

## **SECTION 5: INVENTORY OF LANDS OF CONSERVATION AND RECREATION INTEREST**

### **Overview**

The term “open space” includes landscapes that have little if any development, and which have important ecological, natural resource, or cultural functions. Areas such as forests, farmlands, marshes, islands, recreational areas, cemeteries, historic sites and uninhabited tracts of land over 5 acres are considered open space for the purposes of this plan. The town of Essex is endowed with a wide variety of the types of land mentioned above. Essex residents cherish vistas across the Essex River Estuary to islands and the sea, views of farm fields along John Wise Avenue, hikes through the Manchester- Essex Woods and swimming in Chebacco Lake. It is integral that we, as a town, understand the value of such land and work to creatively protect it before it is developed in ways that could irreparably damage its important functions and the qualities that make Essex such a special place. Open Space preservation also ensures farmland, ecosystems and bioregions remain intact in a manner they are the most ecologically valuable.

The 2016-2023 update of Essex’s Open Space and Recreation Plan contains the Town’s first parcel-by-parcel mapping of the open space character of land<sup>1</sup>. The Essex Open Space Map (Map 12) reveals key aspects of the make-up of open space in Essex.

The Essex River Estuary contains tidal marshes, open water and unoccupied islands that comprise the majority of the northeast quadrant of Essex. Those lands have been protected both by conservation restrictions and wetland regulations that make significant development unlikely.

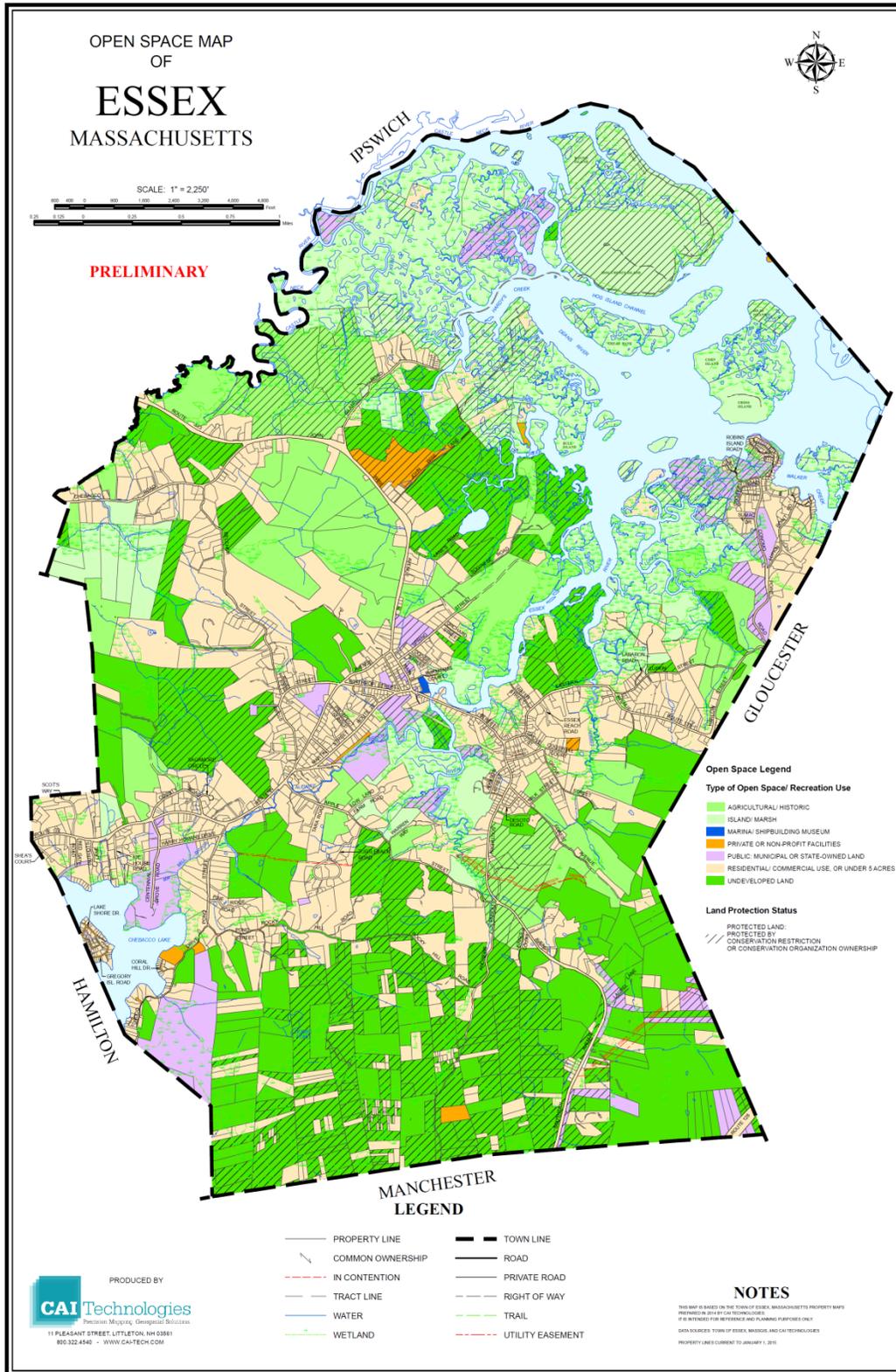
The Manchester / Essex woods lie along Essex’s southern border, below Rocky Hill Road. Significant tracts of these woods have been protected by the Manchester / Essex Conservation Trust, the Essex Conservation Commission and others. Although the lack of roads and the presence of wetlands have limited development of many unprotected parcels, many large parcels in the Manchester / Essex Woods remain to be protected.

