Over the years, many surveys of Windham residents have clearly shown that we take pride in our rural character. We have a rich history along our rivers and in our farm fields; and enjoy our roadways lined with stonewalls and mature trees. However, once these areas are indiscriminately developed we will forever lose this visible connection to our rural character. There are tools and techniques that will enable the town to continue developing while maintaining its rural character. It’s important that we address the regulation changes now before there is little rural character to protect.

Protection of natural resources and the environment continues to be an important issue. The quality of ground and surface water supplies, wetlands, prime agricultural soils, wildlife habitats, and unfragmented forest land are necessary for the health of our entire ecosystem. It is in our best long-term interest to work toward preserving and protecting our natural resources. (Shown on Maps 4, 5, 6, 7, 8, 10, 11 and 12)

Studies across the country have shown that the best strategy for maintaining a stable mill rate is to acquire open space. Less developed towns have far lower taxes than their more developed counterparts.

Windham should strive for the good planning practice that balances development and conservation and encourages ‘green living’.

Of the Respondents to the Fall 2001 Survey:

93% advocate protecting aquifers and water quality
88% advocate protecting forests and wildlife
82% advocate protecting scenic or unique natural areas
71% advocate protecting farmland

Windham Open Space Advisory Committee

2007 Windham POCD
## Natural & Cultural Resources

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Resource</th>
<th>Category</th>
<th>Why important</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td><strong>Water</strong></td>
<td>Streams, rivers, ponds</td>
<td>Water quality, habitat, flood protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Flood Plains</td>
<td>Areas that periodically flood</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Surface &amp; Ground</td>
<td>drinking water sources, prevent pollution</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Land</strong></td>
<td>Wetland soils</td>
<td>habitat, water quality, flood protection</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Unfragmented forest</td>
<td>habitat, water quality</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Hardpan, shallow, rocky soils</td>
<td>septic system concerns</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Sandy soils</td>
<td>susceptible to contamination</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Air</strong></td>
<td>Air quality</td>
<td>promotes healthy environment</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Biological</strong></td>
<td>Plants/Animals</td>
<td>diversity, habitats</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td><strong>Cultural</strong></td>
<td>Historic</td>
<td>connection to past, irreplaceable</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>Views / viewsheds</td>
<td>rural character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>significant mature trees</td>
<td>rural character</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
<td>stone walls</td>
<td>rural character</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
Protect Natural Resources

Streams, Rivers, Ponds:

• Strive to preserve the undeveloped areas around and along our streams, rivers and ponds in their natural state (Maps 4, 12, 13)
• Continue to require appropriate buffer zones for important water resources; extend upland review area to 200’

Water Quality:

• Review current aquifer protection zone regulations on a regular basis to ensure the highest degree of water quality protection for designated aquifers (Map 7)
• Protect public water supply by permitting only appropriate land uses within public water supply watersheds. Support the town purchasing land, or conservation easements on the land surrounding public water supply (Map 13)
• Protect future public water supply areas by permitting only appropriate land uses in areas that could be a future significant water source (Map 7)
• Continue to protect the major aquifers and public water supply watershed from impacts of development
• Work to increase water quality by educating public about non-point pollution, such as lawn fertilizer, septic system maintenance and similar sources
• Maintain public catch basins with frequent cleaning, add filtration systems at major collections points prior to discharge into rivers and streams
• Revise parking lot regulations to include Best Management Practices (BMP) for all development where environmentally feasible

Examples of Best Management Practices (BMP):

Aquifer:
A water-bearing layer of sand, gravel or permeable rock.

Significant aquifers:
Deep aquifer areas capable of containing substantial water for use as public water supply.

Permeable pavement allows water infiltration, reduces run-off
Vegetative swale serves as natural and attractive detention basin
Parking lot using BMP for stormwater management
Wetland Soils

- Continue to protect our wetland areas (Map 5) as they are a key component of our ecosystem
- In addition to providing a habitat for a wide array of plants and animals, they are a prime source for recharging our drinking water sources

Other Natural Resources

- Unfragmented forest and wildlife corridors are vital in maintaining habitats for the plants and animals that keep our ecosystem in balance. Development should be planned to keep these corridors open and to maintain as much unfragmented forest land as possible
- Prime farm soils (Map 11) could become an important source for local food products. The town should strive to preserve agricultural uses and large areas of prime farm soils. Information on State and Federal incentive programs established so landowners can voluntarily participate in natural resource conservation programs should be made available to landowners
- Work to maintain existing and potential wildlife corridors and habitats whenever possible
- Discourage building and road development on steep slopes
- Seek recommendation and guidance from the Conservation Commission for all development proposals
- Review the Town of Windham Natural and Cultural Resource mapset when considering all development proposals (Maps 3 - 22)
- Become a Connecticut ReLeaf community
- Support the Connecticut designated River Greenways within Windham, Willimantic River and Natchaug River Greenways, by continuing to:
  - monitor, maintain and improve surface and groundwater quality,
  - develop and enact best management practices (BMP) for road and storm drain maintenance
  - fill in gaps in protected open space areas
  - support community conservation education and promotion of greenway resources
  - link and extend existing trails (Map 18)
  - examine for potential support other greenway designations that may be proposed in our area
Zoning & Subdivision Regulations

- Review/revise current zoning patterns that are incompatible with preserving and protecting undeveloped areas along our streams, rivers and ponds and in other areas of significant and important natural resources. Revise zoning regulations to protect these resources, consider using overlay districts where appropriate.

