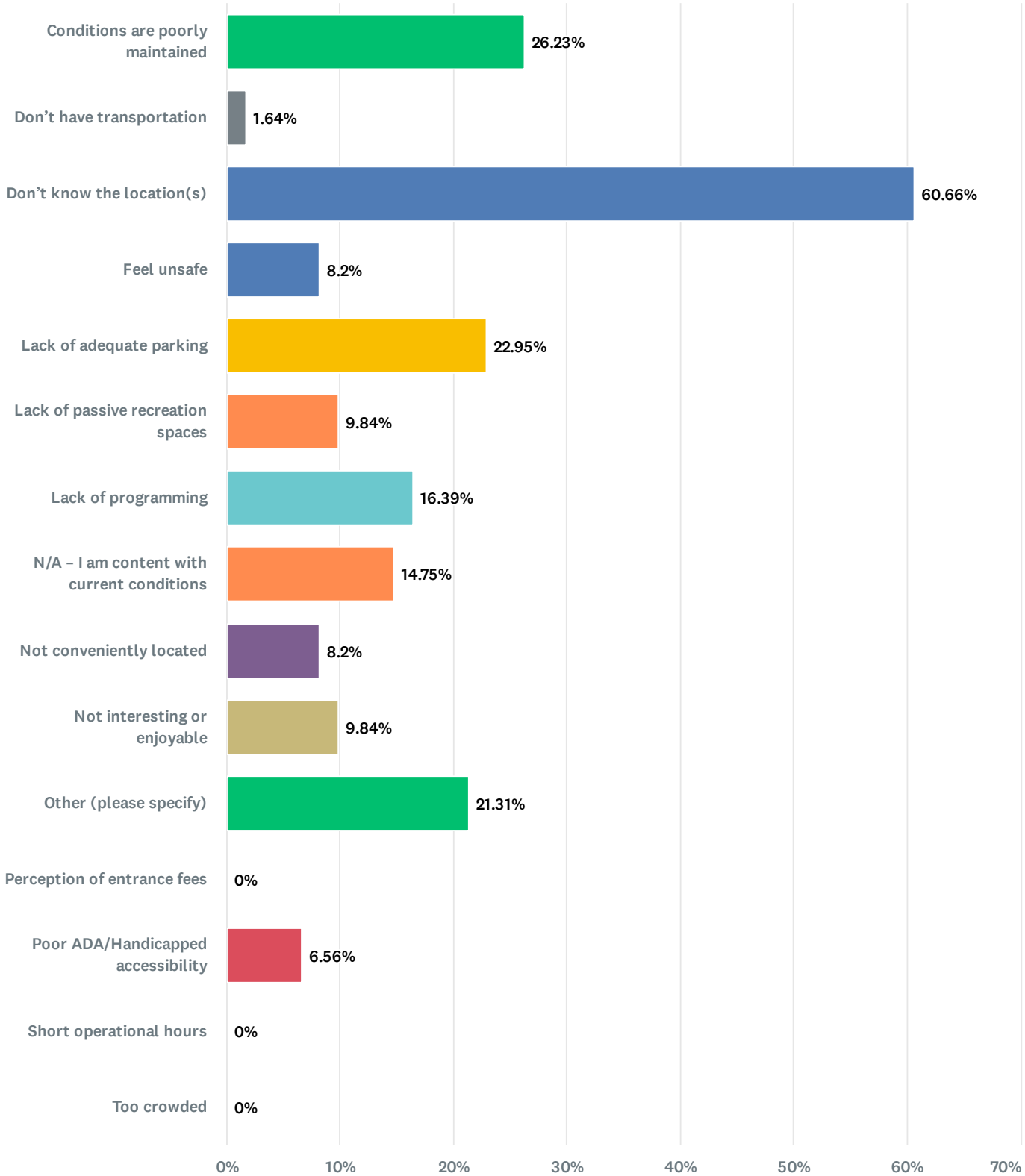
Please rate the importance of preserving additional lands for conservation purposes, including scenic views, wildlife habitats, walking trails, and other open space values.



Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
Very important	85.71%	54
Somewhat important	9.52%	6
Not at all important	4.76%	3
Total		**63**

Q10 61 responses

What are the reasons why you do not use parks, recreation facilities, and open space resources in Merrimac more frequently? Check all that apply.



Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
Conditions are poorly maintained	26.23%	16
Don’t have transportation	1.64%	1
Don’t know the location(s)	60.66%	37
Feel unsafe	8.20%	5
Lack of adequate parking	22.95%	14
Lack of passive recreation spaces	9.84%	6
Lack of programming	16.39%	10
N/A – I am content with current conditions	14.75%	9
Not conveniently located	8.20%	5
Not interesting or enjoyable	9.84%	6
Other (please specify)	21.31%	13
Perception of entrance fees	0%	0
Poor ADA/Handicapped accessibility	6.56%	4
Short operational hours	0%	0
Too crowded	0%	0
Total		**126**

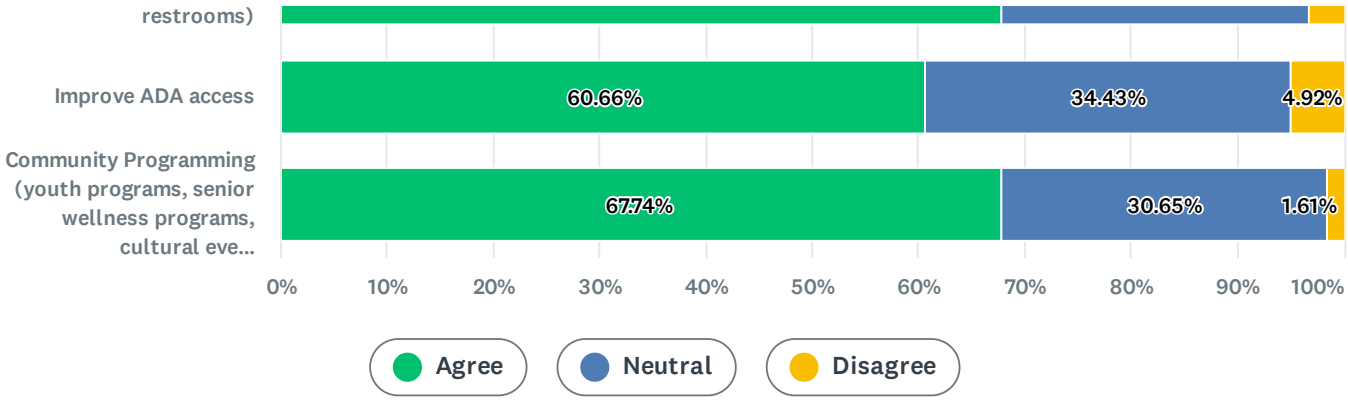
#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
1	I use my time off work best I can. I enjoy the outside everyday !	4/29/2026 4:21 PM
2	Parking is an issue	4/26/2026 3:48 PM
3	Dogs unleashed	4/16/2026 7:45 AM
4	don't have a regular companion to accompany me and am not comfortable going alone	4/15/2026 12:30 PM
5	time	4/14/2026 9:58 PM
6	Didn’t know some of these exist or where they are	4/8/2026 7:32 AM
7	The playgrounds are small and outdated	4/8/2026 6:29 AM
8	Ticks	4/8/2026 6:14 AM
9	lack of adequate parking signage - i never know if it is safe/legal to park at some places.	4/8/2026 6:03 AM

