

## 8. OPEN SPACE & RECREATION

Open space in Arlington includes historical, natural, and recreational areas owned by the Town, other public agencies, and private organizations. Over the past six years, the Town and its open space partners have carried out landscape improvements and park renovations at several conservation parcels and recreational facilities, but at public meetings and small-group interviews for this master plan, many residents said more needs to be done to maintain Arlington’s open space. Some residents think Arlington needs to protect more open space, too.

Arlington is a sports-oriented community. It has many Town-sponsored activities and private sports leagues and a very successful public school athletic program. Arlington’s recreation facilities attract heavy use by teams and other groups, making field maintenance a regular concern. Open space plans and other plans and studies prepared for Arlington in the past have said the Town does not have enough open space to meet its population’s needs. However, Arlington is a densely developed, mature suburb with few opportunities to acquire and protect additional open space. As the current Open Space and Recreation Plan (2007) concludes: “Arlington’s open space is a precious, limited resource that has been difficult to acquire, develop, and maintain. Preservation, protection, and enhancement of existing resources is perhaps more important to the community, as is the need to provide adequate funding to support these efforts.”<sup>1</sup>

### A. Open Space

The Town of Arlington has 554.6 acres of publicly owned open space, including conservation land (town-owned land under the Conservation Commission’s jurisdiction), land in recreational use, open space managed by the Board of Selectmen, and state-owned open land (Map 8.1). The Arlington Conservation Commission (ACC) controls almost 48 acres while the Parks and Recreation Department and Arlington Public Schools manage 227 acres with active recreation facilities. While the ACC is responsible for managing conservation land, Arlington’s Open Space Committee oversees open space planning and provides advocacy for open space initiatives. These groups partner with the Arlington Land Trust, including ongoing efforts to acquire more open space.

The Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR) manages 12.74 acres in Arlington, including 1.24 acres in the Alewife Reservation. The two-acre Elizabeth Island, recently purchased by the

### Open Space & Recreation Goals

- *Treasure our open spaces, parks, recreational facilities and natural areas.*
- *Expand recreational and athletic facilities, programs, and opportunities, for all residents.*
- *Maintain and beautify our public parks, trails, play areas, and streetscapes.*

<sup>1</sup> Town of Arlington, “Open Space and Recreation Plan 2007-2012,” 76.

Arlington Land Trust, and the 7.8-acre Symmes Wood property are permanently protected by conservation restrictions.<sup>2</sup>

### 1. Town Conservation Land

The ACC oversees and manages twenty-five land parcels with a combined total of 47.96 acres (Table 8.1). Except for a few relatively large conservation areas and Cooke’s Hollow Park, most are small, scattered-site holdings of less than one acre that Arlington acquired as tax title takings before the 1970s.<sup>3</sup> Many of these are woodlands with limited access and visibility. The ACC has adopted general use regulations for its properties and tried to address issues with encroachment and landscape dumping, relying on its partner, the Conservation Land Stewards, to identify management needs. The ACC’s small land acquisition fund was significantly depleted in order to help fund the Arlington Land Trust’s purchase of Elizabeth Island.

Site Name	Location	Acres
Meadowbrook Park	Mouth of Mill Brook; surrounded by Mt. Pleasant Cemetery	17.50
Mt. Gilboa	North of Mass. Ave. (parking at Park Place, off Crescent Hill Avenue)	10.20
Turkey Hill	Above Forest and Washington Sts., northwest Arlington	12.00
Window-on-the Mystic	East of Mystic Street near Beverly Road	3.00
Forest Street	Opposite intersection of Forest/Dunster Lane, Winchester Town line	1.00
Cooke’s Hollow Park	Off Mystic Street, south of the Community Safety Building	0.80
Ridge Street	North end of Ridge Street	0.60
Woodside Lane	Across from 26, 30 and 34 Woodside Lane	0.60
Brattle Street	Surrounding 54 Brattle Street	0.50
Stone Road	Across from 24 Stone Road	0.36
Madison Avenue	Adjacent to Mt. Gilboa lands	0.30
Philemon Street	South side of 32 Philemon Street	0.13
Concord Turnpike	Between Scituate and Newport Streets, Concord Turnpike and Arlmont Streets	0.13
Mohawk Road	2 parcels; intersection of Washington and Mohawk Streets	0.13
Hemlock Street	Uphill from 5 Hemlock Street, near former Symmes Hospital	0.13
Short Street	Between 8 Short and 11 West Streets	0.11
Inverness Road	Next to 36 Inverness Street	0.10
Rublee Street	Intersection of Rublee and Udine; entrance to Sutherland Woods in Lexington	0.10
Kilsythe Road	Landlocked behind 44 and 48 Kilsythe Road	0.09
Water Street	Area with two benches north of Bike path next to Buzzell Field	0.05
Brand Street	2 parcels, left of 72 Brand Street and right of 36 Brand Street	0.05
Spring Street	Across from 120 Spring Street	0.04
53 Park Avenue, rear	Access through left side of 53 Park Avenue	0.02
Central Street	Adamian property, end of Central Street	0.02
<b>TOTAL</b>		<b>47.96</b>