In the west-central section of Essex, John Wise Avenue runs through farm fields. Many of the northeast tracts have conservation restrictions while many southwest tracts have no protection.

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<sup>1</sup> Note: the Open Space Map identifies the dominant open space character of each parcel although parcels may have multiple characteristics.

# MAP 12 – OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION MAP



## Inventory

In this section we will consider all valuable open land in Essex and identify those parcels that are permanently protected and those that are vulnerable and may be adversely developed in the future. The protected land parcels are addressed in two sections: first Private Parcels (unoccupied, over 5 acres); then Public and Nonprofit Parcels. In addition, the data is presented in matrix form, separated into privately-held parcels (Matrix A) and public and nonprofit parcels (Matrix B).

Private lands can be protected in perpetuity through deed restrictions or conservation easements/restrictions (though some easements/restrictions only run for a specified number of years and therefore those lands are not permanently protected open space). Special taxation programs such as Chapter 61, 61A or 61B afford protection to land, but it is not permanent since land can become developable if the owner chooses to sell the land for development. Lands acquired for watershed and aquifer protection, and public recreation and conservation lands receive varying degrees of protection. In addition, a variety of private, public and non-profit conservation and recreation land is protected under Article 97 of the Articles of Amendment to the State Constitution.<sup>2</sup>

### A. Parcels Protected by Conservation Restrictions or Land Trusts.

#### 1. Conservation Restrictions

Description: Essex has 1,115.6 acres that are permanently protected under Chapter 184 of the Massachusetts General Laws, an increase of over 250 acres since 2007<sup>3</sup>.

Current Use: These parcels are currently used as farms, wooded lots or open space. Many of these parcels have great recreation potential for activities including hiking, horseback riding, bird watching, cross country skiing and biking.

Public Access: These properties are privately owned and generally available to the public only by invitation.

Degree of Protection: These properties have documented conservation restrictions.

- Bothways Farm, Southern Ave. near Apple St (110 acre CR held by The Trustees of Reservations, “TTOR”)
- Castle Neck River Property, along the Ipswich border (88 acre CR held by TTOR)
- Davis Property, 21-23 Andrews St (16.8 acre partial CR held by the Essex County Greenbelt Association, “ECGA”)

<sup>2</sup> Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs. *Open Space Planner’s Workbook*, Section 5.

<sup>3</sup> Note, the total acreage of land under conservation restriction increased only by ~200 acres. The 250+ acre increase in land protected by CR’s does not include a reduction to account for the shift in status of 48 acres of the Cape Ann Golf Course previously protected by a conservation restriction to ownership by TTOR. An additional portion of the Cape Ann Golf Course is protected under Chapter 61B restriction (38 acres).

- Ellsworth Property, Belcher St. (14.3 + 10.6 acre CRs held by ECGA)
- Harris Property, Choate St. (26.1 acre CR held by ECGA)
- Hodges Property, Apple St. (8.7 acre CR held by ECGA)
- Hodges Property, Apple St. (22.4 acre CR held by ECGA)
- Lane Property, 59 John Wise Ave, (68.8 acre CR held by ECGA)
- Lunken Property, Eastern Ave. (15 acre CR held by ECGA)
- Means Property, Western Ave.. (171 acre CR held by ECGA)
- Phillips Property, Eastern Ave. . (15 acre CR held by ECGA)
- Ridge Property, 54 Spring Street (87 acre CR held by Greenbelt)
- Storey Property , 143 John Wise Ave. (136 acre CR/APR held by the Commonwealth)
- Thornhill Farm (Richardson Property), Island Rd. (57.8 acre CR held by TTOR and two parcels of 93 acres)
- Tyler Property, off Addison St. (43 acre CR held by ECGA)
- Van Wyck Property, Pond St near Turtleback Lane (10 acre CR held by the Town Conservation Commission)
- Warren Property, Harlow St. (21.1 acre CR held by ECGA)
- Wilson Property, 37 Choate St, (4 acre CR held by ECGA)
- The Manchester-Essex Conservation Trust holds approximately four acres of CRs located at access points to the Essex Woods. (Note: the rest of their holdings are “in fee”)

