

IV. OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION

The rolling hills and numerous lakes of Lewisboro along with heavily wooded areas and scattered open fields crossed by streams provide an exceptional, and relatively rural, environment for the Town's residents. The character of the Town's setting may be appreciated even more when considered in perspective with the surrounding growth in Westchester, Putnam and Fairfield Counties.

A major goal of Lewisboro's planning efforts since 1970 has been the preservation of this quality of the natural environment. This Plan expands that emphasis in recognition of the critical period of development which will be facing the Town over the next several years. The key element in maintaining, and perhaps enhancing, the present character of Lewisboro is the preservation and protection of open space lands.

A. Definition of Open Space

In 1984, only 34% of Lewisboro's total area was classified as developed. Of the remaining area, 19% was identified as "open space" and 4% as water surface. The largest component of the Town's area, 43%, was properly termed "undeveloped".

The difference between "open space" and "undeveloped" land is that in order to be termed open space, a decision has been made to dedicate or reserve the land for recreational purposes or for conservation, aesthetic or passive use. There is no such commitment on "undeveloped" land and, absent that, it can be assumed that the land, or portions of it, will eventually be developed for some other use.

In this Plan, committed open space includes the following classifications of land:

- o public parks and preserve areas,
- o land owned by semi-public and public organizations for conservation and open space purposes,
- o land held for protection of public water supply facilities,
- o land set aside in the approved design of conservation subdivisions as areas not to be built upon except for recreational uses,
- o land protected by easements which restrict the use and development of the property to passive recreation or unaltered natural conditions,

- o portions of public school properties used for recreational facilities or left in a natural state, and
- o private recreational facilities.

B. Functions of Open Space

Open space serves three important functions for a community:

- o the maintenance of natural processes or conservation,
- o the provision of recreational opportunities, and
- o the establishment of a community image and a visually pleasant landscape.

Preserving land for conservation purposes is, in many instances, not only a matter of maintaining ecological equilibrium but of economic importance. For example, a ten-acre wetland can accommodate as much as three million gallons of water in a one-foot rise. If the wetland is filled in, the water would have to be provided for elsewhere. It is much less expensive to utilize appropriate existing wetlands in their natural state than to provide man-made facilities for water drainage. Maintenance of certain critical areas in their natural state can also help avoid flood hazards and protect and maintain ground water supplies. In addition, the preservation of natural vegetation on steep slopes can prevent erosion problems and help protect water quality.

Recreational opportunities in Lewisboro include the active-use facilities in the Lewisboro Town parks and larger recreational areas such as the Ward Pound Ridge Reservation which can serve a wide variety of uses through each season of the year. Private recreation facilities such as the lake community associations contribute to the total range of available recreation.

Community appearance is primarily established along the major roads in Lewisboro and through vistas of stream valleys, ridge lines and hilltops. The edges and dominant physical features seen from the roadside can either establish or remove a sense of natural environment and openness by enclosing and defining development so as to prevent a continuous unattractive sprawl. The maintenance of green belts along roads and stream corridors are particularly useful.

In the past, private choice and natural features which pose severe development limitations have prevented widespread development along many of Lewisboro's major roads. With the increasing pace of development, the sense of

compatibility or balance between developed areas and the natural environment can now probably only be retained if the appropriate regulations on land use are in place. These may include density definitions, special setbacks, restrictions on tree removal and maintenance of open fields.

The preservation of open space is, to a large degree, the preservation of the character of a low density residential community such as Lewisboro. Open space, if included as a major design component in town development, can provide for the continuance of an intimate connection between the natural environment and the people of the Town. Open space preservation must take place while there is still open space to preserve. Open space planning seeks to preserve the land which will be needed for open space in the future because once development occurs, the open space can no longer be retrieved.

