

# TOWN OF YARMOUTH OPEN SPACE PLAN 2019

ADOPTED BY  
YARMOUTH TOWN COUNCIL ON NOVEMBER 21, 2019



Prepared by the  
Yarmouth Open Space Plan Task Force

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## Acknowledgements

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### Open Space Plan Task Force

Ed Ashley  
Jamie Carter  
Karen Massey  
Susan Prescott  
Joshua Royte, Chair  
Jackie Schumacher  
Lisa Small

### Parks and Lands Committee

Richard Brimberg  
Ebrahim Fazeli  
Karen Massey  
Lisa Small  
Mary Thorp  
Jay Waterman  
Mary Webber

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Cover photo credit – North Star Planning

# Executive Summary

## Purpose of Open Space Plan

Yarmouth residents strongly and consistently support the preservation of open spaces, large and small, as evidenced by a long history of reports, questionnaires, public comments, and workshops. There is heavy use of our coastal access and a need for more; there is a growing use of our parks and desire for more options for boating, walking, biking, and for safe pathways connecting all parts of town. This plan reiterates those often-cited values that make Yarmouth attractive, vibrant and healthy. It also identifies key places that can efficiently support our growing town, while leaving spaces for recreation, water protection, scenic views, and wildlife habitat, increasing safe access, and connecting in-town and regional destinations and open space.

This plan is overdue and is undertaken to support the 2010 Comprehensive Plan. The planning timeframe of this Open Space Plan is for the next 3-5 years, so that further recommendations and implementation strategies can be considered in the context of a Comprehensive Plan update. As the committee charged with advising on open space goals in the community, the Parks and Lands Committee or a subgroup of that committee will oversee implementation of this plan.

In addition to the three overarching goals and the strategies suggested to meet these goals, this plan is designed to emphasize two important themes. The first is that by working with partners – including local landowners, non-profits, and surrounding communities – much progress can be made. The future of land conservation and park development in Yarmouth should not rely solely on the municipal staff and budget. The Town should be thinking about its role related to the work of acquiring and improving open space as part of a team. Second, Yarmouth is part of a greater region, and Yarmouth Open Spaces fit into a network of regional open space assets. Thinking beyond town lines and open space ownership adds value to Yarmouth's parks and other open spaces.

## Summary of Recommendations

Recommendations are grouped within three overarching goals. Under each goal are a number of strategies the Town should consider implementing within the next 3-5 years. Although this is a relatively short timeframe for a plan of this scale many of our goals and strategies are on-going in nature and in process, and will continue on any applicable timelines.

### **Goal 1 - Maintain and enhance current Town-owned lands.**

- A. Increase attention on maintenance and amenities, especially for open space in the Village and Neighborhood properties, to highlight the best of Yarmouth's values and character.
- B. Update the Royal River Corridor Plan (2009) with a focus on actionable, high impact changes.
- C. Draft and adopt management plans for all municipally owned open spaces that clarify appropriate uses for each property in its current state, as well as a vision for potential uses in the future. This may include a plan that addresses common management needs throughout Town-owned lands.
- D. Participate in research to acquire local, regional, state, or federal financial opportunities to help fund enhancements and maintenance projects within our Town-owned lands.

### **Goal 2 - Prioritize new acquisitions around the following open space values that have stood the test of time.**

Using the existing prioritizations assembled from natural resource mapping and input from many planning forums, the town planning board, council, and local land trust can assess opportunities in a way that provides consistency and predictability for common themes;

- A. Increase public access to the Royal River, Cousins River, and Casco Bay.
- B. Expand linked trail systems, off-road connections between neighborhoods, parks, businesses, and municipal services, and connect to open spaces.
- C. Protect significant natural views.
- D. In more rural settings, prioritize the acquisition of properties close to existing Yarmouth or regional open spaces, those located in unfragmented habitat blocks, and those that protect areas of high ecological value.
- E. In the Village and Neighborhood areas, prioritize the provision of smaller open spaces especially for residents that don't have nearby access to larger parcels and ensure connections to and between open spaces.

### **Goal 3 - Update Town Ordinances and Policies**

- A. Update subdivision and site plan ordinance requirements to provide for the creation of public spaces and connections as development occurs.
- B. Inventory and map the existing open spaces created within subdivisions and incorporate these into the overall open space network.
- C. Extend more permanent protections for existing open spaces, shoreland areas, and other sensitive lands.
- D. Adopt a municipal Open Space Acquisition Policy to guide future decision making for town staff and the Town Council when opportunities arise to acquire land or development rights.

E. Incentivize preservation of privately owned lands.

F. Explore local options for creating and leveraging additional funds for land acquisition.



## Introduction

### Open Space in Yarmouth

The term Open Space can mean different things to different people. For this planning effort, Open Space includes:

- The larger undeveloped natural areas preserved and managed to maintain natural, scenic, ecological, agricultural, forest lands, wetlands, estuarine areas, recreational and cultural or historic properties;
- Places to access the rivers and Casco Bay;
- Community and neighborhood parks; and
- The network of trails, paths, and sidewalks that connect neighborhoods and businesses to these spaces and to other regionally important open spaces.

