

I. OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

I-1.0 Introduction

The Open Space and Recreation Element of the Comprehensive Plan addresses North Smithfield's need to provide a variety of recreational opportunities for all segments of the population and addresses open space and conservation needs and opportunities.

In-town open space and recreational facilities owned outright and managed by the State is limited to 4.2 acres at the Slatersville Reservoir Fishing Access area, 7.5 acres at the North Smithfield Wildlife Marsh, and the 117 acres at the Blackstone Gorge. Compared to other communities in northern Rhode Island, North Smithfield has a very small amount of State-owned land.

The Blackstone Gorge purchase was one of the first steps taken towards the implementation of the *Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan for the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor* and the *Blackstone River Park Master Plan*. In addition to the Blackstone Gorge preservation, these plans propose a greenway along the Branch River from the Slatersville Reservoirs to the confluence with the Blackstone. Various forms of active and passive recreation and a system of trails and bikeway links to those along the Blackstone Corridor are proposed. The Branch River Greenway will be complemented by rehabilitation and historic preservation programs in Slatersville and other heritage sites in North Smithfield.

The designation of the Woonasquatucket and Blackstone Rivers as American Heritage Rivers has provided opportunities for recreational activities including the development of bikeways from Providence. The RI Rivers Council has designated two groups to serve as Watershed Councils in North Smithfield, and both, the Woonasquatucket and Blackstone River Watershed Councils have already begun assisting the Town with protecting and preserving the watersheds in which these rivers are located.

Through the generosity of several donors, approximately 230 acres along the Providence Pike have been turned over to the Audubon Society of Rhode Island for use as a wildlife preserve. This is a unique resource providing a quiet refuge for the contemplative needs of man and the cycles of nature.

Several issues are of importance to recreational planning in North Smithfield. One is the lack of sidewalks along the narrow minor arterial and collector roads which link the different neighborhoods, particularly in the more rural sections of Town. In many cases, adult-provided transportation has and will continue to be necessary to allow children a safe trip between the playing field and home. Under this condition, families with children participating in organized sports at various age levels may be better served by clustering activities than by scattering them throughout the community. Some of the traditional standards which assume a child will be able to walk or ride a bike to the playground or playfield do not always apply to communities, such as North Smithfield, where new development is geographically dispersed by large lot size

requirements. Children living in the more rural areas of Town are favored, however, with a rich variety of unstructured recreational opportunities.

A second issue is the growing cost of maintaining active recreational areas; any program to acquire new recreational facilities must be matched by a long-term capability of maintaining and managing the same.

This element draws upon and complements the proposals contained in the *Recreation, Conservation, Open Space Plan and Recreation Plan, North Smithfield* (January 1986), prepared by the North Smithfield Planning Board. This plan was last updated in 1991.

I-2.0 Goals, Policies and Actions

1. PROVIDE A VARIETY OF ACTIVE AND PASSIVE RECREATIONAL FACILITIES SERVING TOWN RESIDENTS AND VISITORS

- A. Increase land area of active recreation areas to meet present and future deficiencies.
- B. Implement Phase I and II of the proposed Pacheco Park expansion including construction of a Little League field, multi-purpose field and three (3) tennis courts, walking trail, parking and new access road.
- C. Continue to seek funding for acquisition of key parcels of land and for the development of a walking trail in Slatersville linking Pacheco Park, Slatersville Reservoir and Library Island Park and explore the possibility of linking this trail to the Blackstone River Bikeway.
- D. Consider acquiring the Stamina Mills site and other parcels along the Branch River for development of a riverside park, bikeway and or walking trail.
- E. As part of subdivision or land development approval, continue the option of requiring dedication of land for recreational and open space purposes as appropriate and establish the necessary formulas to institute a fee in-lieu of dedication option.
- F. Adopt flexible zoning such as Conservation Development Design to add to recreational and conservation resources.
- G. Work in collaboration with Federal and State authorities in implementing the Woonasquatucket Bikeway and completing the Blackstone River Bikeway.
- H. Coordinate local historic rehabilitation efforts with recreational planning as a component of the Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan for the Blackstone River National Heritage Corridor.
- I. Work with the Town of Blackstone, Massachusetts to improve the visual appearance of the entrance to the Paul S. Kelly Recreation Complex.

- J. Work with the Heritage Corridor, the Blackstone Valley Tourism Council, the RI & MA Department's of Transportation and the other partners to develop the river access facility at the Paul S. Kelly Recreation Complex.
- K. Utilize a DOT Enhancement grant to develop an interpretive park at the recently acquired Mammoth Mill site.
- L. Develop Trails/Greenway Plan connecting conservation and recreation areas.
- M. Coordinate Town and school recreational facilities planning.
- N. Require open space and recreational planning as part of proposed new Mixed Use zoning districts.
- O. Develop a definition to clarify uses which are appropriate for lands designated for open space, recreation or conservation.