Source: Arlington Conservation Commission,  
[http://www.town.arlington.ma.us/Public\\_Documents/ArlingtonMA\\_ConComm/misc/conservationlands](http://www.town.arlington.ma.us/Public_Documents/ArlingtonMA_ConComm/misc/conservationlands)

<sup>2</sup> Open Space Plan 2007-2014 and Arlington Assessor’s Database 2013.

<sup>3</sup> Cori Beckwith, Conservation Administrator, Interview with Community Opportunities Group, Inc., August 1, 2013.

The ACC's key holdings include:

**Meadowbrook Park.** This 17.5 acre parcel is adjacent to Mt. Pleasant Cemetery. Primarily wetlands, the site encompasses land where Mill Brook enters the Lower Mystic Lake. In the past ten years, the ACC has carried out several stewardship projects here: stabilizing the banks of the brook and improving public access, removing invasive reeds at Meadowbrook, and planting native wetland and aquatic plants along the brook.

**Mount Gilboa Conservation Area.** This ten-acre conservation site in northwest Arlington is a tall, tree-covered hill with one house and a network of woodland trails. The Town rents the house to private individuals.

**Turkey Hill Reservation.** Turkey Hill Reservation is a heavily wooded, twelve-acre parcel with walking trails and the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority's (MWRA) Turkey Hill water tower. The Arlington Park and Recreation Commission has jurisdiction over the land around the water tower. During the mid-2000s, Arlington worked with the state, the MWRA, and neighborhood residents to address security issues at the MWRA Tower. A stewardship group organized through the ACC's Land Stewards Program monitors and maintains the Reservation.

**Windows-on-the-Mystic.** Located off Route 3, this three-acre conservation parcel is Arlington's only public waterfront parcel on the Mystic Lakes. It offers scenic views of the lakes and it is the primary public access point to Upper Mystic Lake. The property's rugged landscape has made it difficult for the ACC to manage and maintain the site, resulting in limited use by visitors. An Arlington Boy Scout installed a trail at the property, but there is currently no public boat launch or beach at the site.<sup>4</sup>

**Cooke's Hollow.** This parcel is a long, narrow, partially landscaped area located along both sides of Mill Brook near Mystic Street. The park provides scenic vistas and includes park benches and interpretive signage about the area's historic significance. The Arlington Garden Club installed gardens and public access at the site, and the Town renovated the park in 2008.

## 2. Other Town-Owned Open Space

Arlington also owns open space that is not under the Conservation Commission's purview. Two particularly significant tracts of open space include Arlington Great Meadows and the McClellan Park.

**Great Meadows.** Located outside of Arlington, the 183-acre Arlington Great Meadows lies entirely in Lexington. The Arlington Board of Selectmen has jurisdiction over the land, which is not considered conservation land or permanently protected through other means. Great Meadows is Arlington's largest open space holding. Most of the land is a flat, marshy plain surrounded by wooded uplands with hiking trails. The Minuteman Bikeway forms the southern border of Great Meadows and offers the most direct access to the trails. Local officials and citizen groups in Arlington and Lexington have worked to preserve the natural resources at Great Meadows. In 1999, Arlington commissioned a Natural Resource Inventory

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<sup>4</sup> Cori Beckwith, Arlington Conservation Administrator.

and Stewardship Plan for this property.<sup>5</sup> Thereafter, Arlington and Lexington residents formed the Friends of Great Meadows (FoAGM) to serve as stewards of the property. FoAGM has surveyed plants and animals in the Meadow, organized annual bird watching and geology walks, and built a series of boardwalks to improve visitor experience and protect natural resources.