### Yarmouth's place in the Region

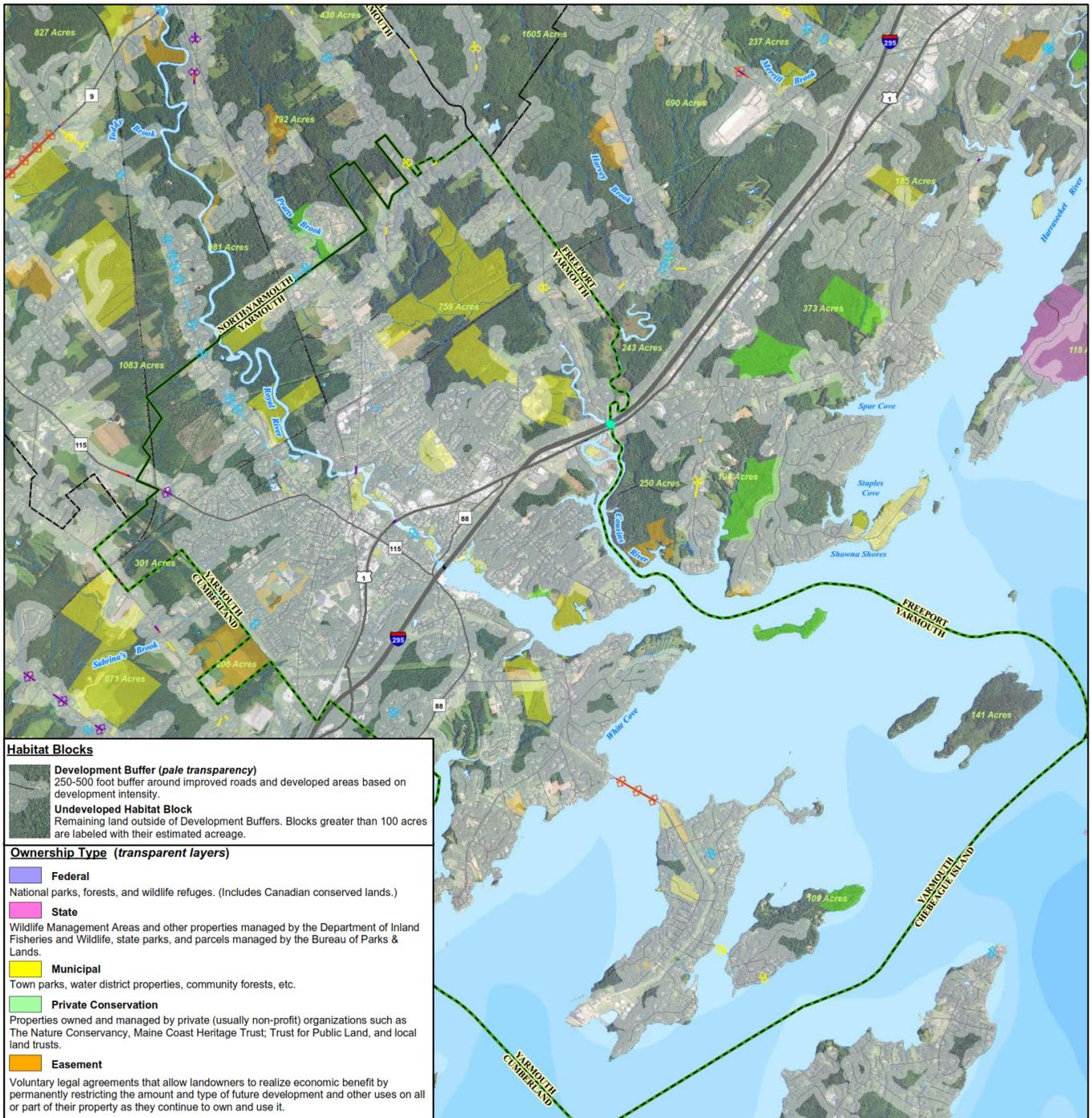
Geographically, Yarmouth is one of the smallest towns in Cumberland County, but in many ways, Yarmouth stands out regionally.

Despite its small geographic area (13.35 square miles), Yarmouth ranks 11th in population out of 28 municipalities in Cumberland County, with a population of 8,349 people in 2010. This means that Yarmouth is a densely settled community. In fact, population density data from the 2010 Census shows that Yarmouth ranks behind only Portland, South Portland and Westbrook, with about 625 people per square mile.

*Yarmouth's natural systems have shaped the community for ages & make Yarmouth unique in the region.*

Yarmouth is situated on the shores of Casco Bay at the confluence of the Royal and Cousins Rivers. Because of its coastal location, these two regionally notable river systems, and the lands that they pass through, Yarmouth enjoys a great diversity of geographical, geological, and biological features within its boundaries. These natural systems supported millennia of Native American activity in the area and shaped the early European and American economy and settlement patterns of the town. The shoreline, marshes and estuaries have been recognized for their biodiversity and ability to adapt in the face of climate change.

This map shows buffers around roads and developed areas, calling attention to both areas of development and blocks of undeveloped natural areas.