10	Many people unleash their dogs when they are unseen which makes for unenjoyable walks with my leashed dog.	4/7/2026 10:29 PM
11	You mention River Road Peninsula and I’m laughing — I live across the street but it’s not clear to me this is public. No signage or narrative explaining our parks system.	4/7/2026 8:22 PM
12	Some that you listed I have never heard of. I am very interested in trails and our natural areas.	4/7/2026 7:56 PM
13	My family and I use what we can a lot, some of these places I’ve never heard of, and the places that I have heard of aren’t necessarily maintain very well besides the two schools. Even Emory Street and the town Forest Fields can be very rough during peak months.	4/7/2026 5:10 PM

Q11 62 responses

How should the Town spend additional resources?



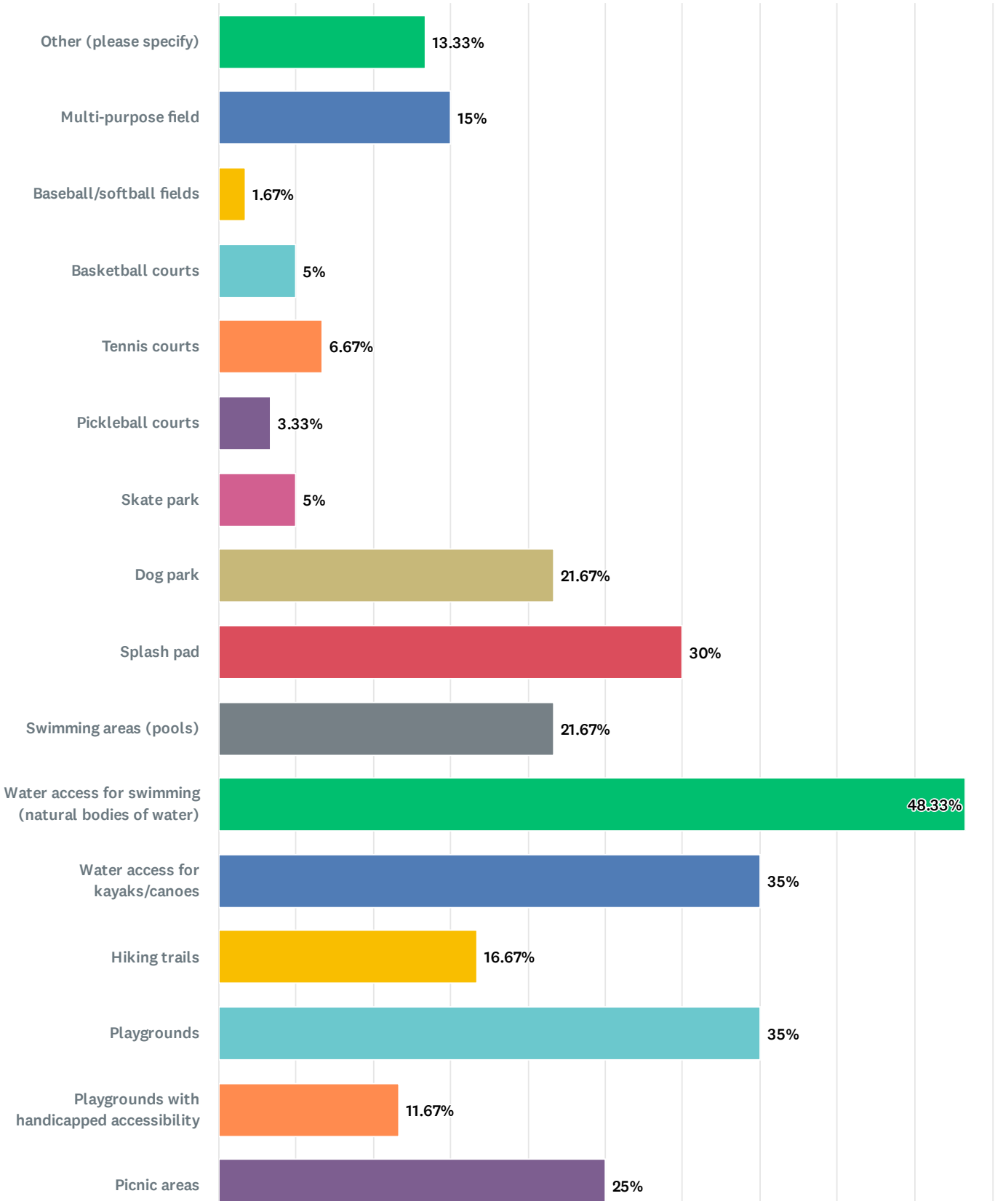


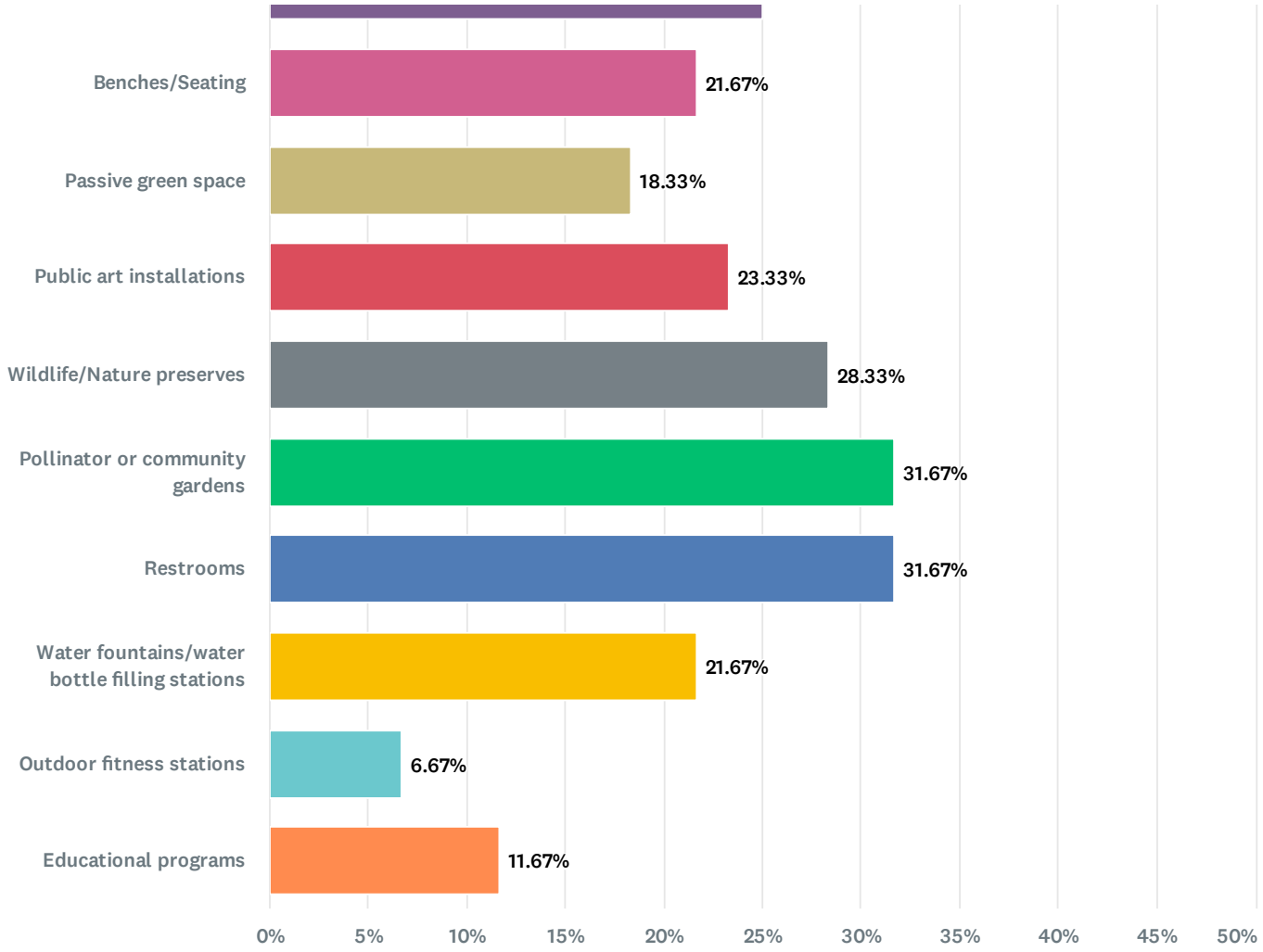
	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Total
Develop a multi-use community gathering space where people can gather for games, music, picnicking, etc.	83.87% 52	14.52% 9	1.61% 1	62
Protect undeveloped land from future development	83.87% 52	14.52% 9	1.61% 1	62
Provide more year-round recreation facilities	66.67% 40	28.33% 17	5.00% 3	60
Acquiring additional land to expand existing parks, open space areas, and recreation facilities	64.52% 40	29.03% 18	6.45% 4	62