**McClennen Park.** The Town re-acquired the 20-acre Reed’s Brook parcel in 1995 after using the site as a landfill from 1959 to 1969. In 1997, the Arlington Redevelopment Board (ARB) studied the land to determine its future use. Town Meeting subsequently authorized a \$5.8 million bond issue to address flooding problems, close the landfill properly, mitigate existing environmental hazards, and develop new recreational facilities, including two soccer fields, one baseball field, a skateboard area, trails, picnic areas and tot lots. Arlington also replaced the site’s storm drain system, created a new retention pond, and designated wetland areas to protect as wildlife habitat. Recent improvements include a new dog park.

**Community Parks and Gardens.** Arlington has many small public parks associated with its historical sites and civic buildings. Examples include the Robbins Memorial Gardens and a community park in front of the Jefferson Cutter House. The Town also has several multi-plot community gardens, numerous town-sponsored gardens, and community-organized landscape projects. The two community gardens are located on town-owned land: Magnolia Field in East Arlington and Robbins Farm Park in Arlington Heights. Students at the Hardy School have also created a vegetable garden in raised beds behind the school. In addition, Arlington has established two dog parks.

### 3. State-Owned Open Space

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts owns several parcels in Arlington. The largest state-owned parcel is part of the Alewife Reservation, managed by the Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR). DCR also manages a parcel around the dam at the Mystic Lakes. The Massachusetts Department of Public Works (MDPW), the Massachusetts Water Resources Authority (MWRA), and the Massachusetts Highway Department (MHD) also manage state-owned properties in Arlington, including a path along the southern edge of Spy Pond and land on Turkey Hill.

The 120-acre **Alewife Reservation** is one of Boston’s largest urban wilds. It provides habitat for a wide range of indigenous and migratory birds. Arlington’s portion is at the end of the Minuteman Bikeway in the town’s southeast corner. The Alewife Reservation encompasses land in Cambridge and Somerville, too. Much of the reservation consists of wetlands and water bodies, including Little Pond, Little River, and Alewife Brook. The site also has wooded uplands and meadows. There is limited access to the Reservation for hikers and birdwatchers.<sup>6</sup> DCR recently completed a \$3.8 million project to build a multi-use path along the Alewife River between the Mystic Valley Parkway and Route 2. The Arlington-Cambridge-Somerville Alewife Greenway Corridor restoration project (also referred to as the Minuteman Bike Path Connector) included installation of a paved path with elevated boardwalks in ecologically-sensitive areas, removal of invasive plants, and new landscaping.

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<sup>5</sup> Clark, Frances, *Natural Resource Inventory & Stewardship Plan of Arlington’s Great Meadows in Lexington*, July 2001, <[http://www.foagm.org/AGM\\_Inventory/concomGM1001](http://www.foagm.org/AGM_Inventory/concomGM1001)>

<sup>6</sup> MA Department of Conservation and Recreation, Alewife Reservation, <<http://www.mass.gov/eea/agencies/dcr/massparks/region-boston/alewife-brook-reservation.html>>

#### 4. Open Space in Private Ownership

**Elizabeth Island.** The Arlington Land Trust (ALT) acquired Elizabeth Island in 2010. With funds from the Town, the Commonwealth, the Massachusetts Audubon Society, and a fundraising campaign, the ALT purchased this undeveloped, heavily vegetated two-acre island in the middle of Spy Pond and granted a conservation restriction to the ACC and Mass. Audubon. Mass Audubon also prepared a management plan for the island that identifies minor maintenance needs.<sup>7</sup> Due to its location, Elizabeth Island is only accessible by boat. This limited access allows the island to serve as nesting habitat for various species of duck, geese, and swans. The island is also used for release of fireworks during Arlington's Town Day celebration. The Friends of Spy Pond hosts tours of the island several times a year.