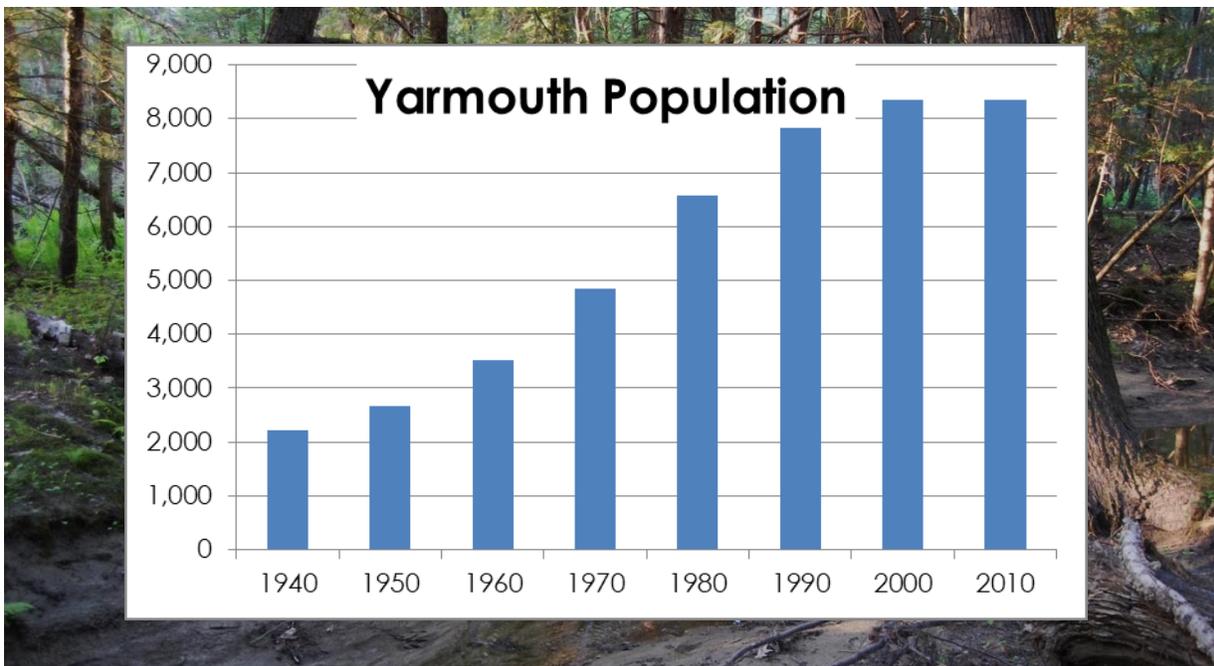


Map 1 - Regional Blocks of Habitat, Beginning with Habitat (2018)

This favorable position at a natural crossroads has shaped the Town's current built environment and transportation systems. US Route 1 and Interstate 295 connect Yarmouth to the region and beyond. Main Street continues inland as state Route 115. Two rail lines traverse the town carrying regional freight and passenger services. Yarmouth is also served by the regional METRO transit service.

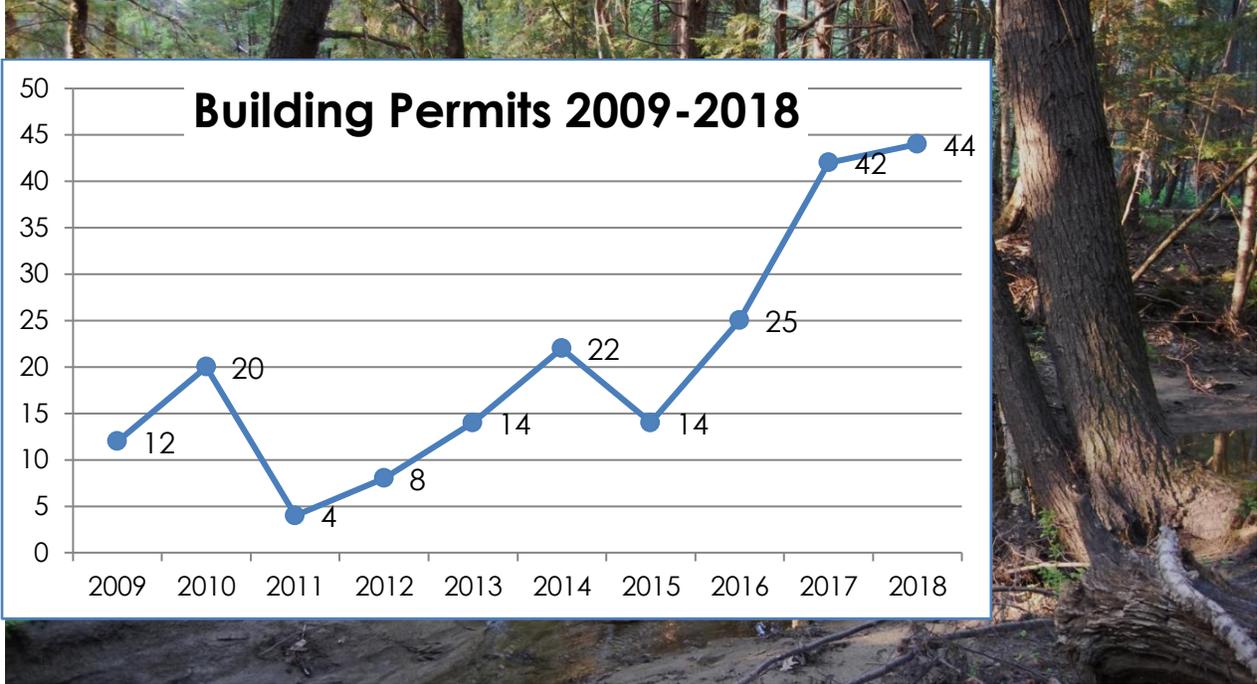
These connections and regional access, combined with Portland's large center of gravity, in regard to regional housing and labor markets, have enhanced Yarmouth's natural appeal as a place to live and work. As such, Yarmouth has experienced consistently high levels of development pressure over recent decades. This growth and development has reduced the number of acres of natural areas and working farms over the years.

