

## Chapter 5 Open Space & Recreation



### Introduction

Preservation of adequate amounts of open space retains a positive connection with Avon's more rural past and permits residents to maintain a relationship with the natural environment. This open space provides opportunities for passive recreational use. In addition, the Town must maintain areas for active recreation which match demand for the use of these areas as population grows. Avon is fortunate to have varied topography, a mix of woodlands and open farms. Upland areas provide opportunities for passive recreation. The Farmington River flows from north to south along the Town's western boundary and travels into Farmington then turns north back to Avon. This forms a dramatic landscape at the eastern end of Town with Avon Mountain as a backdrop. In total, the Farmington River travels for more than 7 miles through Avon.

There are sizeable areas of protected Town, State, private open space, and land owned by the Avon Land Trust. Since 1989, there have been 639 acres of additional open space preserved through a combination of purchase, dedication through the subdivision approval process, or donation. These open spaces are owned by the Town or the Avon Land Trust. In addition, 70 acres have also been protected via a permanent conservation easement to the Avon Land Trust. These acquisitions have added recreation areas,

walking and hiking paths, and have protected sensitive environments as well. The Farmington Valley Greenway, a 5-mile long multi-use path constructed on the former Boston and Maine right-of-way, has been completed through the entire Town (north to south), linking up with a continuation of this trail in Farmington to the south and Simsbury to the north. This path is part of a 22-mile long trail from the Massachusetts State line to Farmington. Overall, this path is about 80% complete.



Farmington Valley Greenway

### Open Space Inventory

For purposes of this report, Open Space includes land used for both passive and active recreation as well as those areas permanently protected as wildlife habitat. As mentioned previously, since 1989 there has been an increase in the inventory of open space by 639 acres, or by 4.4% as a total of the entire Town's land area. **Table 5.1** lists the largest recent acquisitions by both the Town and the Avon Land Trust:

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Table 5.1 Most Significant Open Space or Easement Acquisitions from 1990-2005 Greater than 10 Acres			
Description/Location	Acres	Year Acquired	Type of Acquisition
Route 10 Easement	13.5	1990	Easement
Hunter's Run Condominium	20.3	1992	Easement
Hunter's Run Condominium	19.2	1992	Fee
Avalon Subdivision	14.3	1995	Fee
Sudbury Subdivision	15.2	1996	Fee
Wellner Family Conservation Area	14.9	1996	Fee
Cider Brook Road Conservation Easement	27.0	1997	Easement
Land east of Old Farms Road with 1,000 feet of frontage on the Farmington River	15.5	2001	Fee
Fisher Farm, both east and west of Tilletson Road	317.0	2002	Fee
Fair Hills Subdivision	10.9	2002	Fee
Connecticut Water Co.Easement	10.0	2002	Easement
M.H. Rhodes on Thompson Road	15.2	2003	Fee
Other Acquisitions	115.0	N/A	Fee
Total Acres	639.0	N/A	N/A

At this time, a total of 2,604 acres are permanently protected as open space, which is 18% of the Town's entire land area. In addition 229 acres of privately owned property has been permanently protected through the use of conservation restrictions. These are legally binding restrictions which the Planning and Zoning Commission and Inland Wetland and Watercourse Agency have required through their regulatory review process over the past 20 years. This brings the protected total to 2,833 acres or 19.6% of the Town's entire land area.

All subdivisions must make a donation of open space to the Town, at no cost, equal in size to 10% of the total land area of the parcel(s) being divided. Two hundred thirty five acres were acquired through this process since 1989. In 2000 the Commission adopted a regulation authorized by State Law known as fee in lieu of

open space. This provides an opportunity for a cash payment to be used by the Town for the purpose of open space acquisition in lieu of the donation of land. The payment must be equal to 5% of the pre-developed, appraised value of the parcel(s) to be subdivided. This account can accrue such that a more significant parcel can be purchased in the future. Since 2000, this account has grown to \$143,000. The Town should easily be able to meet, if not exceed, a goal set by the State of Connecticut to permanently protect 20% of the Town's land area as open space. **Table 5.2** presents a detailed look at Avon's Open Space Inventory by ownership.