**Symmes Wood.** The Town acquired the eighteen-acre Symmes Hospital property in 2002 in order to control the site's future development. The property included several former hospital buildings, a nurse's residence, several parking lots, and nine acres of steep, vacant woodland. After an extensive public process, the Town sold the property to a developer in 2007. The disposition agreement requires permanent protection of a large portion of the site, now known as Symmes Wood (7.8 acres). Today, the Symmes property is under construction for mixed-use development. Symmes Wood will be protected with a conservation restriction held jointly by the ACC and ALT. Once all work is completed, the site will offer two public parks, parking for public visitors, and woodlands for trails and passive enjoyment.

**Mugar Property.** The seventeen-acre Mugar property is the last large, privately owned tract of vacant land in Arlington. Located in the southeast corner of East Arlington by Route 2, the Mugar property is adjacent to Thorndike Field and the Alewife Reservation. Arlington has been concerned about the Mugar land for many years. In 2000, Town Meeting approved funding to purchase the land, but local officials could not reach agreement with the owners, who have proposed several unsuccessful development concepts for the site. The Mugar property has been altered and filled, but a substantial part of the site is wetlands and susceptible to flooding. Recent changes to the Federal Emergency Management Agency (FEMA) floodplain maps could have an impact on the property's development potential.

**Conservation Restrictions.** Four private properties in Arlington are protected with conservation restrictions (CR), which provide the most restrictive form of land protection (Table 8.2). Recorded on a property's deed, a conservation restriction allows property owners to convey partial (less-than-fee) interest in their land to a qualified conservation organization or public agency. In exchange, the owner receives a tax benefit. By granting a conservation restriction, the landowner agrees to preserve the property in its natural state and forego future development.

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<sup>7</sup> Ann LeRoyer, Chair, Arlington Open Space Committee and member of Arlington Land Trust, interview by Community Opportunities Group, Inc., August 1, 2013.

**Table 8.2. Conservation Restrictions in Arlington**

Property	Owner	Holder of Conservation Restriction	Term
Elizabeth Island	Arlington Land Trust	Conservation Commission and Massachusetts Audubon Society	In perpetuity
Brantwood Road	Private	Conservation Commission	In perpetuity
Walnut Street	Private	Arlington Land Trust	30 years
Symmes Wood	Private	Conservation Commission and Arlington Land Trust	In perpetuity (in progress)

Source: Cori Beckwith, Arlington Conservation Administrator, and Ann LeRoy, Chair, Open Space Committee and member, Arlington Land Trust

**5. Stewardship and Advocacy**

Arlington has several groups involved with open space stewardship. In addition to the ACC and Open Space Committee, the Arlington Tree Committee was established by the Board of Selectmen in 2010. The Committee’s charge is to promote the protection, planting, and care of trees in Arlington. The Arlington Conservation Land Stewards (ALCS), sponsored by the ACC, provides guidance for citizen volunteers who participate in land protection activities. Since most of Arlington’s conservation parcels are small, scattered throughout town, and relatively invisible, caring for them requires vigilance on the part of open space advocates.

The Arlington Land Trust (ALT) formed in 2000 as a non-profit membership organization to protect undeveloped land in Arlington. It currently owns one parcel, Elizabeth Island, and holds conservation restrictions on two additional properties. Arlington also has numerous “friends” groups for individual parks and conservation spaces.

**6. Open Space Planning**

Arlington has engaged in open space and recreation planning since completing its first Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) in 1996. These plans have to be updated and approved by the state Division of Conservation Services (DCS) every five years in order for a town to qualify for most state and federal open space and recreation grants. Arlington prepared its most recent open space plan in 2007 and received a two-year extension of the action plan timeline (to 2014).

**B. Recreation**

Arlington offers many opportunities for active recreation: town-owned sport facilities and fields, private fields, clubs, and playgrounds, and state-owned trails. These facilities are located throughout the town, and they include softball and baseball fields, football fields, multi-use fields for soccer, lacrosse, and other sports, an ice rink, public beach, spray pool, basketball and tennis courts, and playgrounds.