Source: US Census



Note that the steady population growth seen in Yarmouth since the 1940s leveled off in the 2000s. This is likely associated with the drop in demand for housing regionally, due to the Great Recession in the middle part of that decade. Even though population growth leveled off between 2000 and 2010, Yarmouth still added over 100 dwelling units in that period.

Another sign of growth comes from looking at building permits issued in the last 10 years. Permits for new dwelling units have trended up with an improving economy and housing market since a bottom in 2011.



Source: Town of Yarmouth

### Open Space and Community Character

Yarmouth is characterized by its scenic and accessible coastal resources, its walkable and attractive Village area centered on the Royal River, and the rural attributes of the surrounding inland areas. The trails, parks, and preserves in each of these parts of town make Yarmouth a special place to live and work.

From launching kayaks and canoes in the heart of the Village to skiing and snowshoeing in quiet forested preserves, access to a diverse range of outdoor spaces and activities is a big part of Yarmouth’s unique identity and its quality, small town feel.

*Access to a diverse open space network is a strong part of Yarmouth’s identity as a community.*



Royal River, Yarmouth, ME

Photo Credit: Andy Smith-Petersen

### High Value Places, High Value Views

Wide open fields, large forested tracts of land, the Casco Bay Islands, and long views down salt marshes, river corridors, and the ocean are defining characteristics of Yarmouth’s open spaces. These views and places give a rural character to much of the town, despite its dense development.

The Village parks and green spaces enhance the experience of living and working in Yarmouth, and are a key ingredient in the thriving downtown. These places provide spaces to gather and relax and add character to the Village.



Littlejohn Island Preserve, Yarmouth, ME

Photo Credit: Royal River Conservation Trust (RRCT)

### Recreational Opportunities & Water Access

Yarmouth is an active community. Members of the community value Yarmouth’s open spaces for unstructured recreation, walking, trail running, biking, skiing, and skating. Access to the Royal River, Cousins River, and Casco Bay ensure that residents can take advantage of the outstanding paddling, boating, fishing, and birdwatching opportunities in the area. Regional trail connections like those provided by the West Side Trail and the Beth Condon Pathway connect important community destinations and provide recreational opportunities that span town lines.

### Personal Health & Wellness

Various medical journals and studies have been published linking time spent in open spaces and the natural environment with many health and wellness benefits. Although spending time in the natural environment often correlates with recreation and active lifestyles, research has shown that simply sitting or walking near flowing water or greenspace can benefit your overall physical and mental health. The health impacts vary from lowered blood pressure and improved cognition to improved sleep and an increased ability to focus. Within minutes of being surrounded by trees, blood pressure may drop and heart rates may slow.



Spear Farm Preserve, Yarmouth, ME Photo Credit: RRCT

## Ecological Benefits

Riparian buffers, the vegetated areas around streams, rivers, and forested wetlands provide wildlife habitat and natural corridors for birds, mammals, and reptiles to move through watersheds. These buffers also act as filters, reducing the amount of sediments, chemicals, and pollution reaching surface waters, resulting in healthier estuaries and rivers.

Trees, both large areas of forest and smaller stands in the Village and Neighborhoods, are important community assets benefiting both human and environmental health. Tree canopies filter dust and absorb pollutants from the air. They provide shade and reduce noise. Trees absorb carbon dioxide; they reduce wind speeds and cool the air. Trees help prevent flooding and soil erosion, absorbing storm water. Trees host

complex micro-habitats, providing essential nesting and food to birds and insects.

Salt marshes along the Royal and Cousins Rivers and Casco Bay provide both shoreline protection and also habitat for diversity of wading birds and migratory waterfowl, and for finned fish and shellfish and the microorganisms that serve as food for larger species.

## Economic & Community Benefits

Great parks and open spaces can attract people to downtown and village areas. On their own, these spaces are great places to meet friends, bump into fellow community members or have lunch outside, but these places also provide the space for successful community scale events like the annual Hike with Santa and Summer Arts Series. The Clam Festival takes advantage of the open space represented by Main Street itself as well as all of its ancillary open spaces, public and private: the churches, NYA Campus, the library, Town Hall (Memorial Green), the Butterfly Garden, the ball field and playground at Rowe School, and now our new under-bridge space. These parks and open spaces strengthen community connections and bring activity and social interaction to the center of the community.