2. ADOPT AND IMPLEMENT ACTION PROGRAMS NECESSARY TO PROTECT NATURAL RESOURCE AND CONSERVATION AREAS

- A. Identify and rank key parcels for acquisition or protection based on criteria such as but not limited to: size, adjacent protected parcels, significant natural resources, rare or endangered species or habitat, significant cultural features, development potential etc. and based on the priorities as set forth in the Woonasquattucket Greenspace Project maps D-3 – D-5.
- B. Continue to work with the Land Trust and other organizations for the purpose of acquiring conservation areas and conservation easements and/or receiving same as donations.
- C. Utilize State and/or Federal funds and expertise in the conservation of open space and natural resources.
- D. Create overlay zoning district requiring special review considerations in critical areas such as the Branch River Valley.
- E. Cooperate with the City of Woonsocket in the implementation of its *Water Quality Protection Plan* for the City's watershed and reservoir properties in North Smithfield.
- F. Utilize a variety of techniques to preserve open space and conservation areas with an emphasis on viable alternatives to fee simple acquisition without State and Federal aid.
- G. Introduce a local open space acquisition bond question for voter approval.

I-3.0 Plan Description

I-3.1 Inventory

I-3.1.1 Existing Open Space and Recreational Areas and Facilities

Table I-3.1.1 provides an inventory of existing open space and recreation areas and facilities in North Smithfield. Map I - 1, Open Space and Recreation Plan, shows their location.

The major Town-owned facilities include the playfields at Pacheco Park and the Junior-Senior High School; playfields at the "Paul S. Kelly Recreation Complex"; playfields at North Smithfield Elementary School; 8 playgrounds; two small parks; and the Mowry Fire Tower property.

State facilities include the Slatersville Fishing Access and the North Smithfield Wildlife Marsh. Also listed is the Blackstone River Gorge, where RIDEM acquired the land on the west and east banks of the River. Additionally, the State purchased the development rights of Christiansen's Orchard (23 acres) and West Wind Farm (86 acres).

Private and semi-public areas accessible to the public include the Centennial Memorial Park (owned by the North Smithfield Public Library) and the Audubon Society of Rhode Island's nature preserve. Although not listed in Table I-3.1.1, the privately-owned Slatersville Reservoirs are available for public use.

Open space properties not accessible to the public for protection of water supply purposes are the reservoirs and city-owned watershed properties of the City of Woonsocket Water Supply; their combined area is 596.3 acres. There were another 32 parcels in 2004 that were privately owned and certified as "Open Space", i.e., a certification that allows for a reduction of taxes meant to encourage the preservation of large, undeveloped parcels of land.

The total area of all facilities, not including the Slatersville Reservoirs, is 1,494 acres.

I-3.1.2 Recreation Standards

Area standards originally developed by the Statewide Planning Program call for 3.75 acres/1,000 population for playgrounds and minor parks and 6.25 acres/1,000 population for playfields and major parks. These are consistent with the original National Recreation and Park Association's standards calling for a range of 6.25 to 10.5 acres of developed open space per 1,000 population. Although both organizations have retreated from those numbers and are currently advocating that municipalities develop more specific local standards, North Smithfield continues to base its standards on the guidance initially provided by Statewide Planning and the National Parks Association.

The North Smithfield Open Space and Recreation Element has been prepared using the standard of 10.0 active acres/1,000 population.

Table I-3.1.1 Existing Open Space And Recreation Areas And Facilities, 2005

ID	Name	Acreage	Facility Type	Service Area	Uses/Facilities
State of Rhode Island					

S-1	Slatersville Fishing Access	4.2	SP	S	Fishing/boat launch
S-2	N. Smithfield Wildlife Marsh	7.5	CS	S	Conservation
S-3	Blackstone River Gorge	117	SP	S	Walking Trail
S-4	Christiansen Orchard	22.7	DR	T	Farm Fields/Orchard
S-5	West Wind Farm	85.9	DR	T	Farm Fields
	TOTAL	237.3			
Town of North Smithfield: Active Recreation Areas					
T-1	Carroll Park	.2	SP	T	Heritage Park, walking trail potential
T-2	Pacheco Park	23.8	PF	T	Baseball, tennis, BB, playground equip., skateboard park
T-3	Halliwell Sch Plygrnd	4.0	PG	N	BB, playground equip.
T-4	Kendall-Dean School Playground	1.0	PG	N	Baseball
T-5	School St Playground	2.0	PG	N	
T-6	Waterford Playground	0.7	PG	N	Playground equipment
T-7	Kelly Park/Mammoth Mill	14.8	PF	T	Soccer, baseball, future bikepath, heritage park
T-8	Branch Village Park	7.5	SP	N	Open space
T-10	Bushee School Playground	0.5	PG	N	Playground Equipment
T-11	Union Village Playgrnd	0.5	PG	N	Playground Equipment
T-12	Primrose Playground	0.7	PG	N	Playground Equipment
T-13	Jr./Sr. High School	24.0	PF	T	Baseball, tennis/volley, BB
T-14	NS Elementary School	9.7	PG	N	Soccer, Playground Equipment
T-18	Blackstone Gorge	65.5	SP	R	Walking Trail
T-22	Main Street	8.9	SP/LP	T	Walking Trail/Wellhead Protection
	TOTAL	163.8			
Subdivisions					
T-9	Oakwood Estates Sub.	1.5	PG	N	Meadow
T-15	Slatersville 88 Sub.	4.5	SP	N	Pond, Proposed Equip to be Installed
T-16	Rolling Acres Subdiv.	1.7	PG	N	Proposed Equip to be Installed
T-17	Nipsachuck Estates Subdivision	1.5	PG	N	Playfield, Proposed Equip to be Installed
T-19	Trout Brook Pond Sub.	17.2	SP	T	Cross Country Trail
T-20	Brookside Estates Sub.	.3	SP	N	Equestrian/Pedestrian Easement
T-21	Sunnycrest Subdivision	1.3	PG	N	Wooded lot
	TOTAL	28.0			