Matrix A provides further details on these properties and their public accessibility.

MATRIX A: INVENTORY OF PRIVATELY HELD, PROTECTED PARCELS (CONSERVATION RESTRICTIONS)

Property Name/Ownership/Location	Map & Block (2015)	Acreage	Managing Agency	Current Use	Public Access	Protection Status	Restrictions	Grants Used to Purchase or Improve Property	Recreation Potential
Bothways Farm, Southern Ave.		110 acres	The Trustees of Reservations, (TTOR)	Farm	Privately-owned; access by invitation only	Permanently protected	Conservation Restriction (CR)	None	May provide access to riding trails on an individual, permission required basis?
Castle Neck River Property		88 acres	TTOR		Privately-owned; access by invitation only	Permanently protected	CR	None	
Cape Ann Golf Course, 99 John Wise Ave.		99 acres	TTOR		Privately-owned; access by invitation only	Permanently protected	CR	None	Used for golf, open to the public for fee
Ellsworth Property, Belcher St.		17 acres	Essex County Greenbelt Association (ECGA)		Privately-owned; access by invitation only	Permanently protected	CR	None	
Harris Property, Choate St.		25 acres	ECGA		Privately-owned; access by invitation only	Permanently protected	CR	None	
Hodges Property, Apple St.		12 acres	ECGA		Privately-owned; access by invitation only	Permanently protected	CR	None	
Hodges Property, Apple St.		20 acres	ECGA		Privately-owned; access by invitation only	Permanently protected	CR	None	
Lunken Property, Eastern Ave.		13 acres	ECGA		Privately-owned; access by invitation only	Permanently protected	CR	None	
Means Property, Belcher St.		168 acres	ECGA		Privately-owned; access by invitation only	Permanently protected	CR	None	
Phillips Property, 23 John Wise Ave.		11 acres	ECGA		Privately-owned; access by invitation only	Permanently protected	CR	None	
Stavros Property, John Wise Ave		67 acres	TTOR <sup>2</sup>	Agriculture in perpetuity	Privately-owned; access by invitation only	Permanently protected	CR/Agricultural Preservation Restriction ("APR")	None	Adjacent public access to White's Hill
Stoney Property, 143 John Wise Ave. (CR/APR)		130 acres	CR/APR held by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts	Agriculture in perpetuity	Privately-owned; access by invitation only	Permanently protected	CR/APR	None	
Thornhill Farm (Richardson)		55 acres plus	TTOR		Privately-owned; access	Permanently protected	CR	None	

<sup>1</sup> Does not include nonprofit ownership, which is contained in Matrix B.

<sup>2</sup> ECGA also holds a CR on 19 acres of this property.

**MATRIX A: INVENTORY OF PRIVATELY HELD, PROTECTED PARCELS (CONSERVATION RESTRICTIONS)**

Property Name/Ownership/ Location	Map & Block (2015)	Acreage	Managing Agency	Current Use	Public Access	Protection Status	Restrictions	Grants Used to Purchase or Improve Property	Recreation Potential
Property), Island Rd.		two parcels of 93 acres			by invitation only	protected			
Tyler Property, off Addison St.		30 acres	ECGA		Privately-owned; access by invitation only	Permanently protected	CR	None	
Warren Property, Harlow St.		67 acres	ECGA		Privately-owned; access by invitation only	Permanently protected	CR	None	
Essex Woods Access		4 acres	Manchester-Essex Conservation Trust (MECT)		Privately-owned; access by invitation only	Permanently protected	CR	None	

## **2. Agricultural and Historic Preservation Restrictions**

Description/Condition: Essex has 189 acres that are permanently protected under chapter 184 of the Massachusetts General Laws. These are permanent deed restrictions held by the Commonwealth's Department of Food and Agriculture, which preclude any use of the property that will have a negative impact on its agricultural viability. The Commonwealth has the option to purchase the land at agricultural value.

