How Should Brookfield Use its Natural & Recreation Areas to Honor its Character and Ensure Sustainability as a Community?

Summary Report of Brookfield Public Dialogue Series

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This report and appendices will be made available online on the MOPC website and on the Brookfield town website: Forms & Documents under Open Space / Master Plan

Summary Report Completed by

Mette Kreutzmann & Sara Cohen
Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration - Public Deliberation Program
John W. McCormack Graduate School of Policy and Global Studies
University of Massachusetts Boston

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The Kettering Foundation and faculty, Clarence Snyder, Barbara Clancy, Ron Couture, Kermit Eaton, Lee Farr, Ian Nugent, Cindy Thompson, Bob O'Connor, Melissa Cryan, Trish Settles, Hoamy Tran, Susan Jeghelian, Courtney Breese, Ros Cresswell, Brenda Caron McElroy, Bill Davis, Matthew Franz, Eli Goldman, Ed Hood, Al Jones, Mike Seery, Tim Simon, Karen Trainor Resseguie, Scott Morrill.

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I. Introduction

In February and March of 2018, Brookfield residents engaged in a series of public dialogues to deliberate on the question: *How should Brookfield use its natural and recreation areas to honor its character and ensure sustainability as a community*? The dialogues were facilitated by the Massachusetts Office of Public Collaboration, in partnership with Brookfield town officials, to capture public sentiment ahead of the town updating its 2010 Open Space & Recreation Plan (OSRP).

The OSRP charts the course for how Brookfield will invest in its community landscape, including how it will manage, enhance, and support natural habitat, Brookfield's rich agricultural heritage, and its many outdoor recreation opportunities. The OSRP also opens doors to state funding for specific projects. The plan affects all residents by impacting the character of the town, the quality of life, and the viability of living and working in Brookfield.

Using a *deliberative dialogue* structure described in more detail below, the dialogues helped residents explore their key interests, priorities, and concerns about Brookfield's natural and recreation areas, and openly discuss some inherent difficult trade-offs the town faces when it comes to setting priorities for open space and recreation management. The themes that emerged from the dialogues, which are captured in this report, are intended to lay a foundation for the work the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC) will undertake together with town officials to update Brookfield's expired OSRP.

The MA Office of Public Collaboration (MOPC) at UMass Boston is a neutral forum and applied research institute that assists public agencies and communities in accessing services, programs, and national networks for dispute resolution, consensus-building, and public engagement. The dialogue series in Brookfield was part of a new MOPC Public Deliberation Program to help people use public dialogue to address important and difficult issues affecting their community and move toward collective action.

II. Deliberative Public Dialogues

Public dialogue is a process intended to help people hear what matters to other people, and why, and deepen people's own understanding of what is important to them. Dialogue is not about persuasion or coming to consensus, but about understanding and looking for shared direction, even across differences.

Deliberation involves examining options and thinking through consequences and trade-offs to help make informed decisions. Deliberative questions go beyond "what *can* we do?" based strictly on feasibility, and ask "what *should* we do?" based on values and priorities, and "what are we willing to give up to get what we most want?" The purpose is to think together to explore the most promising opportunities for action.[1]

The deliberative dialogue process MOPC used for this project is the National Issues Forums method, where the dialogue is centered around a discussion guide that presents a few possible approaches to a public issue based on differences in what people most value and walks participants through a discussion about the potential benefits, consequences, and trade-offs of each approach[2].

[1] Paragraph is paraphrased from Scott London http://www.scottlondon.com/reports/dialogue.html
[2] Paraphrased from https://www.nifi.org/en/about-nif-forums

III. Public Dialogue Process Overview

Beginning in late spring 2017, MOPC began working with the Central Massachusetts Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC), the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA), and the town of Brookfield in a collaborative partnership led locally by Brookfield Board of Selectmen Vice Chairman Clarence Snyder. Mr. Snyder secured approval from the Brookfield Board of Selectmen for MOPC to facilitate a public dialogue process in advance of the town's update of its Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP). MOPC Services were provided free of charge to the town for the purpose of testing this process for potential replication elsewhere in the state.