ID	Name	Acreage	Facility Type	Service Area	Uses/Facilities
Conservation Areas					
TC-1	Halliwell School	15.0	CS	N	Wellhead Protection
TC-2	NS Elementary School	17.0	CS	T	Nature Trail
TC-3	Secluded Pines	2.7	CS	N	Wooded grove, detention pond
TC-4	Stone Ridge Subdiv.	9.7	CS	N	Conserv. Ease./no public access
TC-5	Scott Farm Subdivision	1.6	CS	N	Conservation Easement
TC-6	Rustic View Subdiv.	1.7	CS	N	Wooded grove, detention pond
TC-7	Christy Court Subdiv.	22.0	CS	N	Conservation Easement
TC-8	Tift Road Well	4.9	SP	N	Wellhead Protection
TC-9	Old Oxford Rd. Subdiv.	6.3	CS	N	Wooded lot, wetland
TC-10	Spooner Property	26.9	CS	T	Conservation-No access – Proposed rezone to Village Residential
TC-11	Valley View Estates Subdivision	8.2	CS	N	Watershed Protection/no public access
TC-12	Gold Prop. Mattity Rd	11.5	CS	N	Conservation Easement/no access
TC-13	Nipsachuck Hill	5.7	CS	N	No access
TC-14	Pine Estates Subdiv.	3.8	CS	N	Conserv. Ease./no public access
TC-15	Mowry Fire Tower	7.0	SP	T	No public access
	TOTAL	144.0			
Private and Semi-Public					
P-1	Centennial Memorial Park	1.2	SP	T	Heritage Park, benches
P-2	Audubon and/or Private	230.5	SP	R	Nature Trails
P-3	R/Goal Park	20.1	XC	T	Cross-country Trail
P-4	Land Trust/Mattity Swamp	17.3	CS	T	Conservation
P-5	Land Trust/Village Wy	42.5	CS	T	Conservation
P-6	Iron Woods Driving Range	17.0	SP	T	Golf
P-7	RI Sports Center, Ice Rink		SP	R	Ice skating
	TOTAL	328.6			
City of Woonsocket					
W-1	Reservoir #3 Water	156.3	SP	R	No Access, Water supply
W-2	Reservoir #3 Watershed	287.4	SP	R	No Access, Water supply
W-3	Reservoir #1 Water	7.1	SP	R	No Access, Water supply
W-4	Reservoir #1 Watershed	145.5	SP	R	No Access, Water supply
	TOTAL	596.3			
	TOTAL All Facilities	1,494.0			

* Facility Type: PG=Playground; PF=Playfield; SP=Special; XC=Cross Country Trail; DR=Development Rights and CS=Conservation

** Service Area: N=Neighborhood; T=Town; R=Region; and S=State

I-3.1.3 Recreation and Open Space Facility Types

Playgrounds / Minor Parks

Minor Parks are generally small in area and have a specialized purpose. Some, as in the case of Carroll Park and Centennial Memorial Park, may serve a community-wide purpose. Others, such as Branch Village Park, are oriented towards a local neighborhood.

Playgrounds are active recreational areas for children between the ages of 5-15 but may include tot lots for the 1-5 age group and have sections set aside for the passive activities of all age groups. Frequently, they are located next to an elementary school. Site standards range from 3 to 15 acres. In North Smithfield, playgrounds, such as the one-half acre Union Village and Bushee School Playgrounds, are equipped to serve younger children but are not large enough for field sports.

Playfields / Major Parks

Playfields typically range in size from 12 to 20 acres and are equipped with facilities for active sports such as tennis, baseball, softball, soccer and basketball. Those served are generally ages 13 and older.

Major Parks serve more passive activity needs such as boating, swimming, skating, walking, picnicking, day camps and the like. Facilities such as the Slatersville Fishing Access and adjoining reservoirs, the Blackstone River Gorge, Trout Brook Recreation area and the Audubon area allow for some of these activities.