**1. Town-Owned Parks and Recreation Facilities**

Arlington’s public parks support passive enjoyment and active recreation. Robbins Farm Park (which includes the Skyline Park Playground), McClennen Park, Menotomy Rocks, and the Arlington Reservoir offer natural settings for walking, picnicking, sunbathing, and relaxing, as well as designated areas for organized recreation. Arlington also has facilities for active recreation, including courts, playing fields, and an ice rink, as well as neighborhood pocket parks and playgrounds. In addition, the Town offers swimming at a public beach and spray pool. The Arlington School Department maintains playgrounds and gyms at each school, and these facilities are available for general public use after school hours. (Appendix 1) All of

Arlington’s recreation facilities are heavily used and valued by local residents. Table 8.3 reports summary-level program participation statistics for Recreation Department programs for the past five years.

**Table 8.3. Participation Statistics: Arlington Recreation Department Programs, 2008-2012**

	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012
<b>Program Participants by Season</b>					
Summer	1,464	1,349	1,634	1832	1823
Fall	913	1057	920	1110	1263
Winter	764	905	1,506	1207	2012
Spring	544	732	812	772	786
<b>Reservoir Tags Sold</b>					
Adult Resident	464	352	455	437	437
Child Resident	461	346	443	395	395
Senior Citizen	67	51	70	71	71
Non-Resident	31	13	13	24	24
Resident Family	358	290	379	340	340
Non Resident Family	46	17	34	27	27
Resident Family Plus 1	90	59	70	64	64
Non-Resident Family Plus 1	8	1	3	6	6
Total	1,525	1,129	1,467	1,364	1,364
<b>Reservoir Passes Sold</b>					
Weekday Pass	3,500	3,051	4,254	3,050	3,344
Weekend Pass	1,191	1,431	1,827	1,667	2,386
Total	4,691	4,482	6,081	4,717	5,730

Source: Arlington Recreation Department, August 2013.

**Arlington Recreation Department.** The Recreation Department handles day-to-day management of recreation facilities, e.g., scheduling, developing programs, collecting user fees, and so forth, and provides staff support to the Park and Recreation Commission. Together, the Recreation Department’s programs and the ice rink generate approximately \$1.1 million per year in revenue. Facilities maintenance generally falls under the purview of the Department of Public Works (DPW). The Arlington Friends of Parks and the numerous youth leagues help with routine maintenance and special projects, too.

The Recreation Department manages the following facilities:

- **Ed Burns Arena.** The Arlington Sports Center and Veterans Memorial Skating Rink is also the Recreation Department’s headquarters. Built in 1971, the facility originally offered a seasonal regulation-size skating rink. Today, the Arlington Sports Center is a year-round, multi-sport facility with an ice rink that operates during the fall and winter, and batting cages, indoor soccer programs, and summer camps in the spring and summer. It is used for a variety of special events and serves as home facility for the Arlington Hockey and Figure Skating Association and Arlington High and Catholic High School ice teams. Table 8.4 tracks annual usage statistics for the skating rink for the past five years.

**Table 8.4. Participation Statistics: Veterans Memorial Skating Rink**

	FY 2008	FY 2009	FY 2010	FY 2011	FY 2012	% Change
Ice Rental Hours	1,913	2,086	1,859	1,944	1,962	2.6%
Rec & Public Skate Hours	496	552	500	610	622	25.4%
Public Skate #'s-Adult	3,597	3824	3,979	4,484	4,258	18.4%
Public Skate Passes #'s-Adult	46	55	58	53	53	15.2%
Public Skate #'s-Child/Seniors	8,356	8597	7,846	8,317	8,411	0.7%
Public Skate Passes #'s-Child/Seniors	85	92	98	127	79	-7.1%
Skate Rentals	2,713	2597	2,762	3,235	2,959	9.1%
Skate Sharpening	932	962	982	1,112	848	-9.0%
Skate Sharpening Passes	NA	11	20	15	9	#VALUE!
Stick and Puck	280	452	557	518	657	134.6%

Source: Arlington Recreation Department, August 2013.

