

10.3.07

To: Hallowell Comprehensive Planning Committee

From: Hallowell Conservation Commission (HCC) Open Space Planning Working Group

Re: OSP concerns for Hallowell west of the highway

Thank you for the opportunity to highlight a few of the concerns that have risen to the top as we have met with Hallowell citizens in the last few months. Our focus tonight is on the area of the City that is west of I-95. All of these concerns and more will be included in the draft Open Space plan, which will be posted on our website in the near future.

Watershed protection needs to be improved.

Concerns: Most of Hallowell west of I-95 drains into the Vaughan Brook-Bombahook Stream watershed. This series of wetlands, brooks and streams provides wildlife habitat including a native brook trout fishery, flood control, and scenic views, especially as it ultimately courses through the Vaughan Woods. It is a small water system, and easily degraded. According to the DEP, Hallowell must upgrade its Shoreland Zoning regulations by July 1, 2008 to reflect changes in state minimum guidelines. However, the minimum guidelines will not protect most of the Vaughan Brook watershed. Also, recently the City was not prepared to take advantage of mitigation opportunities which could have paid landowners to improve and/or protect wetlands.

Recommendations: The City's Shoreland Zoning regulations will be revised to include in the shoreland zone water resources beyond the state minimum guidelines, such as tributaries, intermittent streams and wetlands. The HCC will pursue funding for an expert to verify and map the water resources which should be covered by these guidelines. Temporary and permanent Best Management Practices for non-point pollution (e.g. stormwater runoff during and after construction, winter sanding practices, etc.) will be adopted, and low-impact development encouraged when possible. The HCC will work with willing landowners to prioritize wetland areas for mitigation. The City will notify the HCC when mitigation opportunities are presented.

Development done poorly will impact the environment for years to come.

Concerns: There may only be a narrow window of opportunity to work with willing landowners to establish development patterns that are fair to landowners while protecting Hallowell's environment and special character. The Open Space process revealed that the community strongly values the rural character of Hallowell west of the highway. Beginning with Habitat, a state program, has identified many of the hayfields and grasslands as significant habitat for declining species. The wetlands and streams have many values described above. Development done poorly will lead to sprawl, degrade the environment and cost landowners and taxpayers more in the long run.

Recommendations: Zoning and development decisions will be based on suitability, minimize impact on open space, and preserve rural character while respecting the rights and needs of landowners. An analysis of land suitability for development and conservation will be conducted, with a build-out analysis of alternative land use patterns as a foundation for evaluating optimal land use strategies for the rural area. Flexible, creative land use management approaches will be considered such as conservation subdivisions, density credit trading, low impact site development, and incentives to

achieve development and conservation goals. The City Council will establish a fund for land acquisition/protection. Capitalization options include impact fees, grants, profits from sale of non-useful city owned land, a bond issue, and / or donations.

As an alternative to traditional zoning the HCC is willing to offer assistance to a group of willing rural landowners and seek funding for the development of a “master plan” for their collective properties to achieve mutual conservation and development objectives.

Priority areas for protection identified.

Concern: There is a significant amount of unfragmented wildlife habitat between Jamies Pond Wildlife Management Area and the City Forest/ City Recreation Area (the Res) that is also adjacent to undeveloped land in Manchester. This area is a high priority for protection, primarily for wildlife and secondarily for human recreation.

Recommendation: Any zoning and ordinance changes will be done with this goal in mind. The Conservation Commission will work with willing landowners, using a variety of options, to protect a significant amount of this present open space.

The Res requires renewed attention.

Concern: The Res (City Forest/City Recreation area) is the largest city-owned open space dedicated to public use. Usage has increased and will continue to increase, especially as certain activities are curtailed at the Vaughan Woods. Facilities are in need of maintenance and trails need to be designated and maintained to accommodate a variety of recreational pursuits while minimizing environmental impact. It is important to build and maintain good relations with neighboring landowners as recreational use increases in this area. Three plans related to this resource have been developed in the last 20 years, but responsibility for implementing the plans is diffuse.

Recommendation: The City will establish a functional entity, perhaps a steering committee, to coordinate maintenance, improvements and protection at the Res and develop an annual budget. The Tree Board, Conservation Commission, Recreation Committee and Public Works Department are likely candidates for this effort. The Water District may want to be involved as well.

Working with our neighbors will bring benefits.

Concerns: This is a concern on two levels, working with our neighbors in Hallowell, and working with Hallowell’s neighboring communities. Good ordinances are fine, but the most effective environmental protection will come from the actions of willing landowners and residents with good information. Neighboring communities can impact us with bad decisions and vice versa. They also present us with opportunities to maximize open space, including wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities.

Recommendations: In all efforts cultivate collaborative cooperative relationships within our community and with our neighboring communities. Hallowell will make a commitment to notify neighbors and neighboring communities and provide them an opportunity for input when zoning, ordinance or development changes might impact them, and encourage neighboring communities to do the same. The City will budget for expenses for education regarding new guidelines or ordinances. The HCC will work with neighboring communities to identify opportunities to maximize open space protection.