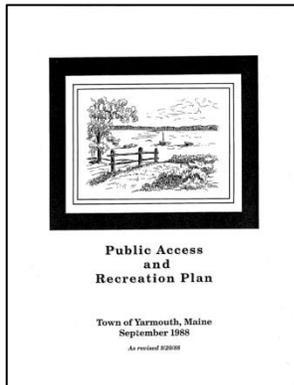


Bridge Celebration on Main Street, Yarmouth, ME

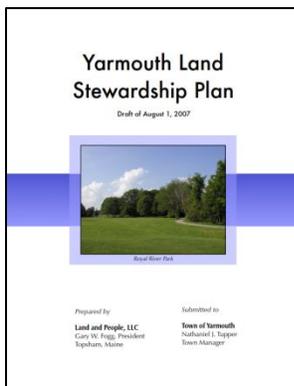
Photo Credit: Angus Muir

Open space increases the value of surrounding properties and does not add additional pressure on the municipal budget. This plan recognizes the benefit of purposeful economic development both as a means of expanding the tax base and enhancing the character of Yarmouth. The 2016 Market Analysis and Action Plan Matrix, initiated by Yarmouth’s Economic Development Advisory Board (EDAB), found that Yarmouth citizens highly value access to outdoor recreation. The Open Space Task Force has worked with EDAB to look at areas that are appropriate for economic development and for open space and how these respective uses can work together synergistically to enhance Yarmouth’s character and quality of life.

## Previous Relevant Planning Efforts



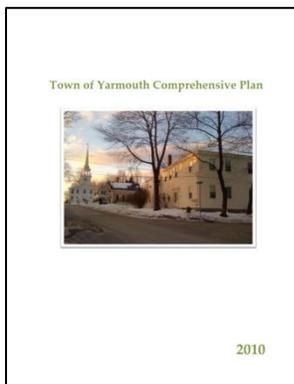
The Public Access and Recreation Plan (1988) is also known as the PARC Plan. This plan is important because it articulated the first comprehensive vision for protection of open space in Yarmouth and provided guiding principles for the round of proactive municipal property acquisition in the 1990s and early 2000s. Although this plan is now over 30 years old, the conservation and recreation values it established remain as the foundation of current open space planning.



The Yarmouth Land Stewardship Plan (2007) was authored following a period of relatively major open space acquisitions. The plan looks at open space through an organizational and capacity lens, with recommendations aimed to allow the Town of Yarmouth to manage and maintain municipal open spaces. Recommendations focus on the structure of committees and staff roles and general guidance for future acquisitions. The general philosophy is to take care of land the Town owns with good guidance for acquisition of future public open spaces.



The Royal River Corridor Master Plan (2009) focuses on the areas on either side of the Royal River from Yarmouth Harbor upstream to East Elm Street. Royal River Park and the trails to and through this community open space are key assets to the Town and the region. Recommendations focus on natural resources, interconnectedness, planning and development, and coordinated corridor-wide improvements.

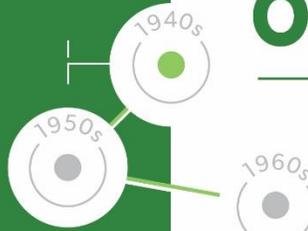


The Yarmouth Comprehensive Plan (2010) featured five key topics facing Yarmouth, one of which was Rural Character and Open Space. The Plan suggests policies for the design of residential development outside of the Village, including natural and green spaces as part of the Town's infrastructure, for selective acquisition of additional open space, and for maintaining and enhancing existing public spaces.

# TOWN OF YARMOUTH OPEN SPACE TIMELINE

.6 ACRES

Larrabee's Landing



37.4 ACRES

Tinker Preserve  
Royal River Park



Land Acquisition Reserve Fund

4.5 ACRES

Grist Mill Lane  
Grist Mill Park  
Latchstring Park



1980 Comprehensive Plan  
1984 Long Range Plan  
1985 Harbor & Water Study  
1985 Cluster Development Open Space  
1988 Public Access & Recreation Plan

271 ACRES

Pratt's Brook Park  
Sweetsir Farm  
Camp SOCI



253 ACRES

Barker Preserve  
Frank Knight Forest  
Fels-Grove Farm Preserve  
Spear Farm Estuary Preserve  
Littlejohn Island Preserve  
Sligo Road



2005 Property Policy  
2007 Land Stewardship Plan  
2009 Royal River Corridor Master Plan

77 ACRES

McKearney Village Open Space  
Frank Knight Forest Extension  
Riverfront Woods



2010 Comprehensive Plan

## Current Open Spaces

### Village & Neighborhood Areas

Open space in the Village and Neighborhood Areas is generally scaled to serve people who live and work within those areas, typified by smaller scale spaces like Latchstring Park, Village Green Park, Center Street island, Memorial Green, and Grist Mill Park. These types of spaces are integrated into the village fabric and provide refreshing texture and enhancement of the built environment, as well as places to gather, rest, and enjoy village life with other members of the community.

They can also be destinations in their own right, like Royal River Park. This park is a regional asset in the heart of the Village and draws people from surrounding communities, whether it is to access the Royal River from the East Elm Street boat launch, to walk or jog along the paved paths beside the river, or to simply fly a kite or play catch in the open mowed areas. This park is a venue for many activities, including concerts and film showings. Through signage and observation of artifacts, the park serves the important function of educating the community on the fascinating history of Yarmouth, illustrating the changing roles the Town has played from fishing and shipbuilding, to small mills and manufacturing, to a mill town with a large paper mill spanning the river, to today's suburban community that has maintained its unique identity and sense of place by maintaining its Main Street and preserving key lands from development.

*Open Spaces bring nature into the fabric of the Village, but are generally designed for gathering and activities.*

The Beth Condon Pathway is a major open space feature within the Village and Neighborhood Areas. This off-road, protected, pedestrian trail is paved and lit for the use of walkers and cyclists. It is used for recreation and fitness but also provides safe access to many important destinations in the community along busy Route One.