Current Use: These parcels, listed below, are in agriculture in perpetuity.

- Stavros Property, John Wise Ave., 53 acre APR held by TTOR
- Storey Property, 143 John Wise Ave., 136 acre APR/CR held by the Commonwealth.

Historic New England acquired Cogswell's Grant on Spring Street, a 132-acre farm property and buildings protected by an historic preservation restriction.

Recreation Potential: These parcels have great recreation potential for activities including hiking, horseback riding, cross country skiing and bird watching, but any such use must be consistent with their primary agricultural purpose.

Public Access: These properties are privately owned and generally available to the public only by invitation.

Degree of Protection: These properties are permanently protected

As can be seen by Map 12, several large private parcels of significant acreage, particularly those adjacent to and connecting conservation lands off of Southern Avenue, Apple Street and John Wise Avenue lack permanent open space protection. They are pivotal to ensuring the protection of whole, healthy ecosystems and habitats, and efforts to educate landowners as to the importance of their parcels could play a prominent role in any decisions to permanently protect the land.

## **3. Parcels Owned by Nonprofit Groups or Conservation Agencies**

The following government and nonprofit groups own protected parcels in Essex:

- Essex County Greenbelt Association
- The Trustees of Reservations
- Manchester-Essex Conservation Trust
- Historic New England
- Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Division of Fisheries and Wildlife

A description of these parcels is below.

Essex County Greenbelt Association

Greenbelt, a not-for-profit land trust, owns 33 parcels totaling 293 acres of open space in town, including the following:

- Allyn Cox Reservation, Eastern Avenue, three parcels (31 acres)
- Choate Marshes, two parcels (17 acres)
- Corbett Property adjacent to Cox (26 acres)
- Cox Woodland (5 acres)
- Fessenden Saltmarsh (5 acres)
- Hall / Heap of Rock Lots (5 acres)
- Essex Marsh (17.5 acres)
- Hopkins Saltmarsh (5 acres)
- Kelleher Saltmarsh (5 acres)
- Reinert Reservation, John Wise Avenue (36 acres)
- Samuel & Helen Warren Memorial Reservation, Andrews Street (12 acres)
- Warren-Weld Woodland<sup>4</sup>, Apple Street/Rocky Hill Rd. (106 acres)

Description: Open fields, wooded lots and marshland.

Current Use: These parcels are used for hiking and wildlife observation.

Recreation Potential: See current use.

Public Access: Open to the public, with some off street parking

Degree of Protection: Permanently protected

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<sup>4</sup> For the most current list of Greenbelt properties see: [http://www.ecga.org/explore\\_our\\_properties/property\\_list](http://www.ecga.org/explore_our_properties/property_list)

*The Trustees of Reservations*

TTOR, another not-for-profit land trust, owns 17 parcels protecting 640.6 acres of open space in town, including:

- **Stavros Reservation (68 acres)**

Description: The Stavros Reservation protects more than fifty acres of salt marsh and White's Hill, a coastal drumlin offering panoramic views of Crane Beach, the Crane Wildlife Refuge (Choate/Hog Island) and Halibut Point. Also known as Lamont's Hill, the 19-acre White's Hill is owned by the Trustees, but is a ECGA C.R (conservation restriction).

Current Use: Hiking and wildlife observation.

Recreation Potential: Bird watching, hiking, nature study, picnicking, and scenic vistas.

Public Access: Open year-round, daily, sunrise to sunset. There is limited roadside parking only on Island Road adjacent to the reservation.

Degree of Protection: Permanently protected.

- **Crane Wildlife Refuge (approximately 650 acres -- comprising Choate (Hog), Dean, Low and Dilly Islands)**

Description: The Refuge is a patchwork of coastal and island habitats that includes a portion of Castle Neck (in Ipswich) and several islands in the Essex River Estuary. Surrounding the Crane Wildlife Refuge is the Great Marsh, the largest contiguous salt marsh in New England, covering more than 25,000 acres from Hampton Harbor, NH to Gloucester. The largest of the Refuge's islands is the 135-acre Choate/Hog Island, supporting wildlife and containing historically interesting buildings: the c.1778 Proctor Barn, the c.1725-40 Choate family homestead and a more recent cottage.

Current Use: Hiking, bird watching and tours.

Recreation Potential: Bird watching, boating/sailing, canoeing/kayaking, fishing, hiking, historic buildings, nature study, picnicking, scenic vistas, and tours.