A. Framing Team

By early summer, a Framing Team was formed to ensure the dialogues would bring forward the issues around open space and recreation that people most needed to talk about. The Framing Team included the following 11 members:

- Brookfield residents: Barbara Clancy, Ron Couture, Kermit Eaton, Lee Farr, Ian Nugent, Clarence Snyder, Cindy Thompson
- MA Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EEA): Bob O'Connor
- MA Division of Conservation Services (DCS): Melissa Cryan
- Central MA Regional Planning Commission (CMRPC): Trish Settles, Hoamy Tran

The Framing Team's roles included: helping create an initial outreach survey; creating an outreach plan to disseminate the survey; reviewing the survey responses for the important themes and underlying values expressed by respondents; testing the draft discussion guide; conducting outreach for the dialogues; and attending the dialogues.

B. Initial Outreach Survey

A public input survey was administered over the summer of 2017 in paper and online formats. The purpose of the survey was to:

- Understand how residents and visitors use and think about Brookfield's natural areas and outdoor recreation: what they value, concerns, challenges, and ideas for solutions, etc.
- Recognize the range of perspectives in the community.
- Ensure the dialogues focused on the issues and concerns that matter most to people.

Ninety-nine (99) people completed the survey; 76 Brookfield residents and 23 non-residents[3]. The survey responses are attached in Appendix A.

C. Discussion Guide

The results of the survey were foundational in creating the public dialogue discussion guide. The aim was to develop a set of different approaches that helped participants think through **how Brookfield should use its natural and recreation areas to honor its character and ensure sustainability as a community**.

The guide's three approaches were:

[3] The 23 non-residents indicated they were summer residents, residents of neighboring towns, or had family in Brookfield, and all indicated some use and appreciation of Brookfield's natural and recreation areas.

1. **Protect Brookfield's Unspoiled Character**: This approach emphasized preserving natural spaces and the rural character of the town; protecting and restoring the environmental health of the ecosystems; limiting noise pollution and environmental impact from overuse and development; and increasing a sense of connection to nature.
2. **Promote & Enhance Accessibility & Public Safety of Brookfield's Natural and Recreation Areas:** This approach emphasized improving access, usability, and safety of Brookfield's natural areas; adding and/or expanding amenities and ways to connect outdoor recreation opportunities; and increasing people's awareness and curiosity about natural and recreational resources and their allowable uses.
3. **Sustain Brookfield's Long-Term Viability as a Place to Work & Thrive:** This approach emphasized activities that generate revenue streams for land management and upkeep; actions that provide jobs for residents; enhancing the town's tax base; and leveraging the town's open space to enhance economic activity through increased tourism opportunities.

While not mutually exclusive, each approach reflects different perspectives and priorities leading to a different lens on the nature of the problem and the kinds of actions the town might take. For each approach, the guide suggested potential benefits, drawbacks, and consequences to structure the discussion.

Additionally, a supplemental information sheet was created for participants, which included information about categorization of open space land, state agency roles and resources, and other related background information. CMRPC also created a map of Brookfield's open space for reference during the dialogue. The discussion guide, supplemental information sheet, and map are attached in Appendices B, C, D respectively.

D. Testing the Discussion Guide

A dry-run dialogue was held to test the guide. Many of the Framing Team members attended the dry run and invited participants not involved in the project to participate, as well. Valuable feedback emerged and adjustments were made to the guide.

E. Dialogues

Four dialogues were planned, although only three were held due to a cancellation resulting from inclement weather. The dialogues were each hosted by existing constituent groups, but the events were open to all community members and publicized to the general public. They occurred on the following dates: 2/13/18 (hosted by the local seniors group), 2/27/18 (hosted by the Recreation Committee), and 3/14/18 (hosted by the Agricultural Commission).

Outreach to invite dialogue participants was done using flyers, posting on social media, word-of-mouth, and through The Brookfield Citizen. Copies of the discussion guide were made available at each dialogue, in the Town Hall lobby, and at the library. Approximately 12-18 people attended each of the three dialogues.