Linear Parks

Typically, these relate to some form of recreational travel such as biking, canoeing, horseback riding and hiking. The proposed Branch River Park, which is discussed in a later section, would fit the definition. Such facilities often serve as a regional resource and may be related to unique natural features or an available corridor such as those provided by utility rights-of-way. A bike path would be a form of linear park. There are no standards for linear parks.

Special Use

These encompass recreational facilities which may be publicly or privately owned such as golf courses, golf driving ranges, hockey rinks, ski slopes and swimming pools. According to the National Recreation and Park Association, a population of 20,000 or more is required to support any of the above-identified activities.

Conservancy

These areas primarily protect a natural or cultural resource with recreational use as a second objective. The only standard is that the site should be large enough to protect the resource.

I-3.1.4 Recreation Area Deficiencies and Needs

The standards cited above have been used to establish a guide to the magnitude of present deficiencies in North Smithfield.

Although the Town owns approximately 163.8 acres for active recreation, not all of it is accessible. Removing the Blackstone Gorge property and another 10% for properties with wetlands and steep slopes, that may be scenic but are difficult to access, provides for a more realistic total of 88.5 acres. Given North Smithfield's 2000 Census population of 10,618 and the standard of 10 acres per 1,000 people, North Smithfield should have approximately 106 acres for recreational purposes. The year 2000 deficit of 17.5 acres will grow to 19.5 acres by 2010 based on the very conservative Statewide Planning population projections that suggest 10,783 people will reside in North Smithfield by 2010. Given the Town's build-out projections contained in the Land Use Element, much more land will be needed to maintain the standard North Smithfield residents have grown used to.

1.3.1.5 Recreation Programs Deficiencies and Needs

Although accepted land area requirements for some types of recreation is limited, this has not precluded the operation of successful recreation programs.

Through the Parks and Recreation Division, the Town runs a number of recreational programs. They presently include:

Summer park program (age 6 through 12) with a playground administrator at each of the following locations: Pacheco Park; School Street Playground; Bushee School Playground; Union Village Playground; Waterford Playground; and Primrose Playground.

Tennis, including instruction, at Pacheco Park and Junior-Senior High School.

Youth winter basketball at several of the schools.

Gymnastics at the Junior-Senior High School.

Annual events include: an Easter egg hunt at the North Smithfield Junior-Senior High School and Christmas Tree lighting ceremonies at the Municipal Annex and Slatersville Church Commons.

Little League baseball and softball are independent organizations that use Town ball fields as follows: 1 at Kendall-Dean School; 3 at Pacheco Park; 2 at Junior-Senior High School; 1 at the Kelly Complex.

There is an independent Youth Soccer Program that approximately 650 children participate in. A recreation complex completed in the late 1990's at the North Smithfield Elementary School provides field space for the Youth Soccer Program.

The RI Sports Center (indoor ice rink) opened in September 1991.

There are no swimming programs as there are no public swimming areas in North Smithfield.

The major facilities shortages are an inadequate number of baseball fields and soccer fields. This deficiency should be eliminated with the construction of one and possibly two new baseball fields at Pacheco Park and with the fields that are to accompany the new school facilities proposed as part of the 2004 *School Facilities Master Plan*.

Additionally, all of the facilities require improvements of a nature which are accomplished under maintenance programs or the annual capital budgeting process and are not encompassed in a Comprehensive Plan.

I-3.1.6 Open Space / Conservancy Deficiencies and Needs

As stated above, there are no standards which can be applied to conservancy requirements in a community. As a general guideline, the State of Rhode Island encourages rural and suburban communities such as North Smithfield to protect large percentages of land and water to compensate for the lack of same in more urbanized areas.

In North Smithfield, open space and conservancy actions should be focused on the preservation of critical natural resources supporting a healthy environment for man and all forms of nature. These include, but are not limited to the following: rivers, ponds, reservoirs, streams, flood plains, freshwater marshes and wetlands, groundwater aquifers and their recharge zones, unique geography and geology, special habitats and vegetation such as those identified by the RI Natural Heritage Program, farmlands, trees (remaining tracts of forest and street trees) and natural vegetation.

Areas falling within the above categories previously were identified in the *North Smithfield Conservation, Open Space and Recreation Plan*, and are discussed in the planning proposals that follow.

I-4.0 The Plan

Proposals are shown on Map I - 1, Open Space and Recreation Plan.

For recreation, the plan emphasizes the improvement of existing playgrounds and playfields. To satisfy acreage deficiencies, first priority should go to additions to existing facilities, if feasible, before creating new playgrounds and playfields.

Major park projects such as the Branch River Park and formal river access to the Rivers through the construction of a canoe/kayak launch will add major areas for passive recreation. In combination with existing open areas such as the Audubon Society lands and those to be protected under open space conservancy proposals, North Smithfield will have recreational resources enhancing the living environment for all its citizens.