Table 5.2 Open Space Inventory by Ownership		
Open Space	Acres in 2004	% of Total Town Land
Town	1,382	9.4
State	437	3.0
Land Trust	268	1.9
Utility	68	0.5
Private	469	3.2
TOTAL	2,604	18.0



Avon Land Trust Open Space Property  
located off of New Road

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## Open Space Priorities

**Map 6** entitled Open Space and Recreation Plan presents a mapped view of the existing open space inventory, current trail network and current trail access locations. It also depicts priority areas for acquisition, recommendations for new trail construction, and locations for new trail access points. A main goal of this Plan is to connect the Town's open space assets wherever possible. This will provide additional opportunities for a more extensive hiking system, walking trails, and create larger, unfragmented open space areas, valuable in maintaining the health of certain wildlife populations. This map also depicts those parcels with the highest priority for acquisition. **Table 5.3** presents a list of those parcels. Several credible studies have been completed over the past 10 years, which clearly demonstrate the positive fiscal benefits of open space acquisition. The cost to purchase open space can be substantial. However, these costs are generally less than the long term costs associated with providing municipal services.

## New Trail Construction

- Found Land to Huckleberry Hill:  
Acquire rights necessary to link these 2 valuable open space assets.
- Buckingham ball fields to Town landfill to the Farmington River:

Table 5.3 Parcels with the Highest Priority for Open Space Preservation

PARCEL ADDRESS	ACREAGE	PARCEL OWNER
35 Blanchard Road	7	Farmington Light & Power
47, 123, 155 Lathrop Road	51	McDonnell, Lathrop, Inc.
712, 828, 841, 860 West Avon Road	35	Thompson, Seaton, Smith
62, 67 Summit Drive	16	Carroll, Inc.
A portion of 70 Summit Drive	12	State
10 Harris Road	28	Thompson
126, 132, 138, 170 Thompson Road	36	Thompson, State
126, 500, 525, 575 Old Farms Road	80	Avon Old Farms School
230 Old Farms Road	38	Avon District
70, 125 Granite Road	75	Avon Old Farms School, Grange
60, 66 Pine Hill Road	25	Wisco
222 Riverbends	25	McDonnell
60 North Farms Road		Farmland
575, 585, 605 Wadsworth Road	10	Wayne Weston
845 New Road	4	Talbot
A portion of 715 New Road	3	Kohlman
A portion of 261 New Road	2	Trickle
A portion of 285 New Road	2	Johnson

An opportunity exists to connect these assets together. The landfill parcel extends to the Farmington River. A two-acre island in the area is partially owned by the Town.

- Fisher Farm river trail:

The Town has received a grant in the amount of \$24,000 to construct the first phase of a three-phase project. Phase I includes a trail from Old Farms Road south along the Farmington River to the Farmington Town line. Phase II will include an extension into Farmington, crossing Tillotson Road then northerly following the abandoned Farmington Valley Canal to Old Farms Road. Phase III will include the reconstruction of a brownstone bridge used to carry canal boats across Thompson Brook.

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- Sconsett Point north to Simsbury Town line along the Farmington River.
- Hazen Park to Heublein Tower:

There is an opportunity to link Hazen Park to the Heublein Tower in Bloomfield. Coordination with the State Department of Environmental Protection will be required.