C. Existing Open Space and Recreation Facilities

Lewisboro has not only a large amount of committed open space but a diversified mix of types of open space. As of October 1984, over 3,500 acres of the Town's total area fell into the category of "open space" as it has been defined above. An additional 851 acres consisted of surface of water bodies.

Of the total open space land, public park land available for active recreational use comprised 1,454 acres or 42%. An additional 212 acres (6%) are also active recreational lands although they are maintained in private ownership. Conservation land to which the public has been granted at least limited access encompasses 814 acres (23%). The remaining 1,023 acres (29%) of open space lands are owned and maintained for protection of public water supply or critical environmental areas and have restricted public access.

Table 17, "Open Space and Recreational Lands," shows that committed open space land in Lewisboro increased by 26% between 1972 and 1984. Both Town-owned park land and privately-held conservation lands increased substantially over the 12-year period. As recommended in the 1973 Town Plan, two additional sites were acquired for use as active recreation Town parks to supplement the original Town Park on Route 35 and to provide increased opportunities for residents in Goldens Bridge and Vista/Lake Kitchawan/Lewisboro. Construction of playing fields and courts in the 43-acre Fox Valley Park and 32-acre Onatru Farm Park began in 1983. The Town also acquired 71 acres of passive use conservation oriented land and a 117-acre parcel on Route 138 which can be developed to meet future needs of the Town's residents.

Table 17
Town of Lewisboro

OPEN SPACE AND RECREATIONAL LANDS
1972 and 1984
(acres)

Category	1972*		1984**	
	<u>Subtotal</u>	<u>Total</u>	<u>Subtotal</u>	<u>Total</u>
Town Facilities:		126		409
Recreation Parks	55		147	
Conservation Preserves	71		262	
County Parks		1,215		1,217
Reservoir Watershed Lands		985		960
Conservation Lands:		98		617
Conservancy Group Holdings	98		365	
Section 281 Subdivisions	0		189	
Easement Lands	NA		63	
Private Recreation		257		212
Katonah-Lewisboro School District				
Recreation Facilities and Open Space		<u>90</u>		<u>90</u>
Total Open Space and Recreational Lands		2,771		3,505

*Source: "Open Space and Recreation - Preliminary Planning Study",
Town of Lewisboro, September 1972.

**Source: 1981 Land Use Survey Prepared by Frederick P. Clark
Associates, updated to October 1984.

Lands under the sponsorship of conservation groups contributed the greatest increase of any single open space category with a 12-year increase of 267 acres. The new conservation parcels include areas of major wetlands and steep slopes identified on the 1973 Town Plan Map. Conservation (Section 281) subdivisions have contributed 189 acres since 1972. Through these subdivisions, several areas of steep slopes, hilltops and wetlands, identified on the 1973 Town Plan Map as worthy of preservation, have been placed in permanent open space lands intended to remain basically wild. An additional 63 acres are covered by conservation easements which preclude future development. Together, the old and new conservation lands establish a widespread outline of open spaces that will be seen in the future as increasingly important for maintaining a rural atmosphere in Lewisboro.

It is significant to note that the increase in open space conservation lands did not come at any expense to the Town aside from some reduction of property tax revenues on the individual lots involved. This reduction may be partially compensated by an increase in value in adjacent and nearby residential properties which benefit from proximity to the permanent open spaces.

Lewisboro is fortunate to have two County parks located partially within the Town limits. Although designed and maintained by Westchester County as regional facilities, their proximity makes them as accessible to Town residents as the Town parks and preserves. These facilities provide numerous recreational opportunities and establish a major element of a protected open space network without direct cost or administrative responsibilities for the Town.

The reservoir systems located within and adjacent to Lewisboro have remained essentially stable over the 12-year period. These waterbodies and adjacent watershed lands provide another unique open space resource for local residents.

The Waccabuc Country Club remains the single largest private recreation operation in terms of land area. The remaining private recreation uses consist of facilities operated by the several lake community associations which focus on beach uses and some racquet sport courts. Other facilities include the Laural Pond Swim Club, the recreation complex at Oakridge and the indoor tennis courts in Vista. There are no semi-public multi-use facilities such as a YMCA or Jewish Community Center in Lewisboro.