The dialogues were facilitated by MOPC and after the introduction, equal time was devoted to examining each of the three approaches and exploring what people liked, concerns they had, and weighing the consequences and inherent trade-offs each may involve. People were encouraged to propose their own ideas for actions as well. No voting took place. Rather, the dialogues ended with time spent reflecting on

themes heard, areas of agreement/ disagreement, what still needed to be worked through, and noticing what perspectives were not represented in the room.

F. Post-dialogue Questionnaires

Before leaving, dialogue participants were asked to complete an individual questionnaire to provide their perspectives. A total of 37 questionnaires were completed. A tally of the questionnaire responses is attached in Appendix E.

IV. Themes from the Initial Outreach Survey

A. How do People Use Brookfield's Natural and Recreation Areas?

The initial outreach survey asked about the types of activities people currently enjoy engaging in. Results are shown in order from most-to-least mentioned.

Activity	Number of respondents who listed activity (# in parentheses are non-Brookfield residents, as a subset of the total)				
Boating (of any type)	52 (12)				
… of those who specified type/location:		Quaboag River	Quaboag Pond	South Pond	
Boating	22 (9)	1	1	3	
		Quaboag River			
Canoeing	10	4			
		Quaboag River	Quaboag Pond	South Pond	
Kayaking	31 (6)	2	1	2	
Hiking / Walking	45 (6)				
Swimming	32 (9)				
… of those who specified location:		South Pond	Quaboag Pond		
		10	1		
Use of Athletic (Lewis) field	27 (1)				
… of those who specified sport:		Basketball	Soccer	Baseball	Softball
		1	2	1	1
Fishing	23 (3)				
… of those who specified location:		South Pond			
		1			
Attending Fairs / Festivals / Community Events / Socializing	16 (1)				
Nature Appreciation	16 (2)				
Using the Playground	9 (1)				
Biking	6				
Cross-country Skiing, ATV, Photography, Farming, Hunting, Birding, Skating, Gardening, Sledding, Geocaching, Skating, Meditating, Hang gliding, Visiting the cemetery, Scouts (youth activities)	≤ 5 in each activity				

Of Note…

- More than half of all respondents enjoy boating; a third mentioned kayaking in particular.
- The Quaboag River was the most often mentioned boating destination, followed closely by South Pond.
- Boating and swimming were the 1st and 2nd most-mentioned activities, respectively, by non-residents.
- Of those who specified where they swam, South Pond was named frequently, while North Pond was named once.
- Nearly half of the respondents enjoy hiking and walking.

B. What do People Care About?

The survey asked people to name what they value most and what concerns them most about Brookfield's natural spaces and recreation areas.

Most Prominent Valued Characteristics Named		Most Prominent Concerns Named
• Rural character; small town charm • Natural "unspoiled" beauty • Proximity and abundance of nature and wildlife • Easy access to outdoor recreation • Peacefulness • Sense of history • Farming (local farm products, pastoral landscape, sense of heritage, source of jobs) • Freedom/autonomy to use natural areas as desired • Athletic and outdoor opportunities for youth		• Litter and poor upkeep of natural areas, including South Pond beach • Water quality issues at South Pond and Quaboag River (e.g. wastewater treatment plant discharges, agriculture and road runoff, aquatic weeds) • Potential loss of natural areas and rural character feel, due to development • Lack of signs/maps/information/promotion of scenic and historic points, trails, natural areas • Insufficient protection of natural areas due to poor adherence to/enforcement of regulations • Need for improved land use planning and citizen stewardship • Not enough trails, bike paths, sidewalks, field space • Natural and recreation areas provide few jobs and little tax revenue for town; while upkeep costs money

Selected survey responses to what people most value about Brookfield's natural and recreation areas…

"I most value the ability to walk through these beautiful places. They provide an escape from the troubles of the world and ground me in what is most important in life."

"The farms and scenic roads that take you back in time!"

"[…] stress goes away when I enter this town and see the open areas."

"South Pond and its swimming lessons, Lewis Field for its playground for moms to meet, and fields for kids to play sports."

"All the outdoor spaces are important: the trails and waterways as well as the field provide us all with different types of recreation and provide for a healthy environment."