Open spaces in the Village and Neighborhoods offer a diversity of spaces, experiences and options for users. A focus on programming to activate these spaces and give residents many reasons to visit is particularly evident at Royal River Park. Open spaces of all sizes, including public and private spaces, are an important part of the fabric of the Village life and experience.



Casco Bay, Yarmouth, ME

Photo Credit: Andy Smith-Petersen

## Rural Areas & Regional Connections

Open spaces in rural areas of Yarmouth tend to be scaled to serve rural functions of habitat protection and preservation of natural systems. These areas often provide the long scenic vistas that are so important to maintaining a rural character. A core function of these open spaces is the conservation and quiet enjoyment of natural landscapes, such as those offered at the Spear Farm Estuary Preserve and Fels-Groves Farm Preserve. Other properties offer more diverse activities and community programming. Examples include the Community Garden at Frank Knight Forest and the popular swimming area and hand carry boat launch at Sandy Point on Cousins Island for access to Casco Bay.

These areas tend to be less formal than the open spaces in the village and neighborhood areas. Because of a focus on preservation and conservation, users can expect fewer of the amenities likely to be found in a Village setting, such as lighting, benches, or landscaped gardens. However, these spaces offer great experiences with nature, moments of quiet and peace, walking, and other recreational activities close to home.

## Open Space Inventory Maps

The maps on the following pages show Yarmouth’s public open spaces in the context of other parks and preserves in neighboring towns. Getting a sense of the regional open space network can provide a new perspective on the value of Yarmouth’s open spaces.

Looking at open space regionally can reveal opportunities to make connections or add adjacent or nearby properties to a regional network which amplify the environmental, recreational, or scenic value a property has on its own.

Parks and preserves are shown as green properties in this series of maps. Other public lands or conserved properties are shown in gray. These properties may be used at least in part for recreation or conservation purposes, or they may be private property that has conservation easements that protect the environmental or scenic character of the property. Examples on Map 1 include the Yarmouth Transfer Station or the Talbot Farm in Freeport. The Transfer Station is a relatively intensively used public property, but it does have some informal trails and high scenic value along the Cousins River. The Talbot Farm is permanently protected farmland with environmental and scenic value but has limited public access.



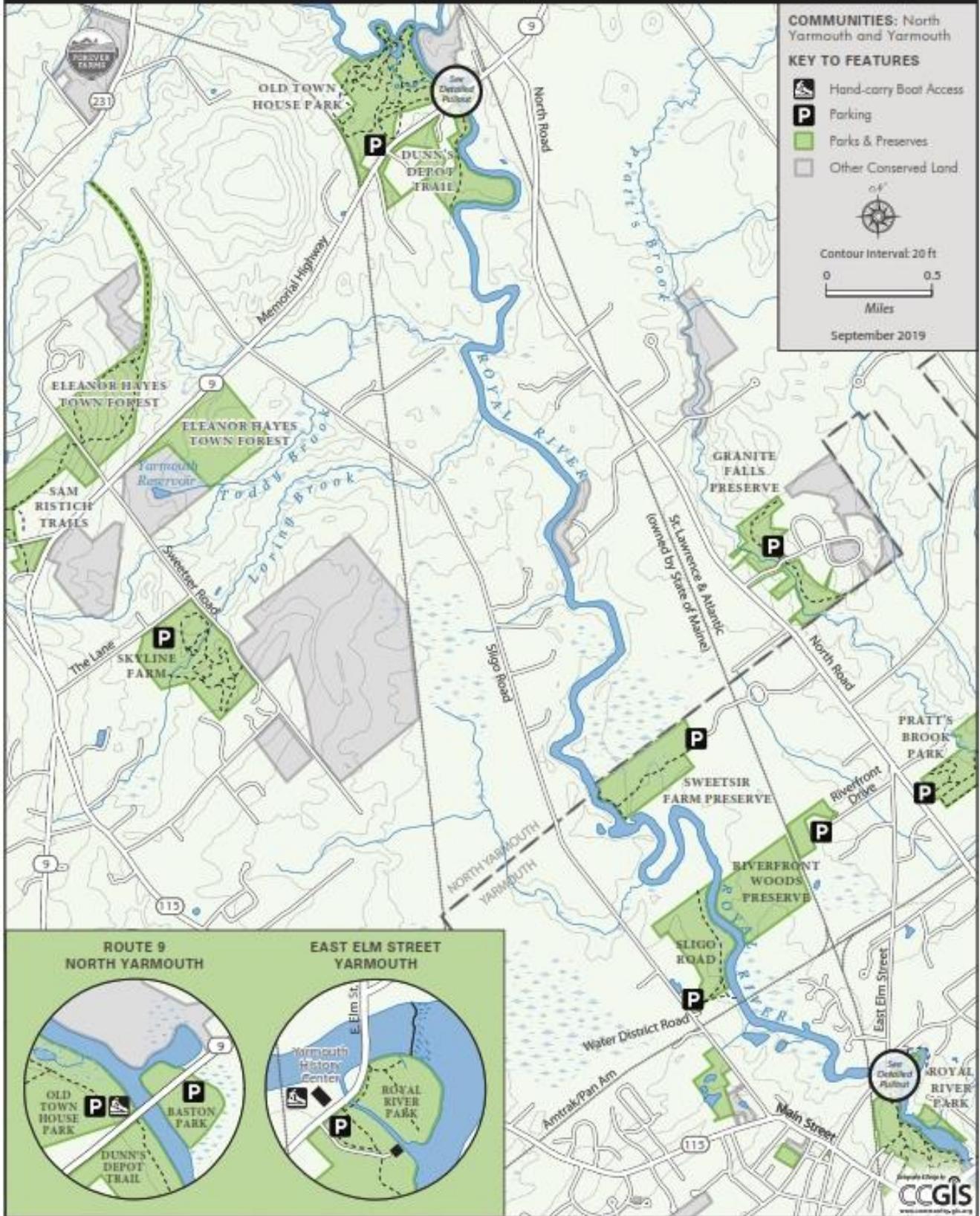
Sandy Point, Cousins Island, Yarmouth, ME