The open space and conservancy proposals offer a number of techniques to protect natural and cultural resources which, once destroyed, are not easily replicated. North Smithfield has a number of areas worthy of this effort.

I-4.1 Playgrounds and Parks

As previously discussed, North Smithfield will conservatively need approximately 19.5 additional acres of playgrounds, fields and park facilities by the year 2010.

It is proposed that this deficiency be removed as follows:

Land in the vicinity of Booth Pond should be acquired and ultimately developed for a combination of active and passive recreational uses. Require a playground/minor park as part of any development between Landmark Medical Center and Booth Pond. Desirably, the recreational area might be located near the Pond. The facility could serve residents as well as those employed in the development area.

Revise Land Development and Subdivision Regulations section on dedication of land for public purposes to allow for the continued dedication of land for open space and recreation purposes.

Consider adoption of alternatives other than donating land for recreational purposes with provisions for public improvements. Develop a fee in-lieu of dedication formula within the Land Development and Subdivision Regulations that would allow the Town to accumulate funds to purchase a larger property than what might otherwise be dedicated as part of a subdivision approval. Development of a formula, however, is a complex undertaking requiring considerable planning and research to make it legally supportable. An alternative to this fee is an Impact Fee as described in Louis Berger's 2002 *Growth Management Report* and may be instituted in accordance with RIGL Title 45, Chapter 22.4.

Consider adopting flexible development standards such as Conservation Development Design. While the overall density would not exceed that which would be permitted under normal subdivision of the land, this technique would raise the density in one part of the development to achieve open space or recreational usage in the other. The principle permits greater flexibility of design and encourages the preservation of more open space. Where possible, such open space should link up with similar spaces in other developments or major conservation areas. Generally, Conservation Development regulations give the Town the option of receiving the open space land as a dedication or requiring its maintenance by a Homeowners Association. The Land Use Element and the Natural and Cultural Resources Element also suggest that the Town consider this concept.

Development of the soccer fields at North Smithfield Elementary School and the proposed Phase I improvements at Pacheco Park should help reduce the shortfall in the playfields category. The addition of the Blackstone River Gorge property and the Trout Brook Pond/ R-Goal property supplement the inventory of places in the major park category. However, as noted in the Corridor Commission's 1997 *Natural Resources Inventory*, funds will be needed not only to manage and maintain these lands, but also to help improve access and interpretation.

As noted in the Introduction to the Open Space and Recreation Element, there are advantages to concentrating the playing fields in several locations. To accomplish this goal, proposed playfields are in two concentrations; one in the northern and the other in the southern end of Town.

Northern Part of Town

Implement Phase I improvements to Pacheco Park including development of a baseball field, multi-purpose fields, walking trails, parking and access road. Phase II of the Pacheco Park expansion may include development of several additional tennis courts.

Southern End of Town

Existing playfield facilities are located at the Junior-Senior High School. The existing playfields could be expanded only by the acquisition of land across a street.

Close by is the North Smithfield Elementary School which has a small playground and four soccer fields.. The Town owns an additional 17 acre portion of the 40 acre site that because of wetlands and other constraints is not suited for active recreation. Acquisition of an adjacent 45 acre parcel could aid in future expansion of facilities in the area.

An alternative perspective is offered by the RGB/Gilbane 2004 *Comprehensive School Facilities Master Plan*. Citing a town wide lack of athletic space and field space, the Plan calls for a new Middle School and new Elementary School. Both schools would be located on land that would be sufficiently sized to accommodate, among other school-related buildings and functions, one baseball field and two soccer fields (multi-purpose fields) each.

I-4.2 Branch River Greenway and Blackstone River Park

The Blackstone River Greenway is an essential component of the overall plan for the Blackstone River Park which extends from North Smithfield to Providence and northward into Massachusetts. Both are important components of the *Cultural Heritage and Land Management Plan for the Blackstone River National Heritage Corridor*. Now that the most critical lands are owned by the State and Town, issues of ongoing maintenance, improving access and heritage programming must be attended to.

The Branch River Greenway starts at Pacheco Park near the Slatersville Reservoir and follows the River through Slatersville, Forestdale and Branch Village to the confluence with the Blackstone River below the Blackstone Gorge. According to recently funded conceptual designs, pedestrian and/or equestrian paths would follow the rivers. Areas such as the Library Island Park have already been set aside for picnicking and the open water areas will be available for boating and fishing. Access to the Branch River (a canoe/kayak put-in and take out, informational signage and parking) is proposed as Phase III of the BRVNHCC 1999 *Blackstone River Access Plan*. This access point at Route 146A across from the former Tupperware headquarters in North Smithfield will provide access to the Blackstone River (and Blackstone Gorge area) via the Branch River.