Selected survey responses to what concerns people most about Brookfield's natural and recreation areas…

"Losing these natural spaces. Once they are lost they are usually gone forever."

"The decline in farming is troublesome. The pastoral landscape is quickly fading into the past."

"There is no place to ride or hike with marked trails where you don't feel you are imposing on someone's land".

"The biggest concern is the weed growth in Quaboag pond. The pond is getting ever shallower and will be gone in the near future."

"There is little excitement drawn to what natural spaces and recreation spaces we have."

V. Areas of High Agreement

This section lays out five areas where the dialogues produced a clear sense of shared direction. The anonymous opinions expressed in the post-dialogue questionnaires similarly reflected high agreement in these areas.

A. Preserve Brookfield's Small-Town Character and Unspoiled Feel

There was high agreement among participants that Brookfield's rural, unspoiled "feel" was one of the most appealing and important qualities of the town. From the wildlife to the scenic beauty, the river and lakes to the farms, people expressed deep appreciation and placed a high priority on preserving these qualities. As one participant put it, "*we all moved here or stay here for a reason*."

Recognized challenge that will need to be addressed:

- Large amounts of open space limits opportunities for economic development and the town's ability to increase the tax base.

B. More Education/Information on Allowable Usage, Existing Trails and Opportunities

There was overwhelming agreement among the dialogue participants on the need for more information and education about open spaces and recreational opportunities in Brookfield. People want more information about where the trails are, access points, what wildlife might be encountered, cultural/historic sites, what amenities and recreation opportunities are available, when it is hunting season, and what is allowed/not allowed on the different types of land. People were especially uncertain about allowable usage on land under MassWildlife management (see section VII below). People strongly favored the idea of using social media and expanding the Town website to provide the information and promote opportunities for recreation and events. The information would benefit residents and serve as promotion to draw more people to Brookfield.

The following actions have a high level of support:

- *Create maps and materials.* Look to neighboring towns for ideas for trail guides, and promotional materials.
- *Increase online information and promotion.* Use social media and expand Town website to provide information and promote recreation opportunities.
- *Publicize walking trails.* Work with CMRPC to post online/print the central MA regional trail map it is working with various trail groups to create.
- *Get more people involved.* Recruit new members for the Recreation Committee, especially young families.
- *DCS grants.* Apply for grants from the MA Division of Conservation Services for mapping trails once the OSRP is submitted.
- *Create materials.* Partner with the Historic Society on creating brochures and signage.

Recognized challenges that will need to be addressed:

- Funding and personnel time associated with website expansion, social media postings, trail mapping and signage, applying for grants, and creating and printing materials.

C. Use Smart Growth Development Principles to Improve Quality of Life, Capture Tourist Dollars, and Increase the Tax Base

Participants felt there were a number of ways Brookfield could support economic development that would improve the quality of life and generate local business income and tax revenue without compromising the town's character. Participants were particularly interested in places to shop, eat, and gather to socialize and many remembered times when more of these options existed. People also agreed more should be done to capture tourist dollars from those who currently come to Brookfield to swim, fish, or recreate (including the roughly thousand people annually who come to Brookfield for fishing derbies), as well as from potential new sources of tourism. Participants noted that people coming to or passing through town currently have nowhere to stop and spend money even if they wanted to. Many also stressed the importance of finding ways to ensure farming remains economically viable in Brookfield.

The following actions have a high level of support:

- *Economic corridor(s).* Concentrate development while preserving open space. Corridors should contain businesses that serve as a draw for one another, such as shops, cafés, and restaurants, as well as those that support and generate income from local recreation opportunities, such as bait and tackle shops, hunting supply stores, and boating supply stores. Routes 9 and 148 were suggested for concentrated development, as was a walkable business district around town square.
- *Economic development coordinator.* Create a position within town government to spearhead positive economic development and help potential businesses navigate the process.
- *Increase tourism.* Capitalize on heavy tourist traffic in Sturbridge, by strategically marketing local attractions and events to these tourists, including among others the Adena site, Devil's Elbow, and the Blue Trail (Blue Trail project under development).
- *Agri-tourism.* Create more ways for residents to connect with and support local farms, including revitalizing farm stands, farmers markets, and community-supported-agriculture (CSA) as well as promoting innovative projects like farm-breweries. In the post-dialogue questionnaire responses, there was also overwhelming support for the use of agricultural preservation restrictions (APRs) and the promotion of local farm products (see appendix E)
- *Cultural Center.* Create a center to celebrate the 3,000 year-old Adena site along with other important Brookfield cultural sites.

