

# OPEN SPACE & RECREATION

In Barre, open space and recreation assets are a substantial part of the town's identity. Barre residents value opportunities to interact with the natural environment, some citing open space as the reason why they moved to town.

The following chapter provides key findings and recommendations related to human interaction with the natural environment, including trails, waterways, fields, and parks. All recommendations align with the vision for Barre's recreation offerings in the town's 2021 Open Space and Recreation Plan.

This chapter recommends focusing resources on improvements to existing assets and coordinating volunteer and partner energy towards priority projects.

## THEMES

- Maintaining recreation assets
- Expanding trail connections
- Increasing capacity for open space programming and communications



*Photo source: Melissa Bonefant*



# OPEN SPACE & RECREATION DEFINITIONS

## *Active Recreation*

Active recreation refers to activities that require physical exertion or team organization. Examples include recreation occurring on sports fields and playgrounds.

## *CMMPO*

The Central Massachusetts Metropolitan Planning Organization is responsible for preparing and updating the Long Range Transportation Plan (LRTP), Transportation Improvement Plan (TIP), Unified Planning Work Program (UPWP), and the Public Outreach Program (POP) for the Central Massachusetts region.

## *LAND*

The Local Acquisition for Natural Diversity (LAND) grant program is facilitated by the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. The grant program helps municipalities acquire land for conservation and passive recreation purposes.

## *Open Space*

Open space refers to undeveloped land, typically owned by the local, state, or federal government, a non-profit such as a land trust, or a publicly accessible parcel of land under a development restriction used for passive and/or active recreation.

## *PARC*

The Parkland Acquisitions and Renovations for Communities (PARC) grant program is facilitated by the Massachusetts Division of Conservation Services to assist municipalities in acquiring and developing land for park and outdoor recreation purposes. Grant funding can be used to acquire parkland, build a new park, or renovate an existing park.

## *Passive Recreation*

Passive recreation refers to low-intensity activities that require little to no development. Examples include hiking, picnicking, and bird watching.

Photo source: Michelle Biron



# OPEN SPACE & RECREATION PRIORITIES

*Invest in open space and recreation assets to improve quality of life*

Playgrounds, fields, trails, and water access all shape Barre's rural charm and pace of life. Investments in these offerings can have ripple effects for local business, community, and resident satisfaction.

