

OPEN SPACE AND GREENWAYS

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"The trouble with land is that they're not making it anymore."

Will Rogers

In communities throughout the Northeast taxpayers are supporting local investment to protect open space and improve recreation areas. Open space provides multiple benefits including protection of water supplies, wildlife habitat and wildlife corridors, outdoor recreational opportunities, maintenance of ridgeline views and preserved farm lands. Active recreation areas, such as ball fields, are in great demand as more people of all age groups participate in sports.

Passive recreational uses such as hiking, wetland boardwalk trails, a dog park, cross-country skiing and bird watching trails are desired and are currently very difficult to find on local public lands. Improved access to streams, rivers and other scenic resources are needed and can allow for a different kind of recreational opportunity and encourage a diverse range of activities to occur along those links.

A major goal for Torrington is to connect our open spaces and special places through a river walk, hiking trails, greenways, rail to trails and a rails & trails network. We also need to find funding to support open space initiatives.

Historic cemetery as open space



View from Weigold's Farm (above), School fields as open space (below)



Implement the Naugatuck River Greenway Plan

The Litchfield Hills Council of Elected Officials has developed a Greenway Plan for the Naugatuck River. This Plan has been approved by the Connecticut Department of Environment of Protection. Torrington intends to take steps to acquire land and right-of-way to complete the Plan. The City should also consider using innovative land-use tools to allow property owners to donate their excess land along the Greenway without becoming a zoning non-conformity (through modifications to minimum lot size when land is donated).

Greenways

A greenbelt / greenway is a corridor of open space that:

- may protect natural resources... or offer opportunities for recreation or multi-use (non-motorized transportation),
- may connect existing protected areas and provide access to the outdoors,
- may be located along a defining natural feature, such as a waterway...
- may be a green space along a highway or around a village.

Connecticut General Assembly
Public Act 95-335

Officially Designated Greenways In Torrington

- Naugatuck River Greenway (2006)
- Sue Grossman Still River Greenway (2003)

Open Space Definitions

Conservation Easement – A restriction placed on a piece of property to protect its associated resources. .

Dedicated / Preserved Open Space – Land with certain restrictions or covenants that protect it from development in perpetuity.

Managed Open Space – Land perceived as open space such as golf courses or cemeteries but in fact is not preserved.

Blue-Blazed Trails

See the *Connecticut Walk Book* for a list.

www.ctwoodlands.org

Reinvest in Local Parks and Recreation

Protecting open spaces is good business for a community. Communities that balance development and open space protect the quality of life sought by families and industries looking for a new location to live and work. The City of Torrington's Department of Parks & Recreation has completed a detailed *Parks and Recreation Master Plan* for the City parks in 2004. For more detailed information about specific parks, their uses and development, consult the Master Plan document.

With obesity on the rise nationally and a youthful population leaving the area, efforts should be increased to provide fitness trails and recreational opportunities that appeal to younger people. Rock climbing walls, obstacle courses, roller trails, expanded skate parks and other youth-minded activities should be considered and incorporated in planning when possible.

Increase Urban Open Space

Open space located in more developed urban areas is very important. Passive "pocket parks", planted outdoor dining opportunities, vegetated streetscapes along with small neighborhood parks all add to the quality of life for the urban resident. Creating open space in the core of the city provides refuge to the residents from excessive pavement to relax and play as well as improve water quality and the quality of life in general. As Torrington progresses with its Downtown redevelopment, a strategy should be devised to locate areas for green space and the removal of paved areas in key locations (See Chapter 7).

As Coe Park changes into more of a destination garden, a need arises for an open public park for concerts and active recreation to draw people into a central activity area. The Downtown Municipal Development Plan should locate a possible site, perhaps connecting with the river walk, to provide this much needed active outdoor gathering space.