Recognized challenges that will need to be addressed:

- Zoning, building code, and infrastructure obstacles, particularly the lack of central sewer services, present challenges to businesses.
- Land area available for concentrated development is very limited.
- Businesses, farmers markets, and CSAs need minimum customer activity to survive. While thriving business activity feeds other business opportunities, building enough commercial momentum initially will be challenging.
- Potential loss or degradation of Brookfield's natural amenities – the very features likely to draw tourists – might occur in the face of overuse or careless use. Note that in the post-dialogue questionnaire, participants were asked the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement: *"we should promote development <u>even if</u> it means potential threats to the natural habitat and environment*", they strongly disagreed with this action (see appendix E question 23).

- Increasing development without increasing traffic and congestion beyond what feels acceptable may prove difficult.
- People expressed concern about how and whether the town could control the types of businesses, land purchases, and tax implications of new development to ensure the town as a whole would benefit.

D. Improve Upkeep and Maintenance

There was high agreement among the participants that it is important to keep Brookfield's beautiful land and water areas and recreational resources clean and maintained. Littering came up repeatedly as a problem. Maintenance of trails and missing/vandalized signs/bulletin boards were also mentioned although to a lesser degree. Many would like to see people take greater pride in their community, including cleanup of their own property, and as one person put it, "*pristine land is good for business*" and would attract visitors. Another person said, "*if Brookfield became known for very little littering it could attract responsible users. The type of users we want to attract.*" South Pond Beach is an attraction and highly frequented by residents and visitors alike and people felt more needs to be done to keep it clean. People acknowledged that costs for clean-up have increased and that enforcing littering regulations is difficult. Some would like to see stricter enforcement codified in Town while others felt more community involvement would be the way forward.

The following actions have high level of support:

- *Increase frequency of Town Clean-up Day.* The A.P.P.L.E. Seed-sponsored event called "Clean Sweep" asks residents to do town and private property clean-up. There is no charge for trash disposal for residents on this day, although there are costs for the town.
- *Pass harsher by-laws.* Pass harsher enforcement codified in town by-laws regarding dumping.
- *Get more people involved*. Recruit new members for the Recreation Committee to help with outreach, awareness and greater involvement in projects.
- *Install cameras as deterrents*. Look into setting up cameras in key areas to help law enforcement crack down on littering and vandalism.
- *Coordinate with other groups.* Reach out to existing groups for assistance with trail upkeep and litter pick-up, and coordinate efforts.

Recognized challenges that will need to be addressed:

- Funding the Town's increasing costs associated with trash collection and general upkeep.
- Finding ways to attract more people to get involved with clean-up both on their own property and in Brookfield common areas.
- People also voiced how difficult it is to pass rules about littering and even harder to enforce, and that littering is also done by visitors who have no stake in keeping Brookfield pristine.

E. Need for Infrastructure to Connect Areas and Increase Safety and Access

Across all three dialogues, there was high agreement about the need for additional infrastructure to increase access and safety. Many people said they would engage in more outdoor activities if there were better ways to connect to areas, for example, there is no good access from north to south of the river. Sidewalks are missing, and it often does not feel safe for children to cross roads. Recently, Brookfield adopted Complete Streets, which is a policy where streets are designed to balance safety and convenience

for everyone using the road. This policy could potentially be a resource to address some of the raised concerns. People also spoke up about increasing the number of trails and proper maintenance of trails in natural areas and along the river. In some areas, there are no trails and in other areas, the trails are narrow, unkempt or not marked, and many people voiced concerns about ticks and getting lost. The lack of marked trails on MassWildlife-managed land came up repeatedly, however, agency policy states that marked trails in most cases conflict with the protection of wildlife, and instead encourages people to use its lands in Brookfield through off-trail hiking/walking.