One final major group of recreation sites is the public school campuses operated by the Katonah-Lewisboro School District. Each school campus contains some recreation facilities which, even if access to them is limited, contribute to the Town's recreational needs.

D. Open Space and Recreation Land Standards

In order to guide public and private organizations when making decisions with regard to how much open space is needed or desirable, a number of planning organizations have formulated open space standards and guidelines. These standards represent an effort to make generalizations about the supply of open space that is needed for various purposes by a population of a given size. In most cases, they are expressed in terms of acres per 1,000 population. Table 18, "Open Space Standards," contains examples of such standards. The range in standards is due in part to the lack of precise definitions of open space lands.

With 3,505 acres of open space and recreation lands and an estimated October 1984 population of 10,228 persons, Lewisboro - in 1984 - had 342 acres of open space and recreation land per 1,000 population. This ratio exceeds by far all of the general standards. However, the reservoir watershed, public school district and private recreation lands are not necessarily permanently committed to open space use. If these lands were eventually used for other purposes, Lewisboro would have 2,243 acres of open space and recreation lands or 219 acres per 1,000 population. This ratio is also well above the general standards. When the components of Lewisboro's open space system were compared to the general standards, it was found that each category also exceeded the general standards.

At the maximum residential development level for Lewisboro as established by this Plan - and with no increase in open space and recreation lands - Lewisboro would have a total of 110 acres of open space per 1,000 residents (excluding watershed, school district and private recreation lands). This figure is closer to, but still exceeds, the standards for total acres of open space.

Much of northern Westchester County and adjacent Fairfield County in Connecticut has an open space image that, if it is to be maintained, must be identified and protected by municipal action in the face of strong development pressures. Part of the reason for this image is due to the establishment of open space in several of the communities that numerically far exceeds the national standards in addition to the fact that substantial portions of the region remain undeveloped. From a regional perspective, the quantity of open space lands in Lewisboro is not excessive.

Table 16
OPEN SPACE STANDARDS

Agency	Total Acres of Open Space per 1,000 Pop.	Open Space Components Per 1,000 Population		Source
Regional Plan Association (RPA)	--	County park	10 acres or 5% of total (which- ever is greater)	<u>2nd Regional Plan (1968)</u>
		Municipal park	10 acres+	
RPA and Metropolitan Regional Council	--	Parkland	22 acres	--
Tri-State Regional Planning Commission	--	Large-scale regional Neighborhood	15 acres 12 acres	--
Tri-State Regional Planning Commission	--	Outdoor recreation	30 acres	<u>Outdoor Recreation in a Crowded Region (1973)</u>
Westchester County Planning Department	18	County-owned open space Municipally-owned open space	10 acres 6 acres	--
National Recreation and Park Association	90	Large parks, forests & other open space Urban recreation areas Extra open space (within 1 hour drive of home)	65 acres 10 acres 15 acres	<u>Outdoor Recreation Space</u>
Clawson's Standard Baltimore, Md.	78	Regional open space Public park & Recreation Private park Green space	42 acres 14 acres 5 acres 17 acres	<u>Challenge of the Land</u> Charles E. Little (1968)

E. Recommended Open Space System

The existing 3,505 acres of committed open space are shown on the Town Plan Map as recommended permanent open space land. As described above, portions of this acreage serve different purposes and provide a range of benefits for the Town's residents. It is extremely important for the future of Lewisboro as portrayed in this Plan that all of this land be maintained in the open space system.

Additional acquisition of land by the Town for the purpose of establishing more open space parkland is not considered necessary by this Plan. The three active recreation Town parks will serve the Town's residents well into the future. Of course individual site improvements should be made at each park as determined to be necessary. Construction of an indoor recreation facility will warrant serious study. Additional room for expansion of Town recreation and park services will be available on the Brownell Estate property in Goldens Bridge for long-term development.