Major points of interest in North Smithfield which are tied into the two parks include the following: the dam at Slatersville Reservoir; Centennial Park; the Slatersville Historic District with its proposed rehabilitation of residences and adaptive reuse of the Slatersville Mill complex; the Blackstone Gorge recently acquired by the State and the Town; the Mammoth Mill ruins recently acquired by the Town along Canal Street in Waterford; sections of the Blackstone Canal; and the playing fields at the "Paul S. Kelly Recreation Complex" site adjoining Mammoth Mills. Details of the overall plans are to be found in the *Blackstone River Master Plan*, prepared by RIDEM in 1986.

I-4.3 Blackstone River Bikeway

The Blackstone River Bikeway, paralleling the Blackstone River, ultimately will provide a connection through Providence to the East Bay Bike Path. Sections of the Blackstone River Bikeway will pass through North Smithfield in two locations as follows: between Manville Road and the Blackstone River in the eastern corner of Town and along Canal Street in the Waterford neighborhood. Plans for a bikeway in Massachusetts connecting the Blackstone River Bikeway with the Worcester area are underway. Plans call for riverboat/ canoe docking facilities to be established at Kelly Park. Funding for design and construction have been secured through a RIDOT Enhancement grant.

An extension of the Bikeway from Waterford to Slatersville follows St. Paul Street, Route 146A and School Street.

As discussed in the Circulation Element, an alternative route to Slatersville would be along the right-of-way of P&W's Slatersville Spur in the event rail service is discontinued.

It should also be noted that a major new bikeway, the "Northwest Bike Trail/Woonasquatucket River Bikeway", had originally included portions of North Smithfield. However, the *Planning/Design Feasibility Study* (February 1999) excluded sections of the proposed bikeway in North Smithfield and Burrillville. Apparently, as a result of data collection efforts and initial meetings with the Project Area Committee, it was determined that it was not practical or feasible to include North Smithfield or Burrillville because much of the former railroad right-of-way in these two Towns was under private ownership and therefore would be too difficult or expensive to acquire, particularly because many of those sections were being actively utilized for other purposes. However, it should also be noted that preliminary discussions of those sections included the segments between Black Plain Road and Farnum Pike (Route 104) and Farnum Pike and Douglas Pike (Route 7) were kept in the Final 1999 Report. As the Report states on page 4-2, "While these portions of the study area have been eliminated from consideration at this time, various segments could be reconsidered at a future date." And, as will be discussed below, the potential of a bikeway in North Smithfield is again a possibility.

I-4.4 Trails / Greenways

Map I - 1 conceptually shows a system of trails connecting major conservation and recreation areas in the Town. Where possible, the trails follow utility line rights-of-way. It is

recommended that a Trails / Greenways Plan be developed so that appropriate links can be retained as subdivision occurs in the larger undeveloped sections of the community. The Trails Plan would be developed in cooperation with the utilities and would identify the means by which the trail system would be reserved for public use. 53% of the respondents to the 2001 Community Survey felt developing bike and walking trail systems was of great importance

Creation of trail links from Pacheco Park to the planned Library Island Park should be considered when reviewing development proposals of parcels west of Pacheco Park along Main Street.

Also, as illustrated and discussed in the BRVNHCC's 2003 *Trail/Greenway Vision Report*, there are two potential trail locations in North Smithfield. One parallels the Woonasquatucket River and continues west to Burrillville and South through Smithfield. This proposal suggests that the Northwest Bicycle Project in combination with a Woonasquatucket River Bikeway still has potential in North Smithfield, not only for the recreational opportunities it will provide, but also because it will serve as a catalyst for the continued renewal efforts of the River. The second potential trail location is identified as the Louisquisset Trolley Line Trail. RIDOT owns the right-of-way to a two-mile segment between Landmark Hospital and the RI Sports Complex along Route 146. The circa 1900 15-mile trolley line originally connected Burrillville to Providence, however, only a few segments, like the one in North Smithfield are still publicly-owned. The State believes this two-mile segment has the potential to serve as a linear recreational facility.

I-4.5 Open Space and Conservancy Areas to be Protected/Enhanced

In addition to the protection of lands that contain critical natural resources and features as previously identified, conservation action is proposed in the following locations:

Branch River and Tributaries

This conservation area includes the Branch River, the Slatersville Reservoirs, Trout Pond and two major tributaries, Tarklin and Trout Brooks. Actions to create a linear Branch River Greenway are discussed above in the Recreation Facilities proposals. Permanent protection of the tributaries is proposed. In the case of Tarkiln Brook, which is fed in small part by Tarkiln Pond, the cooperation of the Town of Burrillville will be essential.

Blackstone River, Watershed and Gorge

Protection of the Blackstone Gorge has been initiated by RIDEM and is part and parcel of the companion plans for the Blackstone River Park and Branch River Greenway. Part of the Gorge and the Rolling Dam is located across the State line; conservation programs will have to be coordinated with the Town of Blackstone and the Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Pursuant to a Memorandum of Understanding between the Commonwealth of Massachusetts, the State of Rhode Island and the Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor, Massachusetts purchased 22 acres on both sides of the Blackstone River to provide access to the land recently acquired by the State of Rhode Island. The Blackstone River Valley National Heritage Corridor Commission must remain committed to supporting improvements at the park,

including parking areas, a trail system and signage. As described in the 1986 *Blackstone River Park Master Plan*, some of the State's best white water canoeing can be found on the stretch of river from the Tupperware dam to the confluence with the Branch River.