Public Access: Open year-round, daily, 8 am to 4 pm. Access is by private boat/sea kayak or on guided tours offered seasonally by TTOR. Boat dock on Long Island offers limited public access; private boats may not tie up on the front side of the dock as TTOR's tour boat docks there.

Degree of Protection: Permanently protected.

*Manchester-Essex Conservation Trust*

MECT, a not-for-profit land trust, protects 121<sup>5</sup> separate parcels totaling 597 acres of open space in town.

Description/Condition: Primarily wooded lots.

Current Use: Hiking, nature study

Recreation Potential: See current use.

Public Access: Foot trails available to the public.

Degree of Protection: Permanently protected.

*Historic New England*

Description/Condition: Cogswell's Grant, 60 Spring Street (Two properties, 132 acres)

Current Use: Farm, with house displaying the Little family's American Decorative Arts Collection

Recreation Potential: Hiking, bird-watching, tours.

Public Access: Open to the public seasonally.

Degree of Protection: Historic preservation only.

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<sup>5</sup> 23 Parcels could not be located in the 2014 Assessor's Inventory. The 2007 Open Space and Recreation Plan indicated that MECT owned 213 parcels consisting of 586 acres.

## B. Public Parcels

### Parcels Owned by the Town

The town of Essex owns 169 parcels (41 of which are under one acre in size) totaling approximately 498 acres<sup>6 7</sup>. Some of the larger parcels contain buildings and/or recreational land as well as open space in the form of marshes, forested land or beaches. Town-owned parcels include:

- Town Landings
- Town Hall
- Memorial Park/Ball fields
- Transfer Station
- Centennial Grove/Field of Dreams
- Chebacco Lake
- Conomo Point
- Coolidge Trust
- Essex Elementary & Middle School
- Land managed by the Water Department
- Tax-title Parcels

#### 1. Town-owned Open Space

##### a. Centennial Grove/Field of Dreams

Description/Condition: Centennial Grove is a 41-acre recreational area on Chebacco Lake, which includes the Town's only fresh water beach. It also includes two baseball diamonds and soccer fields, two recreational structures and a nature trail.

Managing Agency: Board of Selectmen

Current Use: Heavy use for seasonal baseball and soccer, as well as the Essex Youth Commission's summer day camp. Boat landing adjacent to beach allows limited boat access.

Recreation Potential: Great recreation potential for activities including hiking, bird watching and nature study.

Public Access/Access for People with Disabilities: No special access. Stairs to beach/steep hill limit accessibility.

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<sup>6</sup> This does not include the acreage of public roadways.

<sup>7</sup> An additional 67 parcels of unknown size or location have been listed as Town-owned in the 2014 parcel inventory used to create the Assessor's GIS base map and the Essex Open Space & Recreation Map.

**b. Chebacco Lake**

Description/Condition: 209 acre Great Pond shared by the Towns of Essex and Hamilton.

Managing Agency: Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Current Use: Swimming, canoeing, water-skiing, kayaking, fishing, picnicking and boating. Two town landings

Recreation Potential: Bird watching; Hiking; Nature study; Scenic Vistas

Public Access/Access for People with Disabilities: No special access.

Degree of Protection: This is a watershed and part of the recharge area for the town's three wells (two permanent and one seasonal). Jet Skis are currently prohibited. A wellhead protection bylaw restricts development around the wells. The lake is also one of the most productive North Shore Alewife habitats and is considered by the Department of Marine Fisheries to be in good condition. Current beaver damming problems may affect capacity of alewives to reach the lake and are being monitored by Chebacco Lake Watershed Association and the state.

**c. Conomo Point**

Description/Condition: There are two beaches on Conomo Point, a privately owned dock, a town landing, panoramic vistas and offshore anchorage. This land area was sold to the town by John Proctor in the 1800s for \$4,600. The town has since leased parcels to individuals who have built houses on the leased property.

Managing Agency: The Board of Selectmen, in their role as the Conomo Point Commissioners.

Current Use: Since most of the land is currently leased, its use is presently limited to the leaseholders, with the exception of two rocky beaches with limited parking accessible only to those with town resident stickers. Several marshland parcels are held by the Town Conservation Commission. A town-owned, undeveloped, 11-acre lot sits along Conomo Point road (Map 110 Lot 60).

Since 2007, the southernmost portion of Conomo Point (the area south of Robbins Island Road) has been sold to individual former tenants of that area. Also, most of the Beach Circle neighborhood was sold in a similar fashion. The Town will likely sell Robbins Island to the current tenants of that area in the near future, leaving just the northernmost portion of Conomo Point in future Town ownership.