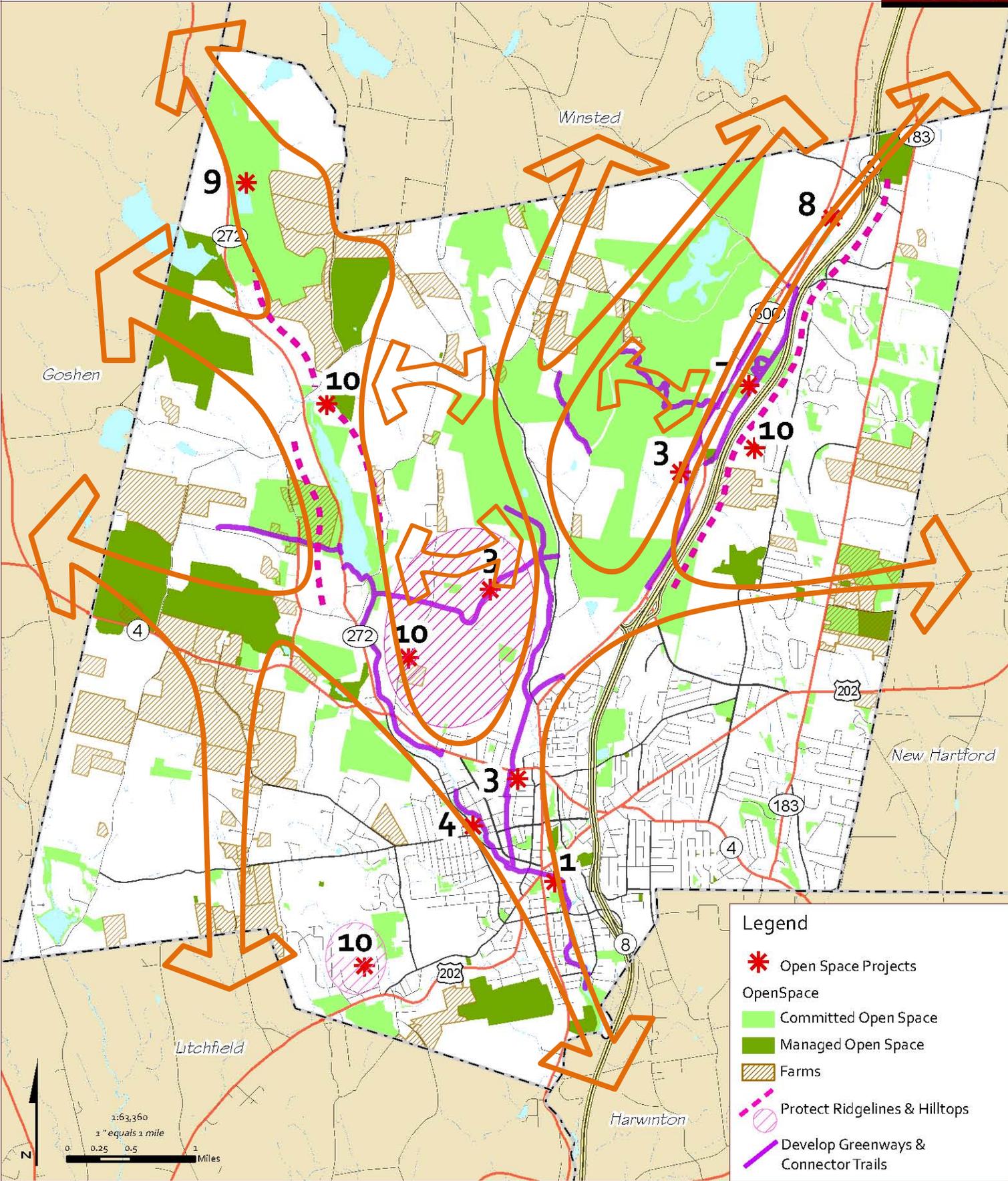
Protect Existing Open Space

Torrington is fortunate to have considerable permanent open space. A 2009 GIS study shows about 23 percent of Torrington's land area was protected open space (including school properties and detention basin areas). As the region's most densely populated community and urban center, Torrington has considerably less open space per capita than other area towns.

The highest concentration of existing open space is in the northern and western sections in large blocks owned by the State and the Torrington Water Company. The Water Company land is not fully protected from development. The City will work with landowners that control land that is managed open space (e.g. golf courses, schools) to find ways to convert this land into protected open space.

The *Open Space Plan* includes an updated map of Torrington's open spaces showing land owned by the State, City, Heritage Land Preservation Trust, conservation easements, private open space, and Water Company owned land. The Plan also illustrates Torrington's top 10 conservation priorities.