- The town should review current density requirements and consider reducing the maximum density as a means of protecting our valuable non-renewal natural resources.

- Institute Conservation Subdivisions (also know as Open Space or Cluster Subdivisions) as a way to protect rural character, natural and cultural resources of Windham.

- Strongly encourage a sketch plan preview for all commercial development and subdivisions prior to formal submission so developer can avoid costly re-designs if initial sketch isn’t in concert with town’s goals of development sensitive to rural character, natural and cultural resources and other regulations.

- Require mining and gravel businesses, as each phase of the operation is completed, to reclaim that area sufficiently to support growth of native trees and shrubs and to replant with native species. Limit scope of work to the extent possible.

- Review parking requirements for suburban commercial development to ensure regulations are both economically sound and promote environmental sustainability.

- Encourage energy conservation and alternative energy sources as a way to reduce Windham’s carbon footprint.

Balance Development with Conservation

- Work with Conservation Commission to identify significant and important conservation areas; use conservation subdivision as one technique to protect those areas (see Conservation Commission’s Priority Resource Analysis in Appendix 2; and Map 12 in Appendix 2 for their Co-occurring Resources Map.)

- Encourage environmentally sound planning that finds the appropriate balance between conservation and development to improve the quality of life for existing and future generations.
In the Fall of 2001, the Town of Windham created an Open Space Advisory Committee to conduct a natural resource and land use inventory, to develop a draft open space plan, and to make recommendations for implementation of the plan. The Open Space Advisory Committee had representatives from a range of boards and commissions in town, as well as interested residents with tremendous expertise and enthusiasm.

The Open Space Advisory Committee, in developing this proposed plan, has collected a huge amount of information and opinions about what is important to the Town. From all of that collected knowledge, the Committee extracted the six highest priorities. The priorities then evolved into criteria by which any piece of property might be assessed in terms of its importance to open space. Those priority criteria are as follows:

1. Protects and improves water quality (ground and surface water), water habitats and/or increases recreational access to water;

2. Creates connections between existing open space, recreational space, trails or greenways;

3. Preserves and protects habitats that support special plant or animal life, especially those identified as endangered, threatened or of special concern;

4. Protects cultural resources of the Town, including educational, archaeological, historical and other sites that distinguish our Town’s character;

5. Preserves farmland, forest land, other agricultural lands and the rural character of the Windham villages; and

6. Develops neighborhood parks, active recreational or educational opportunities.
After completing its work, the Open Space Advisory Committee has developed the following recommendations, which it presented to the Board of Selectmen at its October 15, 2002 meeting. First, the Open Space Advisory Committee unanimously voted to recommend that the Town of Windham establish a permanent Open Space Committee. An Open Space Committee can take the steps outlined here to implement the Policy Statement and the components of this proposed Plan. It can also serve as the group to review any potential available property and make a recommendation whether the Town should take steps to preserve it as open space, and how to do so. The Open Space Committee can also serve an educational role, providing technical support to residents and town boards and commissions.

Second, the Open Space Advisory Committee unanimously voted to recommend that the Town adopt this document as its Open Space Plan. Citizens across the town have expressed to the Committee their interest in preserving the unique character of Windham, and balancing that conservation goal with an equally important goal of growth that improves the Town’s tax base and quality of life for all residents. The Open Space Advisory Committee believes that this Plan achieves that balance and will result in many benefits for the Town and its citizens.

The Open Space Advisory Committee sees the role of the Town in protecting open space as having multiple components. As is noted in the Plan, there are numerous ways to protect open space, including smart development through zoning changes, sale of development rights to the state, donation to land trusts, conservation easements, state acquisition or town acquisition. The Committee emphasizes that only one of these possible protection methods is having the Town purchase the land, while the other examples involve maintaining private ownership while preserving the qualities of open space important to the Town. Windham can educate residents, and perhaps create incentives, to encourage private open space protection without outright acquisition. The Committee recommends that the Town only purchase land that is available for sale, where the sales price is reasonable and does not exceed the appraised value and if the property meets one or more of the priority criteria.