For the future, the Town will likely continue to lease large sections of Conomo Point to the current tenants of that area via long term leases. This concept was supported by a sense of the Town Meeting vote in May of 2015, along with

support for improving open space and recreation opportunities at four waterfront areas surrounding the leased properties (which include a portion of Beach Circle). A complete description of the future plan for the northern area can be found in the Master Plan for the area produced by Copley Wolff in April of 2015. (see Town of Essex Web page)

Recreation Potential: Bird watching, hiking, nature study, scenic vistas, water sports.

Public Access/Access for people with Disabilities: no special access

Degree of Protection: Beaches and 11-acre lot currently unprotected. Conomo Point's natural beauty and recreation potential make it an important area for the town to focus on in its planning efforts, so that options for both preservation and access can be explored.

#### **d. Memorial Park**

Description/Condition: Memorial Park is located on a 17-acre multiple-use town parcel, which also houses Essex Town Hall, the Police & Fire Station, and a public parking facility. Dedicated in 1949 in memory of Herbert S. Goodhue, a young Essex man killed in World War II, this park features two tennis courts, three baseball diamonds, basketball facilities, a playground re-constructed in 2003 and a hill popular for sledding.

Current Use: The playground and playing fields are widely used by the public. Public parking was expanded in 2003. The Park is the site of numerous town-wide events, such as the Easter Egg Hunt, Clamfest, Essex Pride Week, the Chowder Festival, the Essex Farmers' Market in the summer and fall and the Holiday Parade in winter.

The Friends of Memorial Park and a Town committee have initiated an effort to improve Memorial Park. Priorities include:

1. Performing an accurate survey of existing conditions including spot locations of monuments and trees,
2. Making ADA improvements
3. Adding pathways and benches especially along the Marsh,
4. Restoring the tennis courts, and
5. Adding and updating memorials for soldiers.

It should also be noted that the fields and courts are located in the salt marsh buffer zone, making it imperative that the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides be prohibited or strictly limited, and that runoff from the courts be properly directed to appropriate drainage areas. Additionally, it is important to note that the Town Hall, a historic building, has been undergoing repair and renovation.

Recreation Potential: Organized and recreational sports, walking and free play. A former rail bed lies to the east of the Park. An informal walking trail exists from the park across parcels relinquished to abutters and a portion of right-of-way which remains under MBTA ownership up to Landing Road. Park planning should consider and incorporate elements to support the farmer's market and annual festivals.

Public Access/Access for People with Disabilities: The site has handicapped parking, and the new playground features some equipment for children with disabilities. The slopes leading to the ballfields could be improved.

Degree of Protection: The land is on the marsh and has some wetland restrictions due to its location in the salt marsh buffer zone. The pump station is also located there.

#### **e. Town Landings**

Description/Condition: Assessors' maps show 17 town landings on the Essex River, and two on Chebacco Lake. However, narrow roads, lack of parking facilities and river landings that were established when people still walked their dories on dollies to the river render many of them unsuitable for modern use.

The Harbormaster collects mooring and launch fees that provide funds to maintain harbor services and moorings. Currently the Harbormaster maintains a waiting list for permanent moorings.

Managing Agency: The Town Harbormaster oversees the use of the Town Landings and enforces parking regulations.

Current Use: The principal seven-acre town landing on the causeway sees heavy summer use from recreational boaters and year-round use from local clambers. Swimming is not permitted at the site. The other landings see use consistent with their accessibility.

Recreation Potential: Primarily for summer water sports.

Public Access/Access for People with Disabilities: A resident sticker is needed to park at the landings. The main town landing site has handicapped parking. A parking lot constructed in 2003 behind the Police/Fire Station on Martin Street provides additional parking for residents and non-residents wishing to use the main town landing site. Most of the other town-landings have limited access and parking.

Please refer to the chart below regarding problems with Town Landings.

**TABLE F. PROBLEMS WITH TOWN LANDINGS AS THEY APPEAR ON ASSESSORS’ MAPS OR ARE OTHERWISE DOCUMENTED**

	<i>Narrow</i>	<i>Access Blocked</i>	<i>Marsh</i>	<i>Certain Tides Only</i>
<b>TOWN LANDINGS</b>				
Apple Street Bridge	X			
Mill/Apple Street	X	X		
Landing Road			X	
Behind Town Hall			X	X
Behind Ballpark		X	X	
West of Bridge			X	X
“Shipbuilding Acre”				
“Woodman’s Beach”				
Water Street	X			
Billy’s Point	X			
Boyd’s Landing	X	X		
Island Road	X		X	
Robbins Island	X	X	X	X
Robbins Island (II?)	X		X	X
Conomo Lane	X		X	X
Clammer’s Beach			X	
Front Beach				
<b>CHEBACCO LAKE LANDINGS</b>				
Red Gate Road	X	X		
Centennial Grove				

**f. Water Department Parcels (Wellfields/Water Tank/Filtration Plant)**

Description/Condition: The Water Department manages three wellfields in town (one is seasonal only), the water tank on Craft Hill and the filtration plant.