Acquiring agricultural land	49.18% 30	31.15% 19	19.67% 12	61
Maintaining scenic views and vistas	80.65% 50	12.90% 8	6.45% 4	62
Creating/expanding available parking at recreation facilities	58.33% 35	36.67% 22	5.00% 3	60
Maintain and enhance existing parks, open space areas, and recreation facilities	93.55% 58	6.45% 4	0% 0	62
Develop more active recreation (splash pads, playgrounds, courts)	66.13% 41	27.42% 17	6.45% 4	62
Develop more water-based recreation (kayaking, fishing, swimming) opportunities	70.49% 43	22.95% 14	6.56% 4	61
				1109

	Agree	Neutral	Disagree	Total
Provide more bike lanes/bike paths	53.23% 33	32.26% 20	14.52% 9	62
Provide more walking and hiking trails	70.97% 44	19.35% 12	9.68% 6	62
Increase park area for passive recreation (hiking, walking, bird watching)	66.13% 41	25.81% 16	8.06% 5	62
Preserve land for plant and wildlife habitat	80.65% 50	16.13% 10	3.23% 2	62
Expand recreational programs for all ages	74.19% 46	22.58% 14	3.23% 2	62
Community Services (park maintenance, public safety, restrooms)	67.74% 42	29.03% 18	3.23% 2	62
Improve ADA access	60.66% 37	34.43% 21	4.92% 3	61
Community Programming (youth programs, senior wellness programs, cultural events, education programs, sports leagues)	67.74% 42	30.65% 19	1.61% 1	62
				1109

Q12 60 responses

What do you consider to be the biggest unmet open space needs in Merrimac? Check all that apply.





Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
Other (please specify)	13.33%	8
Multi-purpose field	15.00%	9
Baseball/softball fields	1.67%	1
Basketball courts	5.00%	3
Tennis courts	6.67%	4
Pickleball courts	3.33%	2
Skate park	5.00%	3
Dog park	21.67%	13
Total		**294**

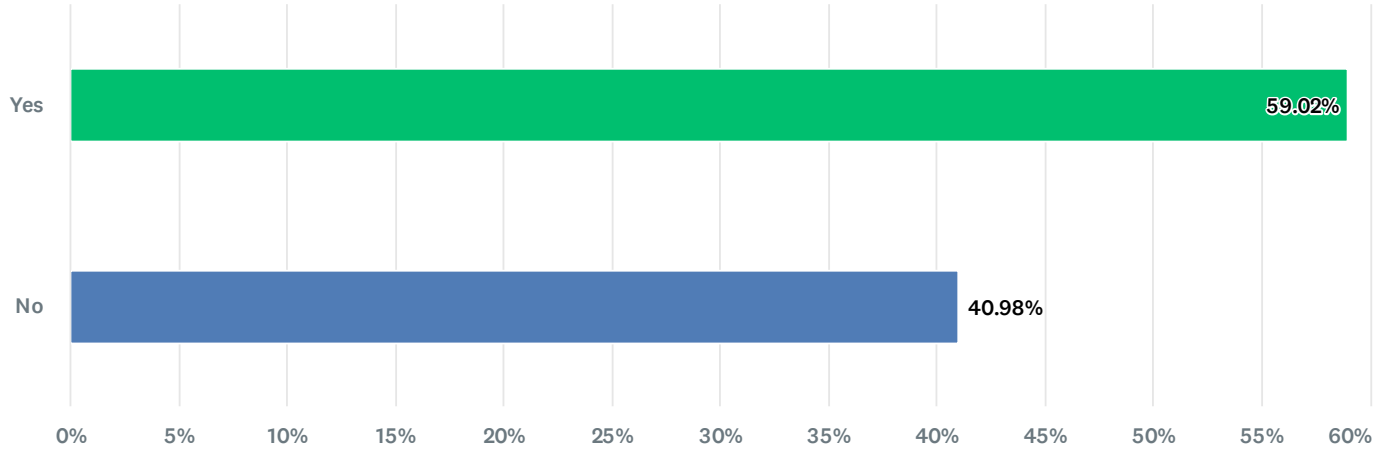
Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
Splash pad	30.00%	18
Swimming areas (pools)	21.67%	13
Water access for swimming (natural bodies of water)	48.33%	29
Water access for kayaks/canoes	35.00%	21
Hiking trails	16.67%	10
Playgrounds	35.00%	21
Playgrounds with handicapped accessibility	11.67%	7
Picnic areas	25.00%	15
Benches/Seating	21.67%	13
Passive green space	18.33%	11
Public art installations	23.33%	14
Wildlife/Nature preserves	28.33%	17
Pollinator or community gardens	31.67%	19
Restrooms	31.67%	19
Water fountains/water bottle filling stations	21.67%	13
Outdoor fitness stations	6.67%	4
Educational programs	11.67%	7
Total		**294**

#	OTHER (PLEASE SPECIFY)	DATE
1	Allow atv/dirtbike use in certain areas!	4/28/2026 6:31 PM
2	Mountain Bike / Pump track	4/15/2026 6:01 PM
3	there is other Town infrastructure (i.e. Fire Dept) that is more of a priority for funding	4/15/2026 12:32 PM
4	Disc Golf Course	4/8/2026 6:39 AM
5	Walking track and exercise area at Emory Street.	4/7/2026 5:13 PM
6	Spaces for teens	4/7/2026 4:32 PM

7	Winter ice skating like Amesbury has. Perfect for Emery St.. emery st could use a new track..	4/7/2026 4:28 PM
8	This might be the meaning of the "multi-purpose field" option, but it would be great to have a flexible community gathering space for concerts, picnics, farmers market-like events, family games, outdoor movie nights - with a structure like a pavilion with electricity.	4/6/2026 12:45 PM

Q13 61 responses

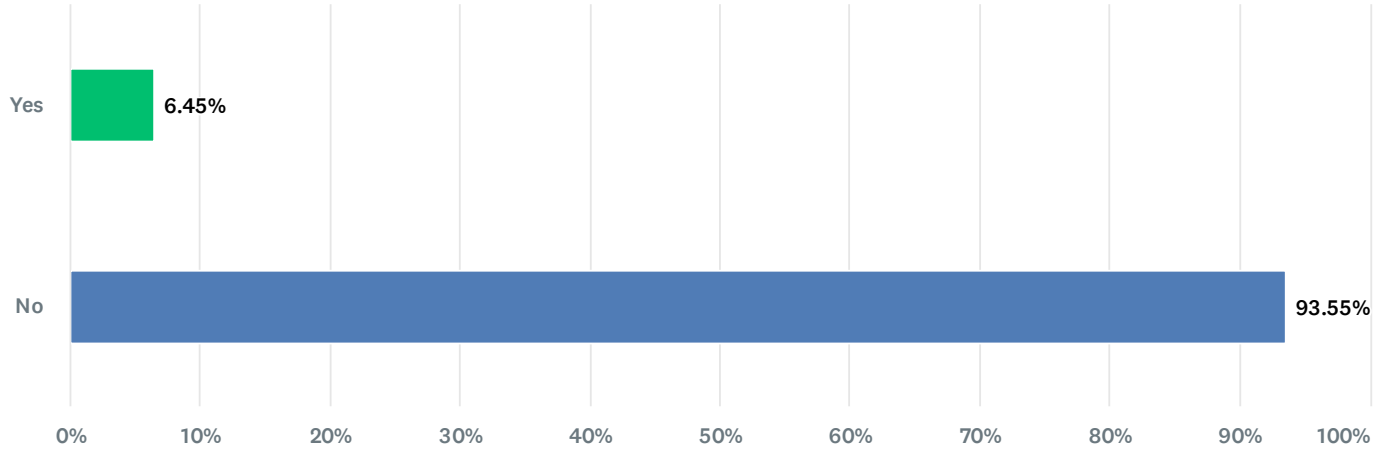
Do you have children (between ages 0-18)?



Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
Yes	59.02%	36
No	40.98%	25
Total		**61**

Q14 62 responses

Do you have a disability that limits your involvement in parks and recreation?



Answer Choices	Percentage	Responses
Yes	6.45%	4
No	93.55%	58
Total		**62**

Q15 If you answered "Yes" to Question 14, what improvements would you like to see to access parks and recreation in Town?

Answered: 7 Skipped: 57

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Easily walkable at a short distance while using either a cane, walker or wheelchair	4/30/2026 10:14 PM
2	Easy parking, walking paths. Occasional benches for resting.	4/28/2026 7:29 AM
3	Seats	4/24/2026 6:22 PM
4	Wheelchair accessibly	4/18/2026 11:33 AM
5	all set	4/14/2026 10:00 PM
6	Although we have no permanent disability, knee and hip replacements mean restrictions on terrain, yet exercising helps with healing. We go to the boardwalk at Hellcat Swamp on Plum Island. Accessible, a mile long, a restroom, and intermittent benches.	4/7/2026 8:10 PM
7	Parking & a Walking track at Emory Street and exercise equipment there too	4/7/2026 5:34 PM

Q16 Where do you think additional parks and recreation facilities are needed in Town, if any?

