The important natural and cultural resources of our watersheds require protection. Drinking water supplies, working farms and forest lands, wetlands, lakes, streams, unique habitats, wildlife corridors and historic sites are assets which sustain and enrich our lives. They define our community character and give us our sense of place. How can these valuable lands be protected?

First, look at your community from the standpoint of the resources that should be protected, that is, its "green infrastructure" – the kinds of items listed above. Most land uses are governed by the template of local zoning. Change the template to first examine the natural resources and cultural resources, and fit the land uses allowed by zoning into the landscape.

Plan for open space



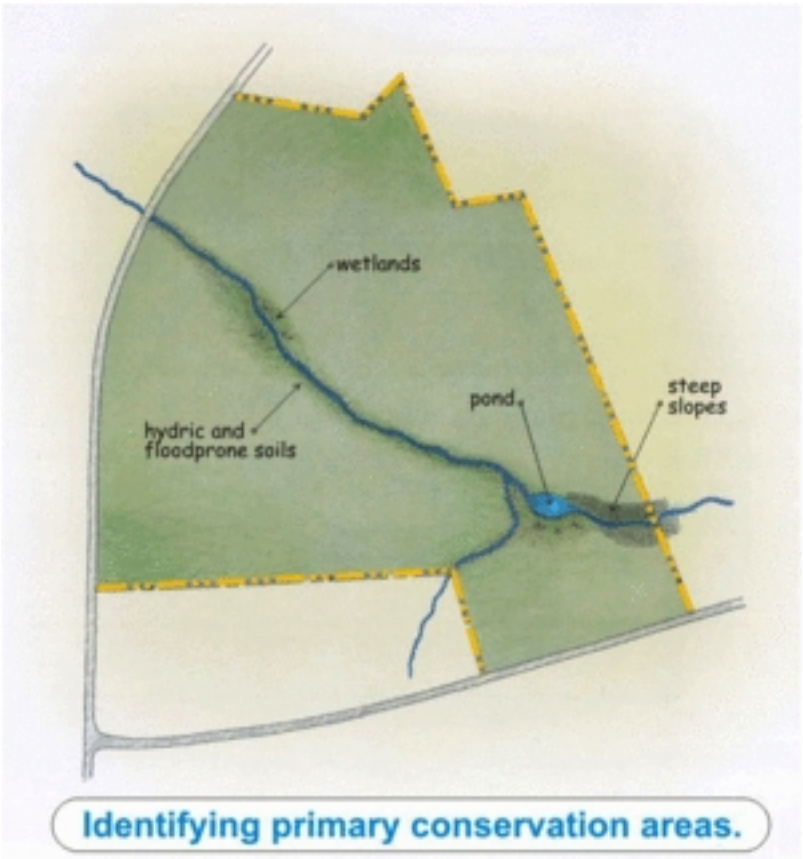
Site before development.

(From MA EOEEA Division of Conservation Services Smart Growth/Smart Energy Toolkit and Arendt, Randall, 1996. *Conservation Design for Subdivisions,* Washington DC: Island Press.)

Planning for open space and recreation provides the opportunity to assess where you are, where you would like to go and how you might get there, before a development boom catches you off guard. Planning now to protect important open space and recreational facilities can greatly enhance the attractiveness of your community and encourage careful growth in the future. To obtain the benefits of development without damaging valued assets, you must plan how your community uses its land. Planning addresses many aspects of the town's future

development in a way that preserves, protects, and enhances the environment. The planning process can alert you to potential problems while there is still time to prevent them.