*Expand current open space offerings for residents and visitors*

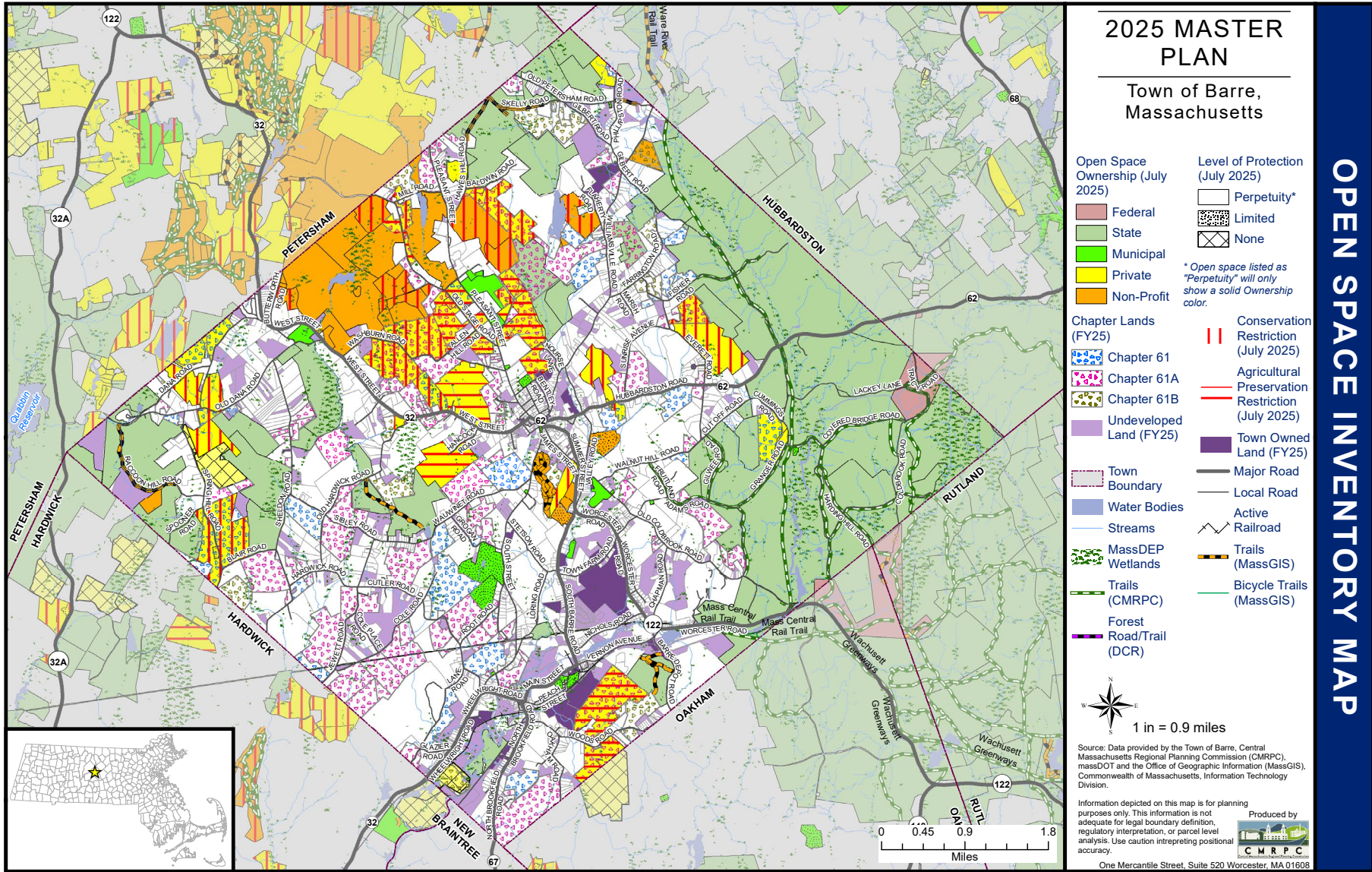
Barre residents value current open space offerings and desire more formal opportunities to engage in active and passive recreation. An expansion of offerings, including organized programming and maintenance of public areas is highly desired.



Photo source: Hai Vy Nguyen

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**OPEN SPACE INVENTORY MAP**

Date: 10/24/2025 Document Path: H:\Projects\01\_Barre\_GIS\Subprojects\m21\_master\_plan\m21\_11\_OpenSpace\_11x17.mxd

Figure OS1: Open Space Inventory

# OPEN SPACE & RECREATION FINDINGS

## *Barre's Top Strength is Natural Beauty and Open Space*

As emphasized in the Economic Development chapter, Barre's assets in natural beauty and open space attract residents and tourists alike to the area. While the Economic Development chapter focuses on indirect returns from tourists to small businesses, this chapter focuses on quality of life for residents. Barre is home to numerous treasured assets, including the Ware River, Barre State Forest, Cooks Canyon, and three wildlife management areas.

Figure OS1 displays acres protected in perpetuity through deed restrictions and limited protection through Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B. Some land is designated under both conservation restriction and a Chapter program.