Answered: 24 Skipped: 40

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	Sidewalks or walking path along the river road would be real nice	4/28/2026 5:07 PM
2	I would like an expanded playground or improvement to the Sweetsir and Donahue schools. Our family always travels to Amesbury, Haverhill or West Newbury for playground.	4/27/2026 9:54 PM
3	The current trails need to be connected somehow with better signage.	4/26/2026 3:55 PM
4	None	4/24/2026 6:22 PM
5	Expand Merrimac Town Forest	4/23/2026 8:47 PM
6	Additional playgrounds would be lovely! Especially those for smaller children or children with disabilities.	4/18/2026 5:48 PM
7	Parking for the McLaren trail near Harriman wooden bridge	4/16/2026 7:53 AM
8	see question 12	4/15/2026 12:33 PM
9	around center	4/14/2026 10:00 PM
10	Bring back public access beaches to Lake Attitash	4/8/2026 1:28 PM
11	Add a splash pad next to the playground at Locust St..	4/8/2026 11:58 AM
12	Improve Emory track and fields!	4/8/2026 10:23 AM
13	River road. We should pursue an easement to allow for the sold off part of the original road to become a walking path/trail to pleasant valley road.	4/8/2026 9:23 AM
14	A real playground like everywhere else	4/8/2026 8:16 AM
15	Where the big Christmas tree is. We need a legit playground!!	4/8/2026 7:44 AM
16	Anywhere there are barely any	4/8/2026 6:27 AM
17	Anywhere	4/8/2026 6:26 AM
18	I love the idea of swimming access for families— we join a pool but many can't and it's a stretch for us. We go to Lake Gardner often and it isn't fancy but it's a fun time. I'm unsure if Attitash allows swimming but it would be great for young families if we could get access. Or — dreaming big — community pool where Emery has the running track.	4/7/2026 8:34 PM
19	Extend Town Forest if possible, and other natural areas. Create a map that includes all of the open natural spaces you list in the survey to raise awareness.	4/7/2026 8:10 PM
20	Na	4/7/2026 6:12 PM
21	Let's get Emory street awesome. And the boat ramp - lake Attitash Fishing pier on the River	4/7/2026 5:34 PM
22	On the river!!	4/7/2026 4:32 PM
23	A park with access to Lake Attitash.	4/7/2026 3:58 PM
24	Make Emery St. a fully accessible multi-purpose low-impact park - raised bed ADA gardens, dog park, family picnic area, town-wide events: music, educ speakers, outdoor film festival, etc.	4/6/2026 12:54 PM

Q17 In your own words, please provide additional thoughts, comments, recommendations, or further explanations about the Town's recreation and open space network.

Answered: 36 Skipped: 28

#	RESPONSES	DATE
1	I think by providing accessible parking and entrances, but explaining prior to such places the access for challenged people. I would do anything if we had boardwalks to walk and enjoy nature, but due to trails being natural (which I DO support), it would be amazing to be able to enjoy these spaces again.	4/30/2026 10:14 PM
2	I moved to 30 years ago because it was a nice country town. The taxes were acceptable. I like to keep it the country town.	4/29/2026 4:24 PM
3	Allow more kids to get into atv/dirtbiking activities! I grew up here and rode thought most of my youth and continue to do so. Opening trails to specifically dirtbikes mountain biking and small atvs would be a good thing!	4/28/2026 6:33 PM
4	It would be nice if you opened up Lake Attitash again. There is no where for families to meet and swim in the summer. A lot of cities and towns have public swimming areas but Merrimac has nothing. Merrimac residents with a sticker	4/28/2026 1:42 PM
5	Parking for the open spaces in town in very limited. The town forest has the most parking, but the only parking I know of for the McClaren trail is on Harriman or Brush Hill. I tend not to walk in the Town forest because I had heard hunting was allowed there. I walked the Meadowview Trail last week and completely lost the trail halfway through, some of the markers may have fallen down and there was no worn path to follow. As an avid biker and dog walker, I'd love to know how to get involved or know who to contact if there is a downed tree that needs to be cleared from a trail; I try to move the smaller ones when I come across them.	4/28/2026 8:51 AM
6	No more condos and apartments that destroy our beautiful open spaces and natural resources.	4/28/2026 7:29 AM
7	I love the Beaver Pond Conservation Area and Town Forest. It's unfortunate the trail is interrupted by the stream/pond so you are forced to use Battis Rd to reach the trail network on the other side of the beaver pond. It would be great if a bridge could be added where the trail used to go	4/28/2026 6:16 AM
8	I am very concerned about the use of Insecticides in the Town Field. Pesticides are harmful to children. We were there this past Saturday for our sons's soccer practice. A field full of 3-5 year olds in an area that had been doused in chemicals. We can wear bug spray to protect from ticks, mosquito fogging is an outdated practice that is not effective for ticks and mosquitoes. It is harmful to the planet - for children, birds and non "pest" insects.	4/27/2026 9:54 PM
9	It would be useful to Have a systematic approach to trail maintenance- with the help Of a forester - to understand what the maintenance priorities are	4/26/2026 3:55 PM
10	Side walks along river, slower speed limits. Cars fly down the river road, especially mornings and returning home after a work day. Police could write many tickets when most folks are coming and going trying to get to 495. Stop huge trucks coming off 495 and running along the river to get to 495. These huge trucks are beating up the roads taking short cuts to amesbury. They should not be running back roads to Amesbury. Keep large trucks out.	4/24/2026 6:22 PM
11	Additional community events such as races, festivals, live music, art shows, scavenger hunts, etc would be so fun to attend and build community involvement. The Santa parade is so fun! Would love some warmer weather events to attend as well!	4/18/2026 5:48 PM
12	The trails lack mantenance. Entering the McLaren trail from church street during the summer you basically have to bushwhack to get in.	4/16/2026 7:53 AM
13	We need space for kids to freely and choose to recreate	4/15/2026 6:02 PM