Although there was less agreement on this, some people also voiced a need for additional recreation opportunities and upgraded amenities. As one person put it, "*there is both active and passive recreation in Town, but very little active recreation – not enough ballfields for kids*," while others felt the focus should be on improving what is already here: "*Spend resources on what we already have. If additional funds or opportunities or enthusiasm arise, then look for places to expand."*

The following actions have high level of support:

- *Division of Conservation Services (DCS) grants.* Acquire state grant funding the town becomes eligible for once the revised OSRP is submitted. Funding can be used for the acquisition of conservation or parkland, the development of a new park, the renovation of an existing park, or the development of trails on municipally-owned conservation or recreation land.
- *Twichell Grove Trail.* Improve the trail by Twichell Grove, an existing parcel adjacent to the school which has a nature and history path already mapped and would make a new recreation area if maintained.
- *Trail building assistance.* Look into coordinating with the Boy Scouts to assist with trail building.
- *Safe access across the river.* Coordinate with MassWildlife about improving pedestrian safety along route 148 where it crosses the Quaboag River, as MassWildlife owns the land adjacent to the road.
- *Quaboag - Old Brookfield Path.* Revisit with Audubon the prospect of mapping the historic trail called "Quaboag - Old Brookfield Path" near Devil's Elbow Road.

Recognized challenges that will need to be addressed:

- Lack of funding for new recreational amenities and upgrades to current sites, both of which would also increase maintenance costs.
- Increasing access to natural and recreational areas would need to be carefully balanced so that increased activity does not pose harm to the environment and wildlife habitat.
- Brookfield has a lot of private and state-owned land and those owners may not be amenable to sidewalks and trails.

VI. Important Areas of Discussion with Less Clear Agreement

In addition to the ideas people converged on with high agreement, there were topics that were heavily discussed and were important to people, but had less clear agreement. These are described below and may warrant further discussion to determine if and what action is appropriate.

A. Stronger Enforcement of Environmental Regulations

Participants expressed a strong desire to see the high quality natural areas in Brookfield protected from degradation, development, and pollution. In particular, people were concerned about decreasing water quality at the town beach, South and North Pond more broadly, and the Quaboag River, including aquatic invasive plants (transferred by boat). People also expressed frustration with a general lack of respect by some for natural resources and the regulations intended to protect them. However, people were less aligned on what action should be taken and some were unsure they were willing to see more usage restrictions and stronger protections (other than litter enforcement, as described above).

Concerns included the cost of enforcement, and a sense that state and national regulations can overly restrict local control (see section VII below), and the recognition that some residents feel regulation is an infringement on personal choice. Mirroring this tension, a question from the anonymous questionnaires asked participants the extent to which they agreed or disagreed with the statement: *"we should protect our natural areas <u>even if</u> it means further limits to our personal freedom through increased regulations and enforcement"*, and half favored and half opposed the action. On the other hand, when asked if Brookfield *"should emphasize water quality and long-term sustainability in planning for Brookfield's natural resources"*, there was overwhelming support for this action (see Appendix E, questions 18 and 6 respectively). Overall, people seemed to support the general concept of moderate and appropriate restrictions, but acknowledged that drawing those lines is tricky. *One proposed action that met with little to no resistance was a program to monitor boats as a way to prevent the spread of aquatic invasive plants and animals.*

B. Need for Environmental Education

Dialogue participants discussed wanting to support Brookfield's environment and wildlife, but many felt they did not know enough about how to do so. During one dialogue, participants heard about an endangered bird species hiding in (somewhat) plain sight on MassWildlife property in Brookfield, which spurred the idea that MassWildlife should publicize the types of wildlife on their lands to increase awareness and appreciation. There was also talk of educating boaters about the impact of transferring aquatic weeds, which is a concern to many. People did not agree on specifics, but there seemed to be support for more environmental education in general. *One proposed idea that met with little to no resistance was that environmental education should begin in Elementary School – perhaps through a Nature Classroom – to teach children about what Brookfield has available and how to support its protection.*