Open space planning in Lewisboro for the next several years should focus on protecting two categories of open space which may fall outside of the presently committed open space lands. These are:

- o Lands which are integral parts of natural systems. These include critical wetlands; streams and the adjacent upland buffers which protect their integrity; aquifers and aquifer recharge areas; floodplains; and potentially erodible steep slopes.
- o Land serving an important aesthetic function. These include highly visible hillsides and ridgelines; land immediately adjacent to major roads; natural buffer areas between different types of land use or levels of development density; and stream corridor greenbelts.

Land areas with these characteristics have been identified, in general terms, on the Town Plan Map and are recommended for protection and preservation.

F. Implementation

Several means are available to the Town to add uncommitted land areas to the protected open space system. The following actions are recommended:

- o Conservation Development. Section 281 of Town Law can be used to greater effect as a means of protecting uncommitted land which is part of the Town Plan's recommended open space system. First, the land set aside as open space in conservation developments

should be land shown on the Town Plan Map as warranting preservation for one or more purposes such as wetland areas, steeply sloped areas, scenic vistas and open space corridors. Second, appropriate legislative action should be taken by the Town Board to fully implement the provisions of Section 281 and authorize the Planning Board to require the use of conservation subdivision design when such use would achieve Town Plan policies.

- o Wetlands Ordinance. Important wetlands and streams can be maintained in their natural state through effective use and enforcement of a wetlands protection ordinance. The present regulatory authority set forth in the Zoning Ordinance is insufficient. A new, separate ordinance should contain a definition of wetlands based on soil type and vegetation. Development of a priority ranking of importance of specific wetlands would establish useful information for decision-making on requests for wetland disturbance permits.
- o Zoning Regulations. Amendments to the Zoning Ordinance should be made to provide a regulatory basis for maintaining the recommended open space corridors along roadways and the recommended open space buffer areas to be established between different land uses. These corridors and areas are shown on the Town Plan Map. Special building setbacks should be established as well as limitations on tree removal and maintenance requirements on open areas.
- o Aquifer Protection. Additional research should be conducted into water resources including the identification and relative importance of aquifers and aquifer recharge areas located in Lewisboro. Depending on the characteristics of these areas, the development of an aquifer protection ordinance may be appropriate. In any event, known aquifers should receive attention during subdivision design and review.
- o Conservation Easements and Subdivision Regulations. Stream valleys, buffer areas, hilltops, ridge lines and prominent rock outcroppings identified on the Town Plan Map can be protected by conservation easements and sensitive subdivision design rather than through public acquisition. Efforts should be made to acquire public trail easements in stream valleys which would serve to connect existing trail segments and to link established open space lands.

Other actions can be taken by the Town to achieve better protection of the existing open space system and critical environmental areas. These are:

- o Watershed Land Protection. The Town should consider seeking right of first refusal in the event that New York City, the First Taxing District of Norwalk, or the Stamford Water Company ever decide to dispose of some or all of their lands in Lewisboro.
- o Surface Water Protection. Land surrounding Lewisboro's lakes and reservoirs should be developed only in ways which do not diminish water quality. In most situations, Rural Density residential land use, implemented through low density zoning regulations, will provide the best protection.
- o Ground Water Protection. Ponding of streams in areas where soil and bedrock conditions favor ground water recharge can be encouraged in subdivision design and development. Town regulations should be strengthened to prohibit or regulate disposal of toxic substances and pollutants into the ground. Revisions should be made to the permitted uses set forth in the Zoning Ordinance so as to confine or eliminate the types of uses which regularly require or produce such substances as part of their operation.
- o Trail System. The realization of a Town-wide foot trail system should continue to be pursued. As part of the system, the Town should seek more extensive use of reservoir and watershed lands.