Recreation Potential: No recreation activities are recommended for these sites, which are in the Water Resource District and subject to DPW regulations. Building allowed through special permit process only.

Public Access/Access for People with Disabilities: To protect the Town’s water supply, public access to the well fields is discouraged.

### **g. Miscellaneous Town-owned Parcels**

Protected town parcels include the:

- 8-acre Coolidge Trust land off Southern Ave., to be held forever as a public forest or woods park. This land was preserved well ahead of public recognition of the value of conservation lands. It consists of eight acres in two strips, one on each side of Southern Avenue.
- 10-acre Van Wyck tract near Turtleback Lane,
- Two cemeteries: the 12-acre Spring Street Cemetery and the Old Burial Grounds on Main Street.
- 40 acres within the Woods, and
- 100 acres of tax-title salt marsh that was voted into conservation in 2005.

## **2. Unprotected Town Parcels:**

All other town-owned land is unprotected and could be developed.

### **Essex Elementary**

Description/Condition: The school occupies ten acres off Story Street. It includes the Eagle's Nest (an extensive playground built in 1987), a retaining pond, playing fields and outdoor basketball hoops.

Managing Agency: The Manchester-Essex Regional School Committee manages the school building and the surrounding grounds. The Essex PTO maintains the playground.

Current Use: Within the school are an indoor gymnasium and a cafeteria. The school grounds have a playground area and basketball courts. These facilities are used by the school during school hours and are available to the public after hours. The school building is used for town boards meetings, youth basketball, adult basketball, volleyball, karate, and adult exercise classes.

Recreation Potential: Use of the gymnasium and cafeteria for sports and classes. The Eagle's Nest playground, designed by noted playground architect Robert Leathers and constructed entirely by town residents, includes creative play areas constructed of natural materials. The playground can be used by the public outside of school hours. This playground has climbing structures, a maze of walkways, a jumping area, a boat that moves back and forth, swings and slides. There are tables for snacks and picnics, as well as a small pond nearby where children look for frogs. It is highly regarded throughout the region and is frequently used by residents and non-residents alike.

Public Access/Access for People with Disabilities: The school provides adequate public parking and handicapped access.

Future Plans: In the next seven years, the Manchester Essex School District may evaluate options to replace Essex Elementary (built in 1958) and Manchester Memorial Elementary (built in 1967). Any school building replacement options should be reviewed for their potential impact on open space and recreational use of this site.

### **Town Hall**

Description/Condition: Built in 1894 out of stone and wood in the Queen Anne style of architecture. The Town is in the process of rehabilitating Town Hall and making ADA access improvements including an elevator.

Managing Agency: The Board of Selectmen.

Current Use: Town offices/meeting rooms and the town library (which is also used for community classes and gatherings).

Recreation Potential: Limited to use of the library.

Deed Restrictions: The T.O.H.P. Burnham Trust, which funds repairs to the building, specifies that it will house town offices and a library.

Public Access/Access for People with Disabilities: The building has a handicapped-access ramp, as well as handicapped parking.

### **Transfer Station**

Description/Condition: A 21-acre parcel located off of Martin Street, this multi-use site houses DPW barns, as well as a transfer and recycling station. A significant portion of the acreage is marshland, including an active stream.

Current Use: The transfer station is equipped for the disposal of trash and various recyclable items, including glass, metal, plastic, paper, clothing (via donation boxes). Scrap metal and large appliances, such as refrigerators, stoves, and computers, are also recyclable here.

Recreation Potential: No recreational uses are applicable to this site.

Public Access/Access for People with Disabilities: Essex residents who pay a yearly fee of \$170 (\$85 for senior citizens over age 65) are eligible to use the transfer station for their trash and recyclable materials. The trash compactor has drive-up access and an operator is available to assist people with disabilities, but the recycling stations are not readily handicapped-accessible (some stairs, etc.) and staffing is limited.