Open Space and Recreation Plans



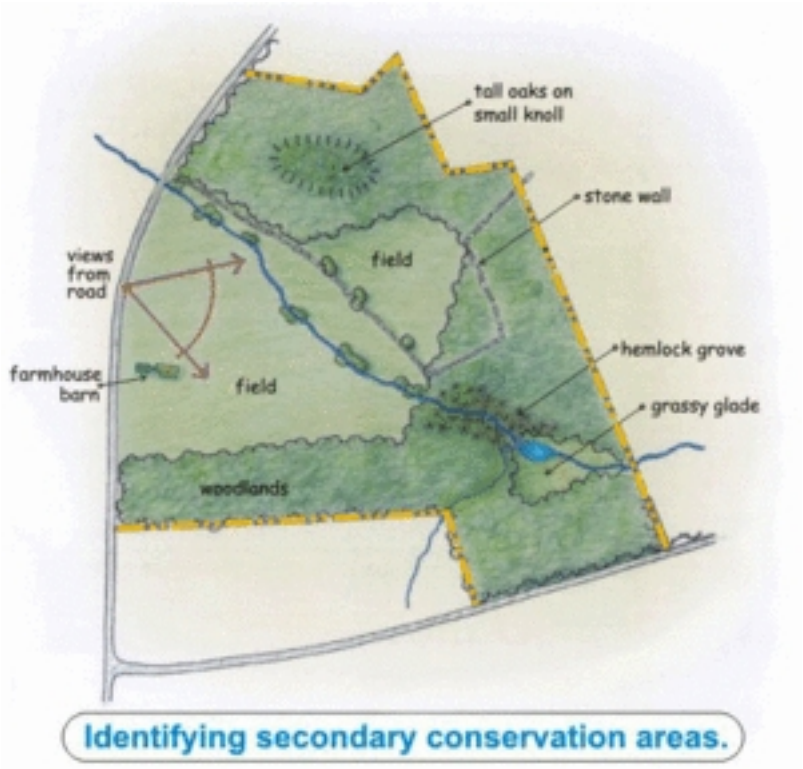
Identifying primary conservation areas.

Municipalities in Massachusetts are required to prepare Open Space and Recreation Plans to submit to the Division of Conservation Services. Approved plans allow communities to be eligible for state funding for the purchase of open space. Plans are prepared by town Open Space Committees and provide the opportunity for the community to preserve important resources.

An Open Space and Recreation Plan allows a municipality to maintain and enhance all the benefits of open space that together define the character of the community and help communities protect their green infrastructure. Planning this green infrastructure of water supply land, working farms and forests, viable wildlife habitats, parks, recreation areas, trails, and greenways is as important to the economic future of a community as planning for schools, roads, water, and wastewater infrastructure.

For more information about Open Space and Recreation Plans visit the MA Division of Conservation Services website...

Conservation Subdivision/Open Space Residential Design



Many communities strive to purchase important lands or protect them with conservation easements. Often this protection is achieved with the aid of land trusts, private fund raising, outright gifts of land, government grants, municipal funds or a combination of these. The Massachusetts Watershed Coalition works with municipalities, land trusts, government agencies and citizens to assist in land purchases to permanently protect valuable watershed resources.

Few communities have sufficient financial resources to permanently protect all the land that they wish to conserve, and development on these lands is inevitable. In Massachusetts over 16,000 acres of open space are developed each year, much of it as residential sprawl.

Conservation subdivision or Open Space Residential Design (OSRD) offers an opportunity for communities to allow future development to preserve essential open spaces. The conservation subdivision or OSRD approach begins with site planning which focuses on community resources to be preserved; identifies building areas which enable economically and ecologically sound development; and uses design techniques to reduce impervious cover and the impacts to water quantity and quality. These low impact design methods include clustering, permeable surfaces, reduced roadway pavement widths, and the preservation of natural drainage ways.

Most conservation subdivisions permanently protect a significant portion, often 30% to 70%, of the site. These lands are placed under a conservation easement and may provide public access, allow farming and forestry, protect drinking water supplies, rare habitats and serve as wildlife corridors. In short, OSRD can be an important tool for maintaining a community's green infrastructure.

(MA EOEEA Smart Growth/Smart Energy Toolkit)

Conservation Subdivision/Open Space Residential Design Bylaws



Site with conservation design.

A clearly written OSRD bylaw will facilitate flexible development and protection of green spaces. Provisions of an OSRD bylaw should build upon and borrow from existing zoning and subdivision requirements in a way that encourages collaboration between the developer and local boards and that does not burden the developer's site planning efforts. An OSRD bylaw may allow density bonuses or other incentives for affordable housing and protection of historic

sites.

A model bylaw is available in the MA Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs Smart Growth/Smart Energy Toolkit. The Massachusetts Watershed Coalition can assist towns to tailor this model bylaw to address local conditions and needs.

Costs of Conservation Subdivisions/OSRDs

OSRD saves money for both developers and municipalities by reducing the cost of installing and maintaining conventional infrastructure, such as unnecessarily wide paved streets and stormwater management practices that collect and pipe runoff away from the site. Since OSRD designs with the terrain, land with environmental constraints is removed from the developable area, and a minimum amount of clearing and grading is required.

OSRD adds valuable amenities that can enhance marketing and sale prices, according to the National Association of Home Builders Research Center. OSRD subdivisions in Massachusetts have appreciated faster and have resale values above those in conventional subdivisions. This increase in value is the direct result of greater site amenities including open space, views, and preservation of historic resources.