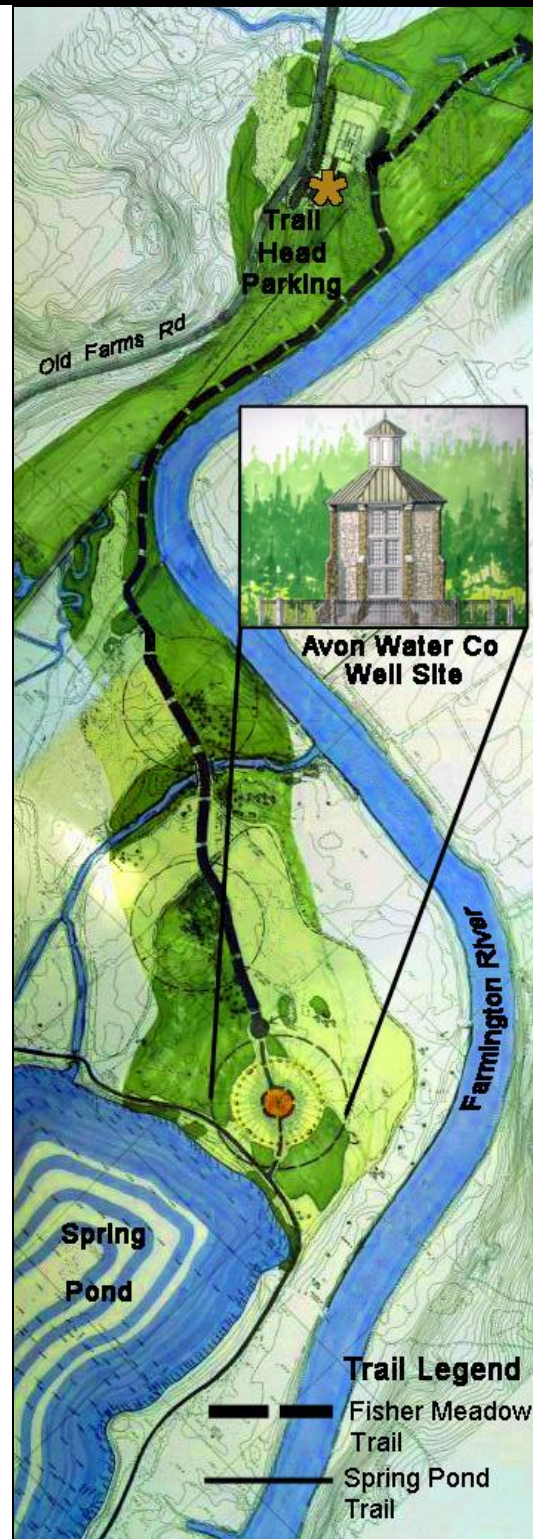
Trail at Fisher Meadows

## New Trail Access Locations

- Found Land from an extension of Lofgren Road: Over ½ mile of frontage with access to the Found Land.
- East side of New Road at the North end of the Buckingham Subdivision.
- East side of Old Farms Road at northerly entrance to Fisher Meadows.



Fisher Meadows Parking and Access Area



Fisher Meadow Well Site Trail Completed 2005

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### TDR and TRD

Two techniques aimed at preserving open space known as TDR and TRD should be considered. Transfer of Development Rights, or TDR, permits an opportunity for a real estate developer to purchase the development rights a particular piece of property has under conventional zoning and add those to another parcel where the construction will occur. The Commission designates on a map those areas suitable for higher density development (Transfer in Zones) and those targeted for preservation (Transfer out Zones). A variation of this concept known as Transfer of Residential Density (TRD) reduces complexities somewhat by making it possible for a single developer to purchase 2 parcels and transfer the development rights from one parcel to another. The sale of development rights between parties is eliminated. The Avon Center Study (Section 8.0 Recommendations) identifies several parcels of land which may be suitable for higher density development. Regulations could be created which would allow a potential real estate developer to earn the ability to develop a higher density (in excess of the as-of-right density) by transferring density from another parcel. This would result in a new housing project which is consistent with the Commission's future land use strategies and have the added benefit of preserving a tract of open space.

### Recreation

Avon has extensive recreation facilities used for active recreation including ball fields, playgrounds, and tennis and basketball courts, as well as a newly constructed swimming pool, bathhouse, and tot pool. The most recent acquisition has been the 18-acre Buckingham ball field complex. This includes a major-league-sized baseball field and 2 soccer fields. A master plan for this facility has been provided and includes the addition of a handicapped accessible playground, tennis, basketball, and volleyball courts. This plan is shown in **Figure 5.1**. **Table 5.4** shows there are opportunities to add ball fields at Fisher Meadows, Fisher Farm, and Alsop Meadows. **Map 6** also highlights these areas. The municipal solid waste area of the Huckleberry Hill landfill has been closed since 1994. There may be opportunities for active recreation in this area. These areas will accommodate the Town's needs for active recreation at full buildout.