In addition to the Corridor Commission, the Blackstone River Watershed Council, as designated by the RI River's Council, is collaborating with the Blackstone River Coalition to generate a bi-state, cooperative action plan for the River and Watershed. This Plan will include specific tasks resulting in the protection and enhancement of the watershed and its unique features that should be supported by North Smithfield.

Screech Hole Bog

Screech Hole Bog is located primarily in Burrillville near the point where the Town lines of North Smithfield, Burrillville and Uxbridge meet, and extends into Massachusetts. The Bog has been identified for protection by the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program. Subject to further study, part of the buffer area for its protection may extend into North Smithfield. Included in the State's 1983 inventory of significant sites, this Bog has the physical and biological characteristics of a fen – a unique wetland in Rhode Island. The area serves as a habitat for unique flora, is a good example of a glacial esker and is of critical importance as a groundwater resource because it contributes to the Ironstone Reservoir in Massachusetts. Its neighboring areas should be closely monitored to ensure that infill or run-off from development does not harm the Bog.

Cherry Brook / Cedar Swamp

Cedar Swamp is the largest wetland in North Smithfield; further encroachments should be limited. As proposed in the Circulation Element, wetland replication for any wetland filling should be required.

Cherry Brook flows through Cedar Swamp and drains some of the most urbanized sections of Town. The brook and its flood plain must be protected. Drainage, flood and water quality impacts of new development within the brook's watershed require careful scrutiny when development proposals are reviewed.

Crookfall Brook/Woonsocket Water Supply

The Crookfall Brook watershed is located primarily in North Smithfield but does extend into Smithfield and Lincoln. A tributary brook, which forms near Rocky Hill Road, feeds Woonsocket Reservoir No. 3 through one subdrainage area. The second subdrainage area is focused on another tributary brook which starts near Smithfield Road to the east of the Route 146/146A merge. This brook enters Crookfall Brook above Woonsocket Reservoir No 1.

Woonsocket has prepared a *Water Quality Protection Plan* which calls for additional land acquisition within North Smithfield by the City to protect the watershed. See the Natural and Cultural Resources Element of this plan for further discussion of watershed protection.

Crookfall Brook was originally the means for moving water from Woonsocket Reservoir No. 3 to No. 1. To replace this pollution-prone method, Woonsocket constructed a 24-inch pipeline parallel to and connecting the reservoirs.

Todd's Pond

In the 1990 Weston and Sampson water supply study and again later in the 1992 Maguire study (see Services and Facilities Element), the Todd's Pond area was identified as a potential aquifer for public water supply purposes. Although the Slatersville Aquifer is considered to be a more productive aquifer, the long range consequences of its being impacted by two EPA Superfund sites is impossible to determine at this time. Accordingly, high priority should be given to protecting Todd's Pond, its tributaries and their combined watershed.

Woonasquatucket River Watershed

The headwaters of the Woonasquatucket River are formed in North Smithfield from wetlands and small streams. Among these are the brook passing through the Audubon Society's property, the stream and wetlands associated with Primrose Pond, a small brook starting to the east of Grange Road, and Nipsachuck Swamp. The Woonasquatucket River was designated a National Heritage River in 1998. This designation, the formation of the Woonasquatucket Watershed Council and the implementation of the Watershed Action Plan are crucial steps toward protecting the watershed. Similar to the authority given to the Blackstone River Watershed Council, the RI Rivers Council designated the Woonasquatucket River Watershed Council as a player in the Watershed's protection. A recent regional effort led by the Watershed Council resulted in several maps contained this Plan which were prepared under the auspices of the Woonasquatucket Greenspace Project.

The Blunders

This unique area combines interesting geological formations with historical artifacts and an ecology supporting rare botanical species selected for protection by the Rhode Island Natural Heritage Program. A 17-lot subdivision is proposed on the property, however the historic district area and the large area containing the rare species is proposed to be dedicated as open space.

Audubon Property

The Audubon Society of Rhode Island developed a plan for its 250 acre property along Providence Pike. A nature education center, along with continued passive use is contemplated. Hunting and the use of motorized vehicles is prohibited.

Booth Pond

This is a diverse area of woodlands, ponds, streams and wetlands within an urbanized area. A recently completed study conducted by Virginian Brown, a recognized odonate (dragonflies and damselflies) specialist found that 51 species of odonates exist at Booth Pond, a number that was exceeded by only one of the other 400 sites surveyed in the state. Among the odonates found at Booth Pond, two were listed by the RINHP as species of State Concern and one was listed as Endangered. Preliminary survey of plants and birds also indicate the Booth Pond and

surrounding upland forest represent a significant biodiversity resource within an otherwise highly developed portion of the state. A major retail development proposing significant disturbance of the area around Booth Pond received Master Plan and Special Use Permit approval from the Town of North Smithfield in 2004.