## *Barre's Built Amenities for Recreation Require Restoration*

Open-ended survey responses and anecdotal data show a common desire to better manage upkeep and restoration of playgrounds, fields, and publicly accessible open space. Specifically, Miller's Beach and Felton

Name	Managing Agency	Current Use
Barre Plains Common	Parks and Recreation Committee	Monument, green space
Nornay Park	South Barre Common Committee	Bandstand, monument, green space
Town Common	Town Common Committee	Bandstand, monument, green space
Felton Field	Felton Field Committee	A historic fairground with 19th-century exhibition hall, tennis courts, basketball court, baseball diamond, recreation fields, horseback riding ring, and a pavilion
Powder Mill Pond/Miller's Beach	Parks and Recreation Committee	Green space, picnicking
Rice Park	Parks and Recreation Committee	Basketball courts, play equipment
Rockingstone Park	Parks and Recreation Committee	A historic spot offering hiking and mountain biking, among other recreational activities. Unmarked and indistinguishable from nearby residential properties.
Unnamed Barre Plains Baseball Field	Parks and Recreation Committee	Baseball diamond
Thorng Field/High Plains playground	Parks and Recreation Committee	Soccer field and playground

Figure OS2: Open Space Assets. Source: 2021 Open Space and Recreation Plan

	Extremely Important	Somewhat Important	Neither Important nor Unimportant	Somewhat Unimportant	Unimportant
Open space and passive recreation (e.g., fields, trails)	63%	26%	6%	2%	2%
Active recreation (e.g., sports fields, playgrounds)	49%	37%	12%	2%	2%

Figure OS3: Survey Question: "To what extent do you think the following issues are important to Barre?"  
Source: 2023 Community Survey (some answer options not shown for clarity)

Field were mentioned as priority areas. Figure OS2 shows a longer list of open space assets enjoyed by Barre residents and managed by town committees.

## *Residents View Open Space and Recreation as a Cultural Identity and a Path Forward*

Figure OS3 from the 2023 Community Survey shows 63% of residents listed "open space and passive recreation" as an extremely important issue in Barre. Many residents stated anecdotally during the 2023 Community Workshop and open-ended survey responses that the recreational offerings in town were



a significant factor in the choice to settle down in Barre.

Figure OS4 from the 2023 Community Workshop outlines community priorities for open space and recreation spending. Improving existing town-owned recreation facilities and open space was ranked more favorably than expanding town-owned resources and preserving more land. This finding heavily affects the recommendations of this chapter.

In addition to locations, community members were also asked to rank their preferred activities in the 2023 Community Survey. Hiking trails, canoe/kayak locations, and playgrounds were ranked most favorable for future support and expansion. Barre residents tended to be more in favor of passive recreation offerings rather than more guided active recreation, such as tennis or pickleball courts.

	Extremely Agree	Somewhat Agree	Neither Agree Nor Disagree	Somewhat Disagree	Extremely Disagree
Barre should focus on improving existing town-owned recreation facilities and open space.	57%	33%	8%	1%	0%
Barre should focus on expanding connections for walking and bike trails as well as sidewalks.	42%	37%	14%	4%	3%
More land in Barre should be protected (by non-profits, the state, the federal government, or the town) and preserved for open space.	37%	30%	18%	5%	10%
Barre should dedicate more land to passive recreational uses (e.g., trails or picnic areas).	35%	37%	18%	6%	4%
Loss of protected open spaces and biohabitats is a significant concern in Barre.	34%	29%	23%	7%	7%
Barre should dedicate more land to active recreational uses (e.g., playgrounds or ballfields).	26%	35%	24%	9%	6%

Figure OS4: Workshop Poll: "To what extent do you agree or disagree with the following statements about natural resources and open space and recreation?" Source: 2023 Community Workshop

Recreational Opportunities	Response
Hiking Trails	62%
Canoe/Kayak Locations	52%
Playgrounds	46%
Public Swimming Pool	40%
Dedicated Bike Routes	40%
Winter Activities	37%
Public Fishing Access	36%
Picnic Areas	34%
Dog Parks	34%
Indoor Sports Facilities	30%
Ice Skating	28%
Hunting	28%
Athletic Fields	22%
Skateboarding	22%
Pickleball Courts	16%
Tennis Courts	15%
Equestrian Amenities	12%
Other	12%