Table 5.4 Town Owned Open Space (Potential for Ball Field Expansion)	
Town Parks	Locations for Expansion
Fisher Meadows	North of existing fields
Fisher Farm	Old Farms Road opposite main parking area at Fisher Meadows and along east side of Tillotson Road
Alsop Meadows	Entire parcel

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Fisher Pond



Dock at Spring Pond



Soccer Fields at Fisher Meadows



Aerial Photo of Fisher Meadows

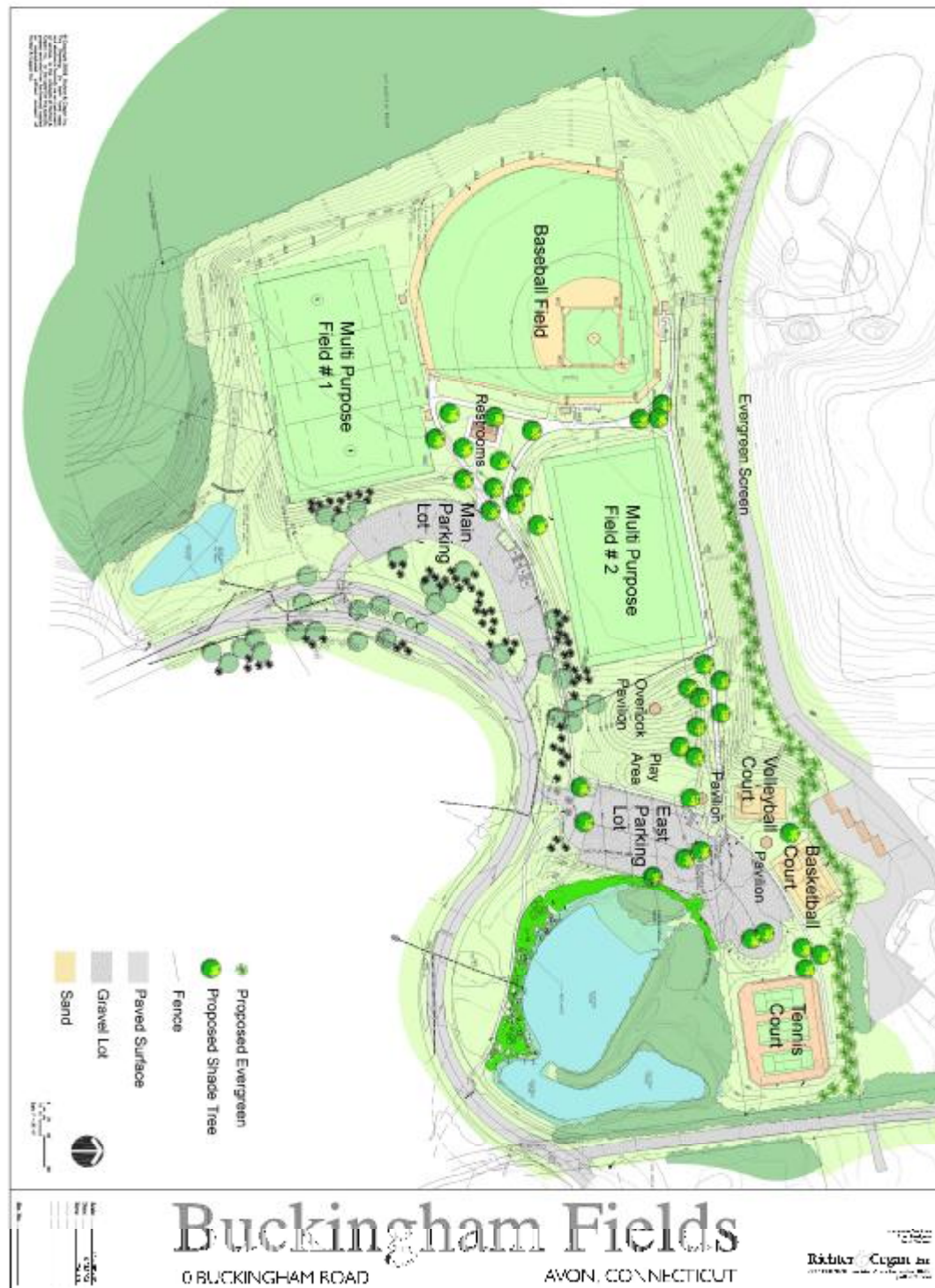


Parking at Buckingham Fields



Construction of Buckingham Fields

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**Figure 5.1** Buckingham Fields Master Plan

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### National Scenic Trail Study

In December 2002, the President signed Public Law 107-388 directing the National Park Service to study the Metacomet-Monadnock-Mattabesett Trail system in Connecticut and Massachusetts for possible inclusion in the National Trails System through designation as a National Scenic Trail. This trail stretches nearly 200 miles across Connecticut and Massachusetts with a small portion located atop Avon Mountain on the West Hartford Town line. As depicted on **Map 6**, a small portion lies within Avon, it is important to maintain the linkage of the trail system to protect its integrity. Informal meetings with stakeholders commenced in the Fall of 2003 and a draft report with findings and recommendations are proposed for the Fall of 2004. The final study report will be released following the public comment period.



Metacomet-Monadnock-Mattabesett Trail

### Goals and Policies

#### Goal:

Maintain sufficient open space in order to preserve community character and quality of life in Avon, to assist in managing significant fragile natural systems, and to preserve areas for passive and active recreation. Develop and maintain adequate recreational facilities for Avon's growing population.

#### Policies:

1. Conserve natural and scenic resources.
2. Continue the policy of creating open space corridors to connect larger open space tracts of land. Develop a more extensive trail network with the opportunities outlined in this chapter.
3. Protect streams and water supplies, as well as wetlands and floodplains.