I-4.6 Techniques for Conservation

In recognition of growing constraints on the availability of State and Federal grant funds for the acquisition and development of recreation and conservation areas, there must be greater emphasis on viable alternatives to fee simple acquisition. Several, which may be applicable to North Smithfield, are described below.

Land Trust

A Land Trust is a non-profit organization dedicated to the preservation of open space, conservation areas, and significant cultural amenities. It can acquire property, receive donations of same, and manage the land in accordance with the appropriate conservation goals. Although many of its functions are similar to those of a public agency, the Land Trust has the advantage of being able to move quickly when a critical property becomes available. The Audubon Society of Rhode Island assisted the North Smithfield Conservation Commission with the establishment of a Land Trust. North Smithfield's Land Trust has, in fact, been very effective since its inception, in acquiring rights to certain parcels worthy of protection.

Conservation Easement

According to *The Conservation Easement Handbook*, prepared by the Trust for Public Land, "A conservation easement is a legal agreement a property owner makes to restrict the type and amount of development that takes place on his or her property. Each easement's restrictions are tailored to the particular property and the interests of the individual owner."

Easements have the advantage of being less costly than fee simple acquisition. If public access is allowed, a donation of an easement to the Land Trust or public agency will allow the donor to take an income tax deduction. The IRS has special criteria applying to such donations.

Zoning Enabling Act

The 1992 Rhode Island Zoning Enabling Act, through its statement of General Purposes, allows communities to use a broader range of techniques to advance conservation, open space and recreation purposes. Several of those applicable to this discussion are stated below:

Provide for the protection of the natural, historic, cultural, and scenic character of the city or town or areas therein.

Provide for the preservation of agricultural and forest land.

Provide for the preservation of open space for wildlife protection, flood water storage, air and water pollution abatement, and to shape and balance urban and rural development.

Provide for the preservation and enhancement of the recreational resources of the city or town.

The above-stated purposes permit municipalities such as North Smithfield to develop special regulations in the form of overlay districts with special review requirements relating to the resources that are being protected. All land development proposals, for example, can be subject to consideration of conservation issues.

I-4.7 Capital Improvements, Maintenance and Upgrading

The *North Smithfield Conservation, Open Space and Recreation Plan* (NSCORP) includes a Six-Year Program for capital improvements and the upgrading and maintenance of facilities. The Recreation Committee and the Conservation Commission were updating the NSCORP annually as part of the Town's annual capital budgeting process. Submission of a NSCORP is no longer required by the State because Open Space and Recreation Elements of Comprehensive Plans have taken their place. While many items in the Town's NSCORP have been implemented, a few tasks remain relevant.

I-5.0 Consistency Statement

The Open Space and Recreation Element is consistent with the goals of the Comprehensive Planning and Land Use Act and is consistent with relevant State Guide Plan Elements as follows:

State Guide Plan Element 152, *Ocean State Outdoors: Rhode Island's Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan*

The proposals of this Element as well as those of the Land Use Plan Element and the Natural and Cultural Resources Element deal with open space preservation on a comprehensive basis.

Local plans were coordinated with the State's efforts to acquire the Blackstone Gorge.

Wildlife habitat enhancement is encouraged by proposed conservation areas and the use of various regulatory techniques to enhance open space preservation. The extensive utility rights-of-way in North Smithfield provide an extensive supply of ecotone environments.

Many open space areas have been linked by a system of overland and river corridor trails.

Water resources, both surface and groundwater, are to be protected through land or easement acquisition and regulatory techniques.

The protection of agricultural and forested land, the preservation of historic resources, and the conservation of archaeological resources are encouraged.

A diversity of recreational facilities are continued and expanded to serve those of all age and income groups in the Town.

State Guide Plan Element 155, *A Greener Path ... Greenspace and Greenways for Rhode Island's Future*

Formal pedestrian paths and bikeways are encouraged along greenways coinciding with the Blackstone and Branch Rivers.

Abandonment of any railroad rights-of-way should be considered for the Rails-to-Trails program and donation to the Town of North Smithfield.

State Guide Plan Element 156, *Urban and Community Forest Plan*

North Smithfield recognizes its small remaining tracts of forest and street trees as having environmental, cultural and economic values. Trees are recognized throughout the Update as significant natural resources. Contiguous forest cover is illustrated on the consolidated resource maps.

State Guide Plan Element 161, *Forest Resource Management Plan*

Property owners are encouraged to participate in the Farm, Forest and Open Space Tax program.

Forest lands are illustrated in the maps contained in this Update to promote understanding and protection of these natural resources.

State Guide Plan Element 156, *Rivers Policy and Classification Plan*

The classification of segments of rivers in North Smithfield is contained in this Update. There are a series of goals and policies included that speak to the clean up and preservation of the quality of rivers such that they can be used more extensively as recreational resources.