Figure OS5: Survey Question: "Which of the following recreational opportunities would you like to see more of in Barre?" Source: 2023 Community Workshop



# GOAL 1: PRIORITIZE PLAYGROUND AND FIELD QUALITY.

Community engagement for the Master Plan initiative ranks prioritizing playground and field quality above other open space and recreation opportunities (Figure OS4). Recent renovation of the High Plains playground has been widely appreciated, becoming a site of local pride. The following five recommended action items are derived from the top areas for improvement from the Master Plan workshop and survey. Similar to the High Plains playground renovation, there are numerous grant programs available to support playground and open space improvements.



Photo source: CMRPC

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## STRATEGY 1.1: UPDATE PLAYGROUND AND RECREATIONAL FIELD INFRASTRUCTURE.

Felton Field has tremendous opportunity as a historic fairground to share local history. Efforts can continue to maintain the available baseball diamonds, tennis courts, and basketball court. There is opportunity to expand offerings and potentially reinvigorate the fairground.

Rice Park's positioning next to town-owned parking and central to many residential homes sets this location as a prime area to re-imagine the playground and reboot local maintenance. There is also

the opportunity to host historical information signage at this location. Residents recommend re-installing the climbing wall and adding a swing set.

Located on Wheelwright Road near the old fire station, Barre Plains Ballfield is popular with local sport leagues. Additional grass and fertilizer for the field, bleachers, dugouts, lighting, and options for soccer are popular suggestions for amenities. Parents voiced concerns with traffic speeds when walking to parking across the street. A crosswalk, paired with traffic calming measures such as road narrowing, sidewalks, and bump-outs, can support safety. Additional parking could also be created on the fire station parcel.





- 1.1.1. Renovate and expand Felton Field.
- 1.1.2. Overhaul Rice Park.
- 1.1.3. Explore additional amenities at Barre Plains Ballfield.

- 1.2.1. Improve Miller's Beach access.
- 1.2.2. Explore additional amenities at Nornay Park. See 1.3.2 in Services and Facilities.

### STRATEGY 1.2: INCREASE AMENITIES AT WELL- USED RECREATION SITES.

The 2021 Open Space and Recreation Plan lists concerns with Miller's Beach water quality as the reason for closure, yet no water quality tests have been completed. Next steps to evaluate if the pond could be reopened for public swimming are recommended in the Natural and Cultural Resources Chapter (Strategy 2.1). In the short term, improvements to the beach area are desired. Increased trash management, signage, maintenance, and amenities can improve the use of the beach.

The 2021 Local Rapid Recovery Plan recommends continuing recent momentum at Nornay Park. Suggestions include portable comfort stations and additional amenities like a snack stand to make concert series and public events more enjoyable. The South Barre Common Committee has been integral in supporting this area and increasing neighborhood pride.



# GOAL 2: SUPPORT ACCESS TO TRAILS.

There is some potential for formal trail expansion in Barre, especially in the South Barre neighborhood. However, there is tremendous opportunity to improve the existing trails network (Figure OS6) through low-cost, low-labor improvements, including marketing, signage, and parking area amenities. In addition to supporting quality of life for residents, trails are a great draw for day visitors who can in turn support local businesses.



Photo source: Zachary Finne  
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## STRATEGY 2.1: FORMALIZE TRAIL EXPANSION AND ACCESS TO WATERWAYS.

The Commonwealth published a state-wide feasibility plan to extend the Mass Central Rail Trail west to east.<sup>44</sup> The Barre portion is proposed to run south of the Ware River. The proposed section includes some existing trail, some public property, and some private property. Expansion through Barre would require technical assistance from the CMMPO to align regional efforts.

The South Barre Village Plan suggests building formal canoe/kayak launches along the Ware River, including parking amenities.