OPEN SPACE PLAN



Legend

- Open Space Projects
- OpenSpace**
 - Committed Open Space
 - Managed Open Space
- Farms
- Protect Ridgelines & Hilltops
- Develop Greenways & Connector Trails

Open Space Strategies

RANK	TASK	LOCATION	DESCRIPTION
5-1	Naugatuck River Restoration and River Walk	Naugatuck River through Downtown (Army Corps project area)	Develop a river walk along the banks of the Naugatuck River through Downtown. Remove invasive species from the stream edges, eliminate or reduce the amount of large rip rap and create a more naturalistic edge with native grasses, flowers and taller shrubs to provide shelter and shade for aquatic organisms and to improve water quality.
5-2	Open Space Funding	n/a	Find methods of additional funding for the Open Space Account. Consider filing fees, bonding, line item account, grants, annual contributions etc. Acquire land to support the open space goals.
5-3	Greenways and trails		
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connector trail from Main Street to Sunnybrook State Park 	City-wide	Create a greenway and trail to connect North Main Street to Sunnybrook State Park. Develop plans and construct trail. A footpath currently exists on private property and needs to be formalized and protected. Use of grants, local fund-raising and bonding should be considered.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Connect Sue Grossman Greenway to Downtown 	Along Winsted Road	Acquisition of right-of-way for new greenway path from Harris Drive to Newfield Road, along the rail line, to Downtown. Right-of-ways need to be acquired from railroad, utility and private land owners. Use of grants, local fund-raising and bonding should be considered. Continue unified cooperation between residents, the City, and State agencies.
	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Sunnybrook to Stillwater connector & preserve significant natural land 	Property along Mountain Road and at the end of Stone Ridge Drive	Encourage the State to acquire property to connect Sunnybrook State Park and Stillwater Pond State Park. In addition to providing a walking connector and wildlife corridor between the State parks. The land should also protect and preserve the upland beaver marsh and heron rookery, Indian Lookout Mountain Laurel display and overlook. The City should contact the State to highly-encourage acquisition of the land needed to connect these parks and protect these resources.
5-4	West Branch of the Naugatuck - restoration	West Branch of the Naugatuck River at Church Street	Breach, circumvent or remove the Church Street dam to restore natural flow to this portion of the River. Project would include sediment remediation and native restoration of the river's edge from Church Street to Wolcott Avenue. The project should also include trails along the River as described in the Naugatuck River Greenway Plan (LHCEO).
5-5	Preserve hay fields/grasslands/sedge meadows	City-wide	Acquire conservation easements over existing hayfields for site protection and provide incentives for the farmers to take their hay later in the season to allow fledging of nesting birds that require the fields for cover and food (specifically Connecticut Birds of Concern - e.g. Bobolinks)
5-6	Protect additional farmland	Rossi farm, Weigold Farm area & Ruwet Farm	Work with the State and private land owners to acquire development rights to much of the existing farmland - including working hayfields to maintain Torrington's character.
5-7	Expand Machuga Park, add vehicular link to Harris Drive and connect to state park trails	Machuga Park	Acquire property or right of way over old trolley line to Harris Drive; protect the area around the park through conservation easement or land ownership. Work with the Parks & Recreation Commission to include passive recreation opportunities. Connect the Park to the Sue Grossman Still River Greenway. Expand hiking opportunities and link the Park with the State park trail system through abandoned Buttrick Road.
5-8	Protect Still River Corridor	Still River along Winsted Road	The Still River is a highly diverse resource in Torrington providing much in the way of flood storage, habitat and water quality enhancements. Acquire conservation easements or land along the Still River to protect this watercourse from further degradation and enhance the Sue Grossman Greenway with trails into special areas for public access and appreciation.
5-9	Encourage the Reinvigoration of John Minetto State Park	John Minetto State Park -	Renovate and improve John Minetto State Park in a similar fashion as Burr Pond, Haystack and Dennis Parks. The State needs to undertake Minetto as its next big project due to its close proximity to a core population center; it's a beautiful facility for 'staycations' and could easily be reopened as a campground to provide for more constant care of the property.
5-10	Encourage the Preservation of the Scenic Hills and Ridgelines of Torrington	City-wide	Encourage development away from key ridgelines in Torrington to protect the scenic vistas around Torrington and from Downtown.