Degree of Protection: None

### **3. Miscellaneous Wood and Salt Marsh Lots**

Description/Condition: The town owns additional miscellaneous, scattered parcels that range from forest on the south side of Town to open marshland on the east side of Town. In the early days of Essex, landowners were deeded woodlots to supply them with firewood and marsh lots to supply them with hay. Over the years, subsequent generations of family members ceased to use many of these lots and knowledge of their existence, much less the necessity to pay taxes on them, subsided. The Town has since claimed some of these parcels as tax title land. Since a number of these parcels are less than one acre and some see compound usage, they have proven difficult to completely quantify in town records. According to research conducted by the Manchester-Essex Conservation Trust, over 100+ acres of tax-title land is owned by the Town within the Woods, and can be voted into conservation at any time.<sup>8</sup>

#### **C. Parcels Owned by the State**

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts owns five parcels totaling 61 acres, 40 of which are marsh, the others of which abut state roadways. The MBTA owns 2 acres of former rail right-of-way to the rear of Martin Street.

#### **D. Restricted Private Parcels: Chapter 61, 61A and 61B Lands**

Description: Essex has approximately 1398 acres within 57 parcels that are offered some protection under Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B of the Massachusetts General Laws. These laws provide tax relief for certain lands held as forested, agricultural, or recreational. Chapter 61 land, which is forested, represents 181 acres (11 parcels) in Essex. Chapter 61A lands are agricultural, and represent 1080 acres (42 parcels) in Essex. Chapter 61B lands are recreational, and comprise 137 acres (four parcels) in the town. Under these laws, the Town has a right of first refusal to purchase such lands before they can be sold for unrestricted use.

Current Use: These parcels are currently used as farms and forested lands.

Recreation Potential: Many of these parcels have great recreation potential for activities including hiking, horseback riding, bird watching, and biking.

Public Access: These properties are privately-held and are only available to the public by invitation.

Degree of Protection: Reduced tax status gives owners an incentive to maintain these parcels as farms, woodlands and open space.

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<sup>8</sup> Helen Bethell, Executive Director, MECT, personal communication, January 21, 2007.

Although the town has right of first refusal to purchase Chapter 61, 61A and 61B lands if the property is up for sale for conversion to another use, no money is currently set aside to purchase such lands. As a result, Chapter 61 lands are subject to be sold to developers. The Town has the ability to assign its right to a non-profit group within 120 days, with both MECT and ECGA having offered their services in such cases.

**E. Unrestricted Parcels (Large, Privately Held Parcels)**

Description: There are 189 privately-owned over five acres that are not under the Chapter 61 program or otherwise protected. These parcels total 2664 acres. As per state open space planning guidelines, those parcels are not listed here.

Degree of Protection: These parcels are not protected in any way.

**Table G. Summary of Open Space and Other Parcels of Conservation Interest**

Type of Parcel	Number of Parcels	Total Acreage 2015	Total Acreage 2007*
Private Land with Conservation Restriction (CR)	19	1116	849
Private Land with Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR)	2	53	40
Essex County Greenbelt Association	33	293	255.5
Manchester-Essex Conservation Trust	121	597	586
The Trustees of Reservations	17	641	578
Town of Essex, Protected Open Space	4	254	8
Town of Essex, Other Open or Recreation Space	3	267	254
<b>Subtotal Protected Open Space (35.0% of land area)</b>	199	3221	2570.5
Private – Chapter 61 (forestry)	11	181	214
Private – Chapter 61A (agriculture)	42	1080	680
Private – Chapter 61B (recreation)	4	137	137
Town of Essex Tax-Title Land	29	114	220
Historic New England	2	132	126
<b>Subtotal Open Space with Restrictions (17.9%)</b>	88	1644	1377
Private, identified at-risk, no designation (5+ acres) (29.0%)	189	2664	at least 950

**Total Protected Open Space & Private, Non-Profit and Public Parcels of Potential Conservation Interest (81.9% of total land area)**

Town of Essex – Facilities (School and transfer station) <sup>9</sup>	2	31	31
Roads	n/a	173	
Other land not associated with individual parcels	n/a	272	
Total Estimated Land Area of Essex	~2400	9200 <sup>10</sup>	

\* Note: since 2007 the Town of Essex has undertaken a significant effort to update and digitize its parcel information database which may explain in part the decrease in the number of parcels while the number of acres conserved has stayed the same or increased.

Matrix B contains more information for each non-profit and publicly-owned parcel summarized in Table G.

<sup>9</sup> Police / Fire / Library / Town Hall sit on 16-acre site with Memorial Park. Public Works located at Water Treatment facility within 209-acre Chebacco Lake / Centennial Grove properties

<sup>10</sup> Communication from Therese Smith of CAI Technologies to Stephen Winslow January 14, 2016