- Robbins Farm Park.** The historic Robbins Farm was owned and farmed by the Robbins Family for more than three generations. In 1941, the Town acquired the land for a public park. Residents use Robbins Farm and the Skyline Park Playground year-round for active recreation. The sites includes a large playground, renovated in 2003, with unique hillside slides and a picnic area, a basketball court, baseball and soccer fields, and steep hills used for sledding in the winter. The Park and Recreation Commission prepared a master plan for Robbins Farm Park in the early 2000s.
- Spy Pond Park.** Located on Spy Pond’s north shoreline, this public park includes a recently renovated playground, a public boat ramp, benches, and picnic tables. In 1999, the town commissioned a feasibility study for the park and shoreline. The plan recommended park improvements, environmental remediation, and site improvements to prevent soil erosion, improve drainage, remove invasive plant species, and deter geese. The Town’s Vision 2020 Spy Pond Task Group and the Friends of Spy Pond participate in stewardship and planning efforts at the pond.
- Reservoir Beach.** Located on Lowell Street in Arlington Heights, Reservoir Beach includes a filtered/chlorinated swimming area, bathhouse, vending machines and playground. The beach is supervised by certified lifeguards and other beach staff when open. Boston.com recently listed Reservoir Beach as one of the state’s top ten swimming holes.<sup>8</sup>
- Hurd Field.** Located near Mill Brook, Hurd Field offers two softball diamonds and a multi-use field. The Town recently received a U.S. Environmental Protection Agency (EPA) grant for a Porous Pavement Education Project at Hurd Field, which funded the installation of a new porous parking surface at the field.

Most sports are popular in Arlington, but the Recreation Department reports increasing interest in youth lacrosse, which is gaining popularity nationwide. Arlington had about twenty youth involved with lacrosse ten years ago; today, more than 500 children participate. Arlington is also seeing growth in the number of picnic permit requests at parks such as Menotomy Rocks, Robbins Farm, McClennen, Spy Pond and Parallel

<sup>8</sup> Boston.com, “Massachusetts Swimming Holes”.

<[http://www.boston.com/travel/explore/massachusetts/galleries/swimming\\_holes?pg=6](http://www.boston.com/travel/explore/massachusetts/galleries/swimming_holes?pg=6)>

Park. Furthermore, there has been an increase use of Arlington’s two dog parks and a growing desire among residents for additional off-leash dog areas.<sup>9</sup>

In addition to traditional sports and leisure programming, the Recreation Department has opened an after-school program for children in grades K-5. Arlington Kid Care, a state-licensed childcare program, operates at the Gibbs School and serves all of the Town’s elementary schools as well as St. Agnes, a local parochial school.

Arlington has made a substantial investment in developing and maintaining recreation facilities. Over the past ten years, playing fields, courts, and playgrounds have been updated with new surfaces, equipment, lights, and irrigation systems. The Town recently completed a \$2 million improvements project at the ice rink and upgraded several playgrounds. The Recreation Department’s long-term capital plan anticipates many more improvements, including a new bath house at Reservoir Beach, field and diamond repairs at Hurd Field and Poets Corner, field and court renovations at Robbins Farm, Scannell Field, and Spy Pond, and new play structures at several town playgrounds.<sup>10</sup>

## **2. Other Recreation Facilities**

The Minuteman Bikeway provides visual relief and recreational opportunities, and it also functions as habitat corridor due to its proximity to open space, brooks, and rivers. The path connects the wildlife habitat of Great Meadows to the natural environment of Spy Pond. The Minuteman Bikeway was constructed on the former Boston and Maine Railroad right of way in 1992 after twenty years of planning and construction. The entire path is almost eleven miles long, beginning in Bedford Center, passing through Lexington and Arlington, and terminating in Cambridge near the Alewife MBTA Station. In addition to its popularity as a commuter bike path, the bikeway links historic sites, attractions, and conservation areas and parks in Arlington, Lexington and Bedford. Arlington’s portion of the bikeway is three miles long and runs in an east-west direction largely parallel to Massachusetts Avenue. In 2000, the Town renamed its portion of the bikeway to the “Donald R. Marquis/Minuteman Bikeway” to honor a former Town Manager.

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<sup>9</sup> Joseph Connelly, Arlington Recreation Director.

<sup>10</sup> Arlington Park and Recreation Commission, *Capital Plan FY 2014-FY 2024*.