C. Off-Highway Vehicle Usage (ATV and snowmobiles)

OHV riding is a polarizing issue in Brookfield. OHV enthusiasts generally ride elsewhere as there are not enough areas in Town and trails/paths do not connect beyond town to offer continuous riding. People who oppose OHV cite its high noise level, speeding, and detrimental impact on plants and wildlife. Although riders would ideally like more trails and a designated area – which would draw riders from outside to Town and thus attract and help support businesses, coffee shops, and more – they generally understand that it may not be physically possible in Brookfield due to land area constraints. *One idea that was met with some agreement and some resistance was to look into whether the Blue Trails, which connect to other towns by water, might serve as a model for the four Brookfield towns to connect with snowmobile trails.*

VII. Building Understanding around MassWildlife Land in Brookfield

The abundance of land held by MassWildlife, a division of the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game (DFG), was a topic of vigorous discussion in every dialogue session. MassWildlife holds approximately 24% of Brookfield's total area in the form of four Wildlife Management Areas (WMA)[4]. The dialogue series brought home the outsized influence of these properties on people's perceptions of open space and recreation in Brookfield, and a section has been dedicated to this topic.

Key Background:

- The statutory purpose of the four WMAs is the biological protection and management of fish, wildlife, and rare species, and the provision of wildlife-dependent recreation opportunities for the public, including hunting, fishing, and trapping.
- MassWildlife's Walking Trails Policy holds that marked recreational trails can degrade habitat, disrupt wildlife, and compromise biodiversity. As a result, there are no sanctioned trails on the WMAs in Brookfield, other than former carriage trails or logging roads. The former carriage trails, logging roads and other pathways are accessible to the public, although not marked or actively maintained.
- MassWildlife encourages use of the WMAs for hunting, fishing, birding, and general nature appreciation, through the use of existing unmarked trails and off-trail hiking/walking[5].

During the dialogues, participants expressed confusion about what uses are allowable in the WMAs and where these properties could be accessed. The prohibition of new trails felt excessively restrictive to many, and some expressed doubt about the safety and appeal of off-trail hiking, particularly in light of ticks and risk of Lyme's Disease. Participants were also frustrated that such a large percent of Brookfield's area was held by MassWildlife, which pays no taxes, leaving diminished revenue resources for the town and a higher tax burden on residents. Combined with the perception of heavy use restrictions on MassWildlife land, many sensed that Brookfield was giving up more than it was getting from these areas. Additionally, people expressed anxiety about the prospect of "losing" even more land to the state should future parcels be acquired, and uncertainty about whether there was any means of local control over this process.

Bill Davis, District Supervisor at MassWildlife, was able to attend two of the dialogues as a guest expert. He explained the purpose of the trail restrictions, clarified the nature of the public access that is allowed, and shared information about some rare species and scenic areas that can be found within the WMAs. Mr. Davis also pointed out that while the state does not pay taxes to the town, the WMAs do not cost the town anything for upkeep or services in contrast to residential and commercial properties. Finally, Mr. Davis asked participants to consider exploring ways to capture revenue from the fishing derbies made possible by MassWildlife's fish stocking activities in Brookfield, or any of the other wildlife management activities MassWildlife undertakes in Brookfield with the fees and surcharges on hunting permits and licenses collected by the state.

[4] Quaboag; Richardson; Quacumquasit; and Wolf Swamp

[5] Access points for WMAs can be found on the MassWildlife Lands Viewer at: https://www.mass.gov/how-to/masswildlife-lands-viewer

While the large influence of MassWildlife land in Brookfield will likely remain a source of debate and controversy, the following ideas for future action emerged as possible ways to reduce tensions and find some constructive ways forward:

- In general, participants supported the goals of wildlife protection and people seemed genuinely appreciative of the information Mr. Davis provided. Some felt that it may go a long way to share this information more widely with the community – in particular, the important species that can be found in the WMAs; where best to access the properties; the types of public use allowed; and the wildlife purposes served by restricting other types of use.
- As suggested by Mr. Davis, participants were receptive to exploring with MassWildlife possible ways to generate town revenue from wildlife management activities, particularly capturing revenue from fishing derbies made possible by MassWildlife's fish stocking.
- People would like opportunities for information and Q&A sessions, more access to printed materials, and further discussion with MassWildlife.