14	see question 12	4/15/2026 12:33 PM
15	thanks	4/14/2026 10:00 PM
16	I enjoy the town forest keep it as is	4/14/2026 8:05 PM
17	It’s crazy to have Lake Attitash be so accessible to our community but you can only enjoy it by boat, whereas the Amesbury side has a (private) beach.	4/8/2026 1:28 PM
18	Most of the time, we leave the town to go to playgrounds like Amesbury or West Newbury. It would be great to have our own in town.	4/8/2026 10:18 AM
19	The selling off of river road after the road closed is a huge shame. The most beautiful part of our town is inaccessible to residents. Additionally, the lack of sidewalks along river road and the high speed limit make it unsafe to walk along the river.	4/8/2026 9:23 AM
20	Merrimac is severely lacking in places for children to play. The suites are school playground is dirty and the one at the Donahue field is extremely small and made for babies. All the other towns are leaving us behind in their playgrounds for children. And the trails of the town forest are extremely inadequately maintained.	4/8/2026 8:16 AM
21	Have a grandchild and dog visit once a month, would like to being to the park	4/8/2026 7:47 AM
22	I’d love to see a pool in town somewhere or a rec center. And a playground like action cove.	4/8/2026 7:44 AM
23	Please try to limit development outside the center of town. I love Merrimac for all of its rural beauty.	4/8/2026 6:40 AM
24	I think it's awful that Donahue kids don't have a playground Kids at the page school got a Brand new one. Our kids get nothing	4/8/2026 6:27 AM
25	More playgrounds and better, safe, updated play spaces for kids!	4/8/2026 6:26 AM
26	I think our playgrounds are outdated. Would love to see improvements here as I bring my kids to other towns to play rather than staying in town.	4/8/2026 6:06 AM
27	Trails need to be groomed better maybe with crushed stone mulch ect.	4/8/2026 5:25 AM
28	Opening a boat/kayak drop where there is a seemingly abandoned boat yard off Broad street would be a cool game changer if practical. I’m unsure if families own that land now but every year I think opening it and maybe a snack stand would breathe life into Merrimacport. This is a wonderful community regardless and we love flying kites and hunting eggs at Carey Park. Appreciate the committee’s hard work.	4/7/2026 8:34 PM
29	Mainly, please draw up maps that show the natural areas you list and whether there are trails that are maintained. A group of us tried to get from the McLaren Trail to the Perkins Conservation area and had to bushwhack a very overgrown trail. If you can list the names of so many properties, please explain where they are and what options are there for residents.	4/7/2026 8:10 PM
30	Opening the town beach to Attitash would be a game changer for this entire town. At the moment, only people with water front property can swim. The mass majority of people living in town have no idea we even have a beach	4/7/2026 7:10 PM
31	There should be at least one or two picnic tables in CAREY Park. Also, I know this is a reach, but the Wallace boat yard now were banded would be a phenomenal place for boat, launches picnic, and all of that for the town.	4/7/2026 6:12 PM
32	Let’s get Emory street awesome. And the boat ramp - lake Attitash Fishing pier on the River There’s so much we can do with very little resources.	4/7/2026 5:34 PM
33	Hi, Bronwyn here! I am super excited to be involved in any capacity needed!	4/7/2026 4:32 PM
34	Emery st. Has alot of potential to be way better then it is..	4/7/2026 4:29 PM
35	I sometimes don't feel safe on the McLaren Trail because of people walking with aggressive dogs. I would like to see more native plantings and invasive plant removal programs. I'd like to see more community outdoor recreational events. Thank you!	4/7/2026 9:59 AM
36	Consider making the portion of River Road between Broad and Locust Streets one-way, creating a bike lane, and an ADA path for all to walk and appreciate the most amazing natural resource Merrimac has in its midst. Only 20 family units would be directly impacted.	4/6/2026 12:54 PM

WEDNESDAY, APRIL 15



OPEN SPACE & RECREATION PLAN WORKSHOP

Join us for Merrimac's Open Space and Recreation Plan Public Workshop!

This is your opportunity to share ideas, priorities, and feedback on the future of the Town's parks, trials, and open spaces.

Whether you use these spaces every day or just occasionally, your input will help shape improvements and guide decisions for years to come.

All are welcome – come be part of the conversation!

Time: 6:00 PM to 7:30 PM

Location: Merrimac Public Library

IN PERSON EVENT!

Topics include:

Open Space Acquisition

Recreation Programming Improvements

Recreation Accessibility

and More!

Tighe & Bond

Merrimac Open Space and Recreation Plan Update

Community Forum

April 15, 2026



Introductions



Kristin Yankauskas

PROJECT MANAGER

TIGHE & BOND

KYankauskas@tighebond.com

814-335-0763

Working Group

Lucy Crocker Abisalih – OSRP Town Lead
Chris Gaudet – Commission on Disabilities
Jerome Mathieu – Conservation Commission
Mary Glennon – Open Space
Bill McGowan – Planning Board
Nancy Knettell – Resident
Robert Sinibaldi – DPW
Tim Simmons – Resident
Wayne Adams – Select Board
MVPC

Agenda

What is open space?

OSRP Update Purpose

What We've Heard So Far

Interactive Feedback Stations



What is Open Space?

Conservation of land, forested land, recreation land, agricultural land, or other land dedicated to conservation/recreation.



Passive recreation - any outdoor activity that occurs in a natural setting with minimum disturbance of the natural and cultural resources that is consistent with quiet enjoyment of the land including walking, hiking, and nature study

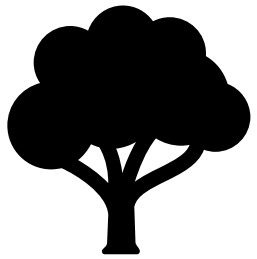


Active recreation - outdoor recreation that occurs in parks and requires significant alteration of the natural landscape to provide playground or active sports facilities including soccer, tennis, or baseball

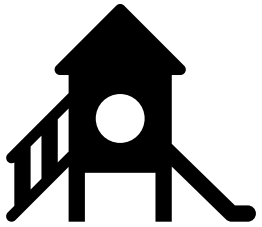
Tighe & Bond

What is an Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP)?