- 2.1.1. Seek technical assistance to expand the Mass Central Rail Trail (MCRT) through Barre.
- 2.1.2. Commission a study to under-

stand river flow, level, culverts or road impediments, and protected areas for canoe/kayak launches and paths through the Ware River.

Existing Trails
Mid-State Trail (Barre Falls Dam)
Wachusett Greenway
Prince River Preserve
Cook's Canyon Wildlife Sanctuary
Rutland Brook Wildlife Sanctuary
Town Farm Hill
Barre State Forest
Ware River Trails (Granger Road)
Potential Trails
Mass Central Rail Trail

Figure OS6: Trails

<sup>44</sup> Massachusetts Department of Transportation <https://www.mass.gov/lists/mass-central-rail-trail-feasibility>



## STRATEGY 2.2: OPTIMIZE TRAILS AS A CULTURAL IDENTITY.

There is interest to expand programming and maintenance of the Prince Walker Burial Ground. However, due to historical importance, wider public access should be explored with caution. More information can be found in the Natural and Cultural Resources chapter under Strategy 1.2.

Trail mapping in Barre can be pieced together from state and private sources, including TrailForks and the Mass Trail Tracker. A town-led volunteer effort to map all local trails and create marketing brochures and online resources would encourage visitation to local trails and avoid confusion on-site. All trail mapping should consider trail ownership, parcel rules, and emergency service connections.

- 2.2.1. Connect trail expansions to historical connections, such as the Prince Walker Burial Ground.
- 2.2.2. Create a comprehensive trails map and market trails through paper and online resources. See 1.3.4 in Economic Development.

# GOAL 3: REIGNITE CAPACITY IN BARRE FOR OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION VOLUNTEER WORK.

The Town of Barre relies heavily on volunteer efforts to supplement staff resources for maintenance, ongoing management, and event planning. Effective volunteer coordination requires strong communication to and from staff, board, and committee members to ensure volunteer time is used appropriately. In addition to local volunteer resources, Barre can continue to utilize regional and state partners and grant programs to augment the town budget.

## STRATEGY 3.1: ALIGN PARTNERS AND GRANT OPPORTUNITIES TO IMPLEMENT RECREATION IMPROVEMENTS.

Barre has numerous local, regional, and statewide partners to fill gaps in town staff capacity. The following list includes some options for implementing this chapter and sustaining good parks and ongoing programming:

- East Quabbin Land Trust
- Mass Audubon
- New England Mountain Bike Association
- Central Mass Rail Trail
- Wachusett Greenways
- Chicopee Four Rivers
- MassWildlife

- South Barre Common Committee
- Felton Field Commission
- Friends of the Ware River Advisory Committee
- Department of Conservation and Recreation

CMRPC has assisted the Town of Barre in previous years for open space and recreation grant administration, such as the PARC grant for the High Plains playground. Continuing to utilize grant opportunities at the federal and state level will assist with implementation of this chapter.

- 3.1.1. Strengthen partnerships with local and regional resources such as Land Trusts and State agencies for maintenance and funding.

- 3.1.2. Activate partners and recurring grant opportunities like the PARC grant.

## STRATEGY 3.2: INCREASE VOLUNTEER CAPACITY FOR OPEN SPACE IMPROVEMENTS AND PROGRAMMING.

The Open Space Committee is currently inactive in the Town of Barre. If reactivated, this committee could assist in implementation of the 2021 Open Space and Recreation Plan as well as this Master Plan initiative. Recruitment of new members may be needed. Parks and recreation committees can become self-sustaining through careful



planning and paid programming. Although this is a large undertaking for a volunteer force, this strategy suggests an increase in recreational programming does not need to come from the town budget. Barre Youth Soccer and Quabbin Youth Soccer are local examples.

- 3.2.1. Activate the Open Space Committee (2021 Open Space and Recreation Plan).
- 3.2.2. Assess options for self-sufficient recreational programming, such as sport leagues.

