



Questions and Answers about the Town of Harpswell Open Space Plan

Q: The Town recently approved an update to the Comprehensive Plan that discussed open space. Why do we need an Open Space Plan?

A: The Future Land Use section of the Comprehensive Plan called for the development of an Open Space Plan. The Conservation Commission was asked to work on a Plan. The Plan will be presented for the Townspeople's approval at Town Meeting in March 2009.

Q: How will I benefit from the Open Space Plan?

A: The majority of people in Harpswell like our town the way it is and do not want it to change. However, we have built an average of 42 new homes a year over the last five years. If this continues over a period of ten to twenty years or more, Harpswell will change dramatically. An Open Space plan will assist us in preserving the natural and scenic beauty and character of Harpswell as we continue to grow and make it a desirable place to live for our children and grandchildren. If we implement the Plan, we will continue to have recreational resources in town for boating, fishing, hunting,

swimming, hiking, and picnicking, as well as clean water to drink and wild animals and birds to enjoy.

Q: I am a fisherman/lobsterman/clammer. How will the Open Space Plan benefit me?

A: The fishing industry is the core of the local economy in Harpswell. The Open Space Plan outlines strategies to protect our water resources that are essential for a healthy marine economy. Our coastal marshes provide the nursery beds that are used by 60% of our commercial fish species in their life cycle. Our wetlands recharge our ground water supply and filter the water that flows into our bays. Clean marshes and wetlands result in open clam-flats and unpolluted marine waters.

Q: Will the Town take away my land or restrict the use of my land as a result of this Plan?

A: No. Most of the open space in Harpswell is owned by private individuals who have chosen to keep their land undeveloped. The Town recognizes that privately owned property may be the principal asset of its owners. In addition, it may have significant historical value to families. The Plan calls for voluntary actions and the use of tax incentives to help preserve the undeveloped land in town. For those who want to keep their open space, we can work together to achieve that goal, not just preserving open space but helping to protect our marine economy for future generations.

Q: What is the impact of approval of the plan?

A: The Plan provides us with a roadmap for future actions to protect open space. If the Plan is approved in March 2009, an Open Space Plan Implementation Committee will be appointed to implement the suggestions outlined in the plan. The Committee will

solicit ongoing input from the public to develop programs to educate residents about conservation measures to protect our water resources, as well as to acquire land for public use. Any land purchased by the Town for open space or future changes in land ordinances to protect open space will need to be voted on by the voters in future town meetings.

Q: How did you pick the Focus Areas?

A: The Plan identified 12 Focus Areas throughout Harpswell which are valuable to protect as open space. They were chosen principally because they contain important water resources, such as wetlands and coastal marshes, as well as valuable natural wildlife habitat for rare and endangered birds and animals. In addition, both public and expert input was used to choose the areas. Priority was given to areas with existing protected lands and large tracts of lands. Harpswell's islands over one acre, especially those with nesting habitat and/or public access, were also included.

Q: If I am in a Focus Area, will I be restricted from building or developing my land?

A: No. Property owners are free to develop their land as they choose following existing state and town building regulations. The Plan focuses primarily on voluntary efforts to protect open space. If you plan to develop your land, the Town Planner can suggest actions you can take to protect the open space on your property outside the building area. You may also want to consider putting a conservation easement on your land or using tax incentives to protect your land. You can get further information on these possibilities from Carol Tukey, Town Planner.

Q: Will landowners be forced to sell their undeveloped land in the Focus Areas?

A: No. We hope that residents will take advantage of town and state incentives that encourage property owners to protect their open space. Any purchase of land by the Town for open space would only take place with willing sellers at fair market value with the approval of residents at the annual Town Meeting.



Q: Can I use the incentives if I'm not buying or selling my land? How will they help me?

A: The State of Maine has established "current use" programs which offer property owners a reduction in the assessed value of their land for tree growth, farm land, open space and working waterfront land. These programs are available to property owners through an application program through the Town of Harpswell. Please call the Town Assessors Office for more information or see the State of Maine website about current use programs:

<http://www.maine.gov/revenue/propertytax/propertytaxbenefits/CurrentUseLandPrograms.htm>

Q: Why would I want to identify vernal pools? I read in the paper that if they are significant it could devalue my land by restricting development and use.

A: Vernal pools or seasonal pools are temporary bodies of water that fill in the

spring and dry out in the summer. They do not have predatory fish in them. They provide the breeding habitat for frogs and salamanders and are an important part of our natural food chain, not to mention the pleasure of hearing the spring chorus of peepers and wood frogs. Preserving these pools helps protect these neglected species, cleanses the surrounding water and enriches our human experience of nature.

If you have a significant vernal pool (i.e. one of a certain size and number of egg masses) on your property, it is protected by the State of Maine and requires a set back around your vernal pool. Please see <http://maine.gov/dep/blwg/wetlands/vernal.htm> or contact Carol Tukey for more information.

Q: Ok, let's say the Plan is approved. What are you asking me to do?

- A: You can help the Harpswell Conservation Commission in the following ways:
- Help us to identify vernal pools – Watch for information about their importance and communicate with the Town Planner if you know of any such spots on your property. Volunteer to help map the vernal pools in Harpswell in the spring.
 - Consider increasing the value of open areas on your property by using conservation measures, such as maintaining buffer zones along the water and limiting the use of pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers on your lawn and in your garden.
 - Visit Harpswell's protected open space areas that are open to the public and enjoy the trails, beaches, picnicking and boating opportunities. Advocate for continued protection of these valuable resources.



Q: Where can I get more information about the Plan?

A: You can get a copy of the Open Space Plan on the Town of Harpswell website at www.harpswell.maine.gov or by contacting Carol Tukey, Town Planner, at ctukey@town.harpswell.me.us or 207-833-5771. Copies are available for review at the Curtis Memorial, Cundy's Harbor, and Orr's Island Libraries.