A state approved document that describes a community's open space and recreation resources



A 10-year blueprint for action on open space and recreation topics for decision makers in a community



OSRP Purpose

Planning = assess where you are, where you'd like to go, and how you might get there

Establishes aspirations for open space and recreation

Allows Merrimac to maintain/enhance open space and recreation resources

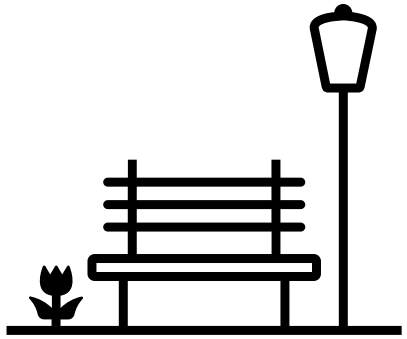
Allows for eligibility for EEA, Division of Conservation Services (DCS) Grant programs

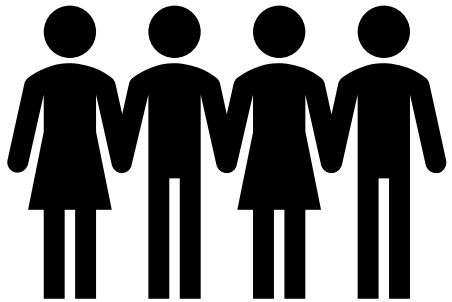
OSRP Workshop Purpose

Gives the public an opportunity to provide meaningful feedback on OSRP

Educate residents about the OSRP update process

Integrate public feedback into Merrimac's final OSRP update





What We've Heard So Far

Desire to expand recreation amenities – playgrounds, trails, sports facilities

Improve access to the Merrimac River and Lake Attitash

Connection of open space and recreation – improve sidewalks, expand bike infrastructure

Protect and preserve natural resources and land for conservation, including agricultural land

What is on your parks, recreation, and open space wish list?



Tighe & Bond

Workshop Plan

Three Interactive Feedback Stations

1. **Open Space Mapping**
    1. Each person gets 1 green dot and 1 red dot – green dot marks your favorite place, red dot marks your top area for improvement
    2. Give reasons
2. **Action Plan Priorities**
    1. Each person gets 5 dots– If the Town could only focus on five things in the next ten years, what should they be?
3. **Action Plan Support**
    1. Support this action (green), action needs to be modified (yellow), or concerns with this action (red)
    2. Write in actions

Tighe & Bond

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Survey

Haven't taken the survey yet?
Please take 5-10 minutes now!



STATION 1: Open Space Mapping

What do you love and what needs attention?

Instructions:

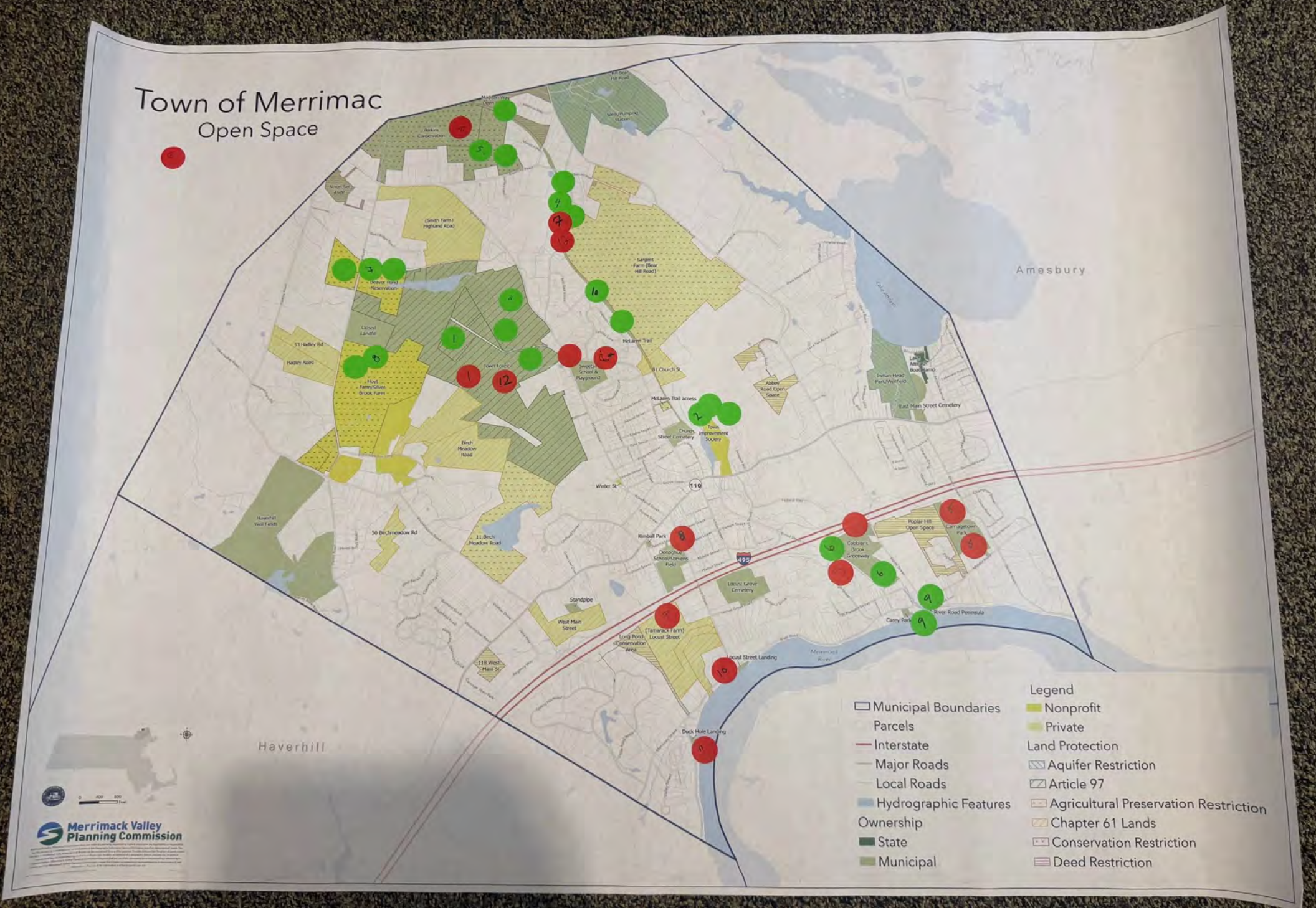
- Place 1 **GREEN** dot on your favorite area
- Place 1 **RED** dot on an area that needs improvement
- Please write a short note explaining why you placed your dots where you did

Consider:

- Parks, trails, conservation land, waterfront areas
- Access issues, maintenance concerns, safety, or missing amenities

We're asking:

- Where are Merrimac's most valued places?
- Where should the Town focus improvements?