VIII. More Discussion or Information Sought

At each dialogue, questions and topics came up that participants felt needed further discussion and/or research.

Suggestions for continued discussion:

- **Who benefits**? Participants were eager for ongoing conversations about how to assess who benefits from actions that the Town may want to pursue through the OSRP process. Are benefits and costs shared fairly? What percent of users of Brookfield's natural and recreation areas are residents vs. visitors?
- **Proactive land acquisition by the Town**: Participants wanted to explore whether the town could more effectively anticipate and pursue purchase of properties for sale that are of interest to the town for economic development purposes, recreation, or other town needs.
- **Future land acquisition by the state**: What is the process for such acquisition? What measures are in place – or could be put in place – to ensure the community has a voice in protecting Brookfield's interests as a whole in the face of potential new state acquisitions?
- **Keep up momentum**: Participants were interested in ongoing discussions to help keep action items moving forward**.**

Areas to research:

- **Capturing revenue from fishing derbies**: Is the town permitted to charge and capture fees from derbies (despite the state managing boat ramp permitting)? Are there other ways to derive revenue from these derbies?
- **Learning from others towns**: How are other towns with large percentages of state-owned land dealing with issues of taxes and limits to economic development opportunities?
- **Beach maintenance**: What maintenance is permitted under the town's licensing agreement with MassWildlife and how is communication and coordination with the state best done?
    - An intra-town conversation about beach maintenance was also suggested on how to share responsibilities among different committees or departments.

- **Cultural Heritage sites**: Are MassWildlife practices and regulations sufficiently protective of cultural heritage sites, including Devil's Elbow? Can clearer information about these practices and regulations be provided?
- **Blue Trails promotion**: Does the Blue Trail conflict with MassWildlife management goals? If so, could concerns be strategically addressed so the Blue Trail can continue to be promoted?

IX. Perspectives Not in the Room

Participants were asked to think about perspectives or constituencies possibly not well represented during the dialogues. People noted that these missing perspectives might have changed the conversations and should be included as part of moving forward with the OSRP process.

- Commuters who live in town but work elsewhere and feel less connected to the town
- Children, young adults and their families
- "Hardcore" wildlife enthusiasts and advocates for unspoiled nature
- Advocates for maximum freedom of land use and access / strong anti-regulation advocates
- Small business entrepreneurs
- Teachers
- Lake association members

X. Closing Reflections

During the final reflections of each dialogue session, participants expressed appreciation for the opportunity to engage with each other in a different way. Some suggested that the ideas generated during the discussions were a direct result of the opportunity to have an honest and constructive dialogue about the issues. As one participant put it, "*the conversation felt productive in new ways.*" Participants also valued the chance to hear perspectives that were new to them: one reflected, "*I heard concerns today that I hadn't thought of before,*" and another appreciated having "*heard the different viewpoints.*"

In addition to helping develop some clear senses of shared direction about how best to manage, preserve, and leverage Brookfield's natural and recreation spaces, and some deeper understanding about the challenges involved, it is our hope the public dialogue experience introduced a useful tool for public engagement. From the Board of Selectmen's willingness to try something different, to the Framing Team's many hours and efforts to make this process a success, to the dozens of people who took time to come to the dialogues, MOPC staff were impressed with the community's enthusiasm and commitment. Many in the community seem eager to find vehicles that give them a voice and that create meaningful, engaging opportunities for them to participate in public decision making. Whether through another deliberative dialogue process or one of the many other participatory engagement methods, it is our hope that Brookfield was encouraged by this process to continue to find ways to create space for people to work together on issues of shared concern.

List of Appendices

Due to size of appendices, they are in a separate PDF document, and can be found here and on the Brookfield town website: Forms & Documents under Open Space / Master Plan

A. Public Input Survey Responses
B. Public Dialogue Discussion Guide
C. Supplemental Information Sheet
D. Brookfield Open Space Map
E. Tallied Post-Dialogue Questionnaire Responses