Windham, by adopting this Open Space Plan and implementing its recommendations, will choose to be a community that balances economic development with protecting our environment and enhancing our quality of life. Recognizing that “the number one deciding factor in business relocation is quality of life and open space,” Windham can take advantage of its existing strengths and build wisely upon them for a better future. We can create a community that has a vibrant economy, vital urban center, is affordable to live in, has clean rivers and streams, and preserves the rural character that is inherent in small New England towns. We hope this Open Space Plan accomplishes these goals, and that the other boards and commissions in Town will consider and adopt the necessary regulatory changes, ordinances and other steps to make these recommendations a reality.
POLICY STATEMENT

A. POLICY STATEMENT WITH CRITERIA:
Based on all of the work described above, the Open Space Advisory Committee has developed and recommended the following Policy Statement for adoption by the Town:

“It shall be the policy of the Town of Windham to adopt the necessary ordinances and regulations to assure proactive development of the Town while recognizing the importance of protecting our cultural, agricultural, architectural and natural resources. Through planned conservation and economic development, the Town can encourage and create opportunities for all Windham citizens to enjoy passive and active outdoor activities. To pursue this policy, the Town shall encourage the commitment of open space through various means, including considering the acquisition and holding of any open space parcel of land within the town, if the parcel is of value to the Town and its residents and meets one or more of the priority criteria set forth below:

1. Protects and improves water quality (ground and surface water), water habitats and/or increases recreational access to water;
2. Creates connections between existing open space, recreational space, trails or greenways;
3. Preserves and protects habitats that support special plant or animal life, especially those identified as endangered, threatened or of special concern;
4. Protects cultural resources of the Town, including educational, archaeological, historical and other sites that distinguish our Town’s character;
5. Preserves farmland, forest land, other agricultural lands and the rural character of the Windham villages;
6. Develops neighborhood parks, active recreational or educational opportunities.”
B. PRIORITY GOALS AND CRITERIA DETAIL AND RATIONALE:

1. WATER: Protects and improves water quality (ground and surface water), water habitats and/or improves recreational access to surface water;

The number one priority voiced in several venues has been to protect the quality of Windham/Willimantic’s drinking water, to protect the watershed areas, and to increase access by residents to our area waterways. Windham is blessed with three rivers, multiple streams and ponds, all of which contribute to the quality of life in this area. Residents’ interest in recreational access to water for swimming, boating and fishing is strong; Windham has one of the few endangered cedar bogs left in the state; and the flood plains provide extremely attractive soil and drainage for agricultural use. Therefore, a priority in reviewing any potential property for acquisition as part of the Town’s permanent Open Space would be its proximity to water and/or its use as a buffer to protect and enhance adjacent waterways, marshes, wetlands or watersheds.

2. CONNECTIONS: Creates connections between existing open space, recreational space, trails or greenways;

Open spaces within a town are more likely to achieve their potential range of objectives if they can build upon existing open spaces and preserved areas. Larger unbroken tracts of undeveloped land are more likely to support a larger number and diversity of plants and animals, provide more accessible and satisfying recreational experiences, and increase the value of nearby development. For example, Windham is a link on the Airline Trail, the Quinebaug and Shetucket National Heritage Corridor, Rochambeau Route and the Willimantic River Alliance initiatives to create and extend connections.

3. SPECIAL HABITATS: Preserves and protects habitats that support special plant or animal life, especially those identified as endangered, threatened or of special concern;

Windham possesses numerous state and federally-listed special habitats and plant/animal species. These areas/species present the opportunity to make a lasting contribution to wildlife protection, and may also offer Windham unique educational and recreational enhancement opportunities.
4. CULTURAL RESOURCES: Protects cultural resources of the Town, including educational, archeological, historic and other sites that distinguish our Town’s character;

*Windham’s natural and cultural diversity and history offer us a unique opportunity to promote tourism and economic development, accentuate our Town’s aesthetic qualities, and promote pride and a sense of community. By identifying, protecting and accessing these resources we secure our identity and create a more meaningful place to live.*

5. FARMLAND: Preserve farmland, forest land, other agricultural lands and the rural character of the Windham villages;

*Windham’s active and historic farmland, although part of our cultural resources, was called out as a separate category due to the large quantity of farmland areas and the significant contribution these areas have on our rural character, both economically and visually (the unique viewsheds agricultural fields offer).*

6. ACTIVE RECREATION AND EDUCATION: Develop neighborhood parks, active recreational and/or educational opportunities;

*The Town will develop and adopt a recreation plan to address the growing need for active recreational areas for residents, and it is likely that the Town will then need to consider acquiring properties to implement the growth aspects of such a plan. In addition, the richness of Windham’s culture and natural resources may provide a wonderful opportunity for education for residents of all ages, a priority that may overlap other priorities but may enhance the importance of a specific property under consideration. And while urban areas are not likely to have large new open spaces available, small neighborhood parks can provide welcome areas for neighbors to gather and safe places for children to play while improving the look of densely built urban settings.*