Town of Merrimac
Open Space
Amesbury
Haverhill
Legend
Municipal Boundaries
Parcels
Interstate
Major Roads
Local Roads
Hydrographic Features
Ownership
State
Municipal
Nonprofit
Private
Land Protection
Aquifer Restriction
Article 97
Agricultural Preservation Restriction
Chapter 61 Lands
Conservation Restriction
Deed Restriction
Merrimack Valley Planning Commission

STATION 2: Action Plan Priorities

What matters most for the next 10 years?

Instructions:

- If the Town could only focus on a few things over the next decade, what should they be?
- You have 5 **BLUE** dots next to the priorities that matter most to you
    - You may put multiple dots on one item if you feel strongly

We're asking:

- Where should Merrimac focus time, funding, and effort?

Goal 1: Preserve and protect land that supports wildlife habitat, greenway corridors, and Merrimac's remaining agricultural and scenic landscapes.
Secure protection of priority parcels – partner with Greenbelt, Essex County Trails
Develop management plans for open spaces - allowed public uses, maintenance of trees and vegetation, and maintenance of public trails.
Notify Open Space Committee, Parks and Recreation Committee when the Town takes tax title properties or there are Chapter 61 changes.
Assess and prioritize the maintenance of Merrimac's trails and forests.
Adopt the Community Preservation Act to provide funding for open space
Revitalize and maintain scenic vistas and viewsheds throughout Town
Designate Scenic Roads - Bear Hill Road, Birch Meadow Road, Hadley Road, Heath Road, and Locust Street.
Prioritize preserving flood storage areas, maintaining ecological connectivity, reducing urban heat, and strengthening natural and agricultural systems

Goal 2: Foster a sense of community by providing open space resources for residents of all ages and abilities through accessible parks and recreational facilities and increased awareness of these resources.
Require developers of cluster subdivisions to protect/improve the open space they set aside.
Require tot lots or small parks as a condition of approval for developments of conventional subdivisions of over 35 family units.
Improve public access to the Merrimack River - Locust Street, Carey Park – including parking
Develop a recreation site plan to better utilize Carriagetown Park/Emery Street. F.U.
Evaluate teen specific recreation options such as a skate park.
Evaluate a location and feasibility of a dog park.
Evaluate a location and feasibility of a community garden.
Evaluate existing playgrounds for accessibility and inclusivity, and implement phased improvements
Continue to connect existing sidewalks to major amenities such as schools and outdoor recreation areas.
Enhance access to existing open space and recreation facilities for people with disabilities.
Maintain a downloadable and printable town-wide trail and open space map.
Update the Open Space Committee's webpage on the Town website with parking information, and accessibility details.

Goal 3: Safeguard water resources for drinking water, habitat, and recreation while balancing access and resource protection.
Adopt underground sprinkler system regulations and require all new construction/major rehabilitation projects to use water-conservation fixtures.
Adopt septic system cleaning/maintenance regulations.
Evaluate state and private grants/funds to supplement Town funds for water protection
Determine options to reestablish public access to the beach at Indian Head Park.

Goal 4: Support the viability of agriculture in Merrimac.
Promote the availability of locally produced farm products.
Organize an agricultural forum to introduce locally produced products and learn about local farming practices
Identify and maintain an inventory of priority farmland parcels to guide preservation and outreach efforts.

Goal 5: Engage residents and Town departments in the implementation of this plan and the stewardship of Merrimac's natural, recreational, historic, and cultural resources.
ually review action items and priorities and periodically seek public input about open space and recreation es.
Meet with other Town committees and departments bi-annually to determine the status of action items.
Organize neighborhood groups to plant and care for street trees along the Town's sidewalks.
Partner with the Merrimack River Watershed Council (MRWC) to identify critical parcels for protection.

STATION 3: Action Plan Feedback

Help us refine the plan

Instructions:

- For each action listed:
  - Place a **GREEN** dot if you support this action
  - Place a **YELLOW** dot if it needs modification
  - Place a **RED** dot if you have concerns
- Use large note pad to:
  - Suggest improvements
  - Identify missing actions
  - Share concerns or implementation ideas

Consider:

- Are these the right actions?
- How can we make them better or more realistic?

We're asking:

- What actions should be added, changed, or reconsidered?

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Prioritize preserving flood storage areas, maintaining ecological connectivity, reducing urban heat, and strengthening natural and agricultural systems.

Invasive Removal

Goal 2: Foster a sense of community by providing open space resources for residents of all ages and abilities through accessible parks and recreational facilities and increased awareness of these resources.
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Evaluate a location and feasibility of a community garden.
Evaluate existing playgrounds for accessibility and inclusivity, and implement phased improvements
Continue to connect existing sidewalks to major amenities such as schools and outdoor recreation area
Enhance access to existing open space and recreation facilities for people with disabilities
Maintain a downloadable and printable town-wide trail and open space map.
Update the Open Space Committee's webpage on the Town website with parking information, and accessibility details.

Native plants!

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Goal 4: Support the viability of agriculture in Merrimac.
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Who will organize?

Goal 5: Engage residents and Town departments in the implementation of this plan and the stewardship of Merrimac's natural, recreational, historic, and cultural resources.
Annually review action items and priorities and periodically seek public input about open space and recreation issues.
Meet with other Town committees and departments bi-annually to determine the status of action items.
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Who will these people be? organizers

COMMUNITY EVENTS

BRING KIDS INTO THIS CONVERSATION!

ICE SKATING RINK

STORY WALK - INCORP. ART IN OPEN SPACES/ TRAILS

SKATE PARK, DISC GOLF, MTN. BIKE

COMMUNITY GARDEN

MAKE RIVER RD ONE-WAY between Locust St + High St. + PARKING

FULLY ACCESSIBLE TRAILS

BETTER TRAIL SIGNAGE - distances, difficulty, etc.

WEBSITE IMPROVEMENT -

EDUCATE PEOPLE ABOUT OPEN SPACES, TRAILS. (people don't know where things are!)

REQUIRE/(CONSIDER) NATIVE PLANTS ON MUNICIPAL LAND.

NEED TREE WARDEN - KNOWLEDGE FOR TREE CARE, REMOVAL

DARK SKY LIGHTING