4. Preserve an open space corridor along the entire Farmington River as shown on **Map 6**.
5. Increase the required open space dedication in subdivisions from the current five percent and fee to ten percent. This is consistent with Connecticut General Statutes regarding payment of fee in lieu of open space.
6. Manage neighborhood parks, forests and other open spaces to enhance their value to the public. Continue the Town's program of selective cutting and invest the proceeds from timber sales into trail construction.

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7. Continue to enhance opportunities for public recreation.
8. Preserve historic sites and cultural resources.
9. Continue the policy of acquiring key open space parcels through fee simple purchase or purchase of development rights. These parcels are identified in **Table 5.3**. Thirty four parcels are listed. In some instances the recommendation is to purchase a portion of one of these parcels.
10. Continue to seek state and federal funds to acquire open space. The Commission should continue to be selective regarding the quality and usefulness of the open space dedicated through the subdivision process. Priority should be given to acquisition of open space that would connect immediately, or in the future, with existing open space assets and land which has the ability to be used for active recreation without the need for a significant amount of regrading.
11. The Town should preserve open space in the following ways listed in order of priority:
  - a. Acquire fee simple rights.
  - b. Acquire development rights.
  - c. Acquisition of public easements.
  - d. Deed restriction.
12. Inform residents of the available recreational opportunities in town. Work with the Recreation Department to create a single publication highlighting all Town parks and significant open space assets. Include maps of hiking trails.
13. Continue to expand Avon's trail network, especially along the Farmington River and Talcott Mountain.
14. Add additional active recreation fields at Fisher Meadows, Fisher Farm, and Alsop Meadows as needed.
15. Implement the master plan for the Buckingham Recreation Area.
16. Utilize TDR or TRD as an additional means to preserve meaningful areas of open space.



Countryside Park