Photo Credit: North Star Planning



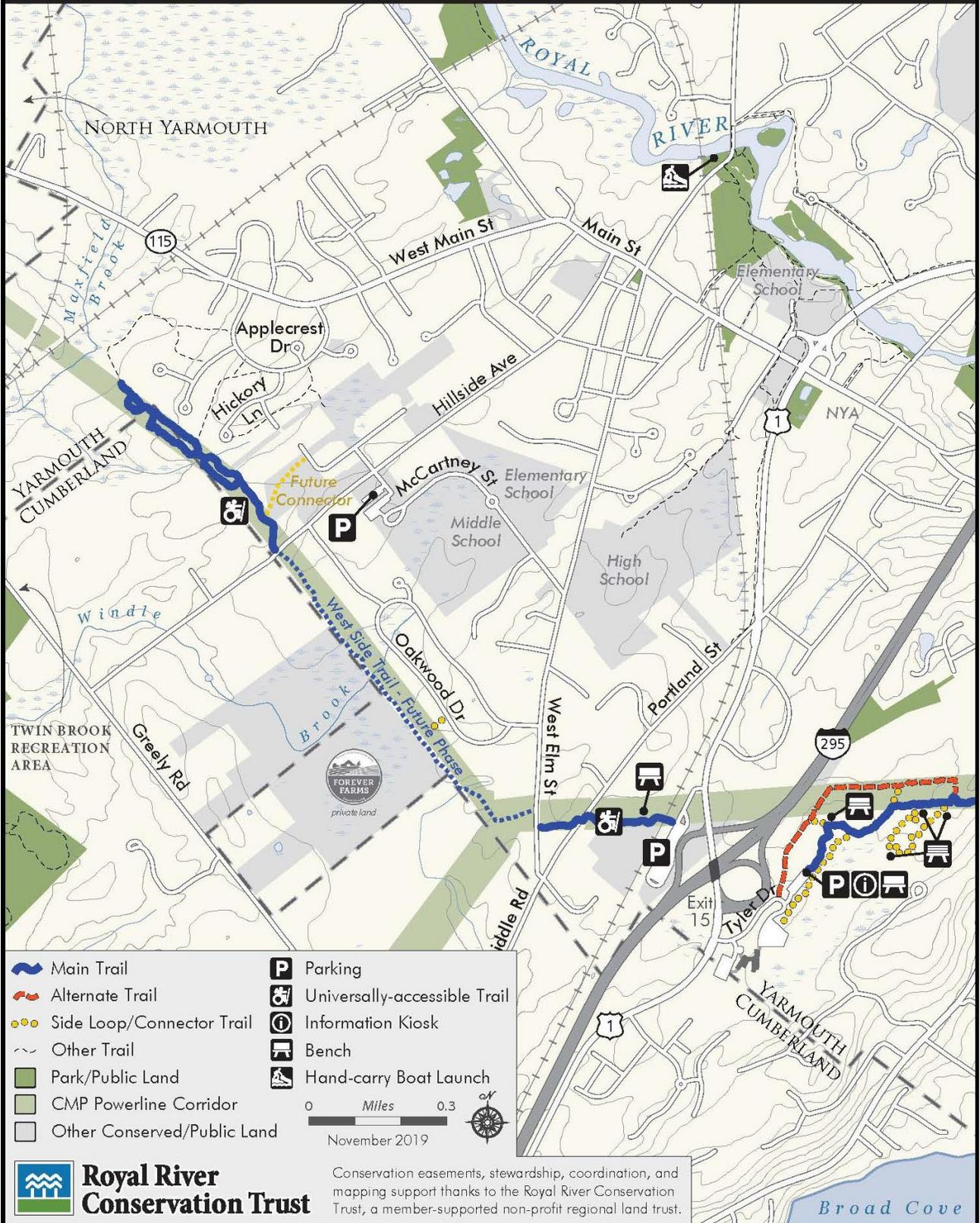


# Yarmouth & Region Map 3: Royal & Pratt's (Freshwater)





# Yarmouth & Region Map 5: West of Village







Casco Bay, Yarmouth, ME

Photo Credit: Jodi Federle

## Climate Resiliency & Mitigation

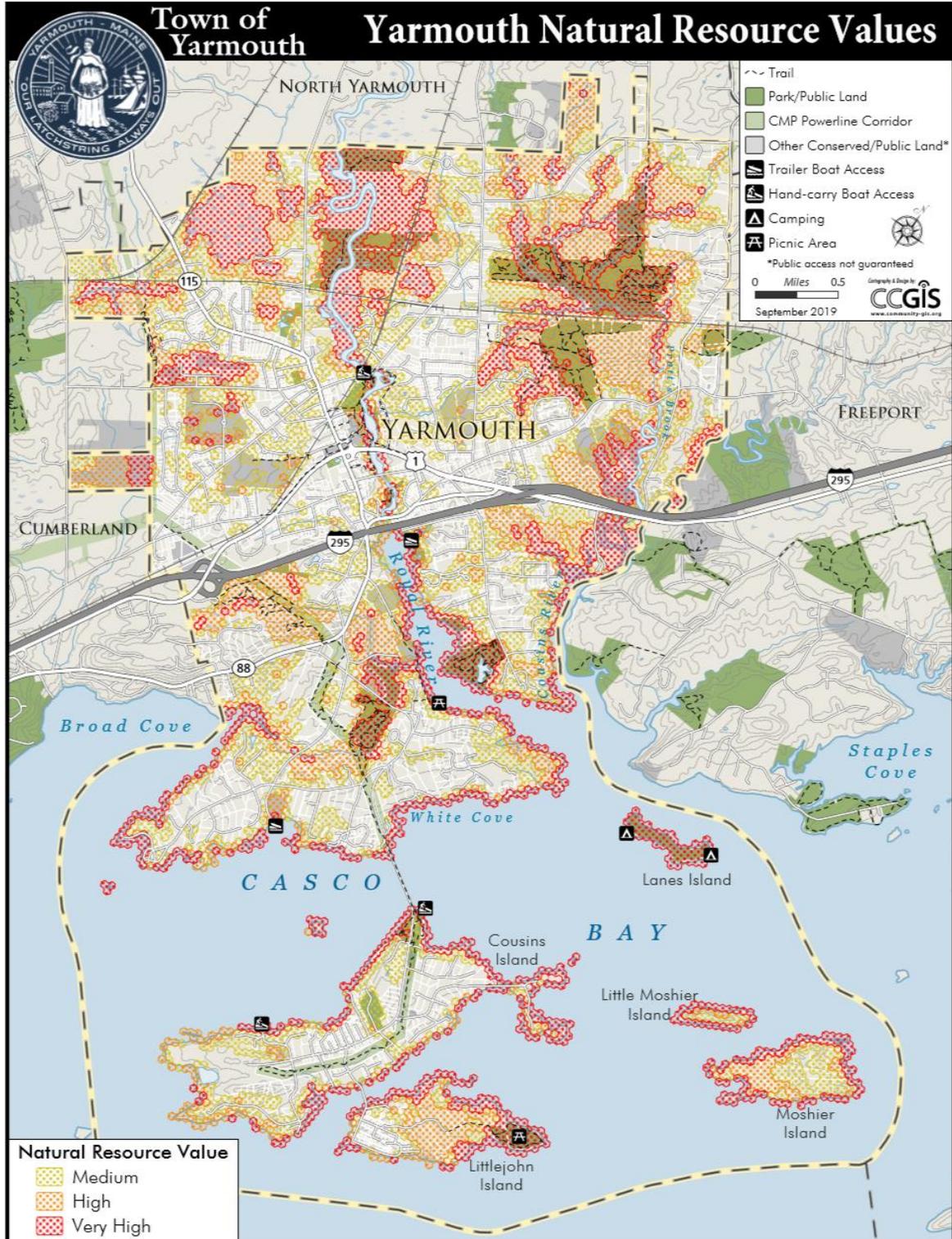
### Coastal Resiliency

Yarmouth's boundaries include salt marshes that the Maine Natural Areas Program has identified as “coastal resilient sites” especially the Cousins River Marsh (212 acres in Yarmouth and Freeport). These are places with the best chance to adapt to sea level rise based on an assessment of their size, the extent of future marsh habitat under a 1 meter sea level rise scenario, and the extent of undeveloped upland buffers.

According to Maine Coast Heritage Trust, saltmarshes are highly productive, vegetative intertidal habitats that provide critical habitat for a range of species including diadromous fish, migratory shorebirds, wading birds, waterfowl and shellfish. Significant threats to marshes in northern Casco Bay include sea level rise and continued coastal development. Although marshes are dynamic natural systems that respond to natural changes in sea level through soil accretion, sea level rise threatens to overwhelm marshes’ natural resilience. Land protection can play a role in protecting sensitive marsh habitats through direct acquisition of marsh and upland buffers, use of conservation easements that limit shoreline development and restricting shoreline hardening as well as structures that alter the natural hydrology such as docks and piers (CBEP, 2017).



Local knowledge from the Greenprinting Yarmouth that started after the 2010 Comprehensive Plan update has been used to augment the state level data used in the Beginning with Habitat mapping series. This level of additional data has been used in the map below to identify the most environmentally sensitive areas





Littlejohn Island, Yarmouth, ME

Photo Credit: North Star Planning

## Open Space Priority Map

It is difficult to predict what open space expansion opportunities may present themselves in the future. Many of the following priority area recommendations will require the willingness and aspiration of current private property owners to see these protections and connections become reality. The future of open space expansion in Yarmouth will be a result of opportunities seized as they arrive, including opportunities that come in the form of land acquisitions and donations, as well as through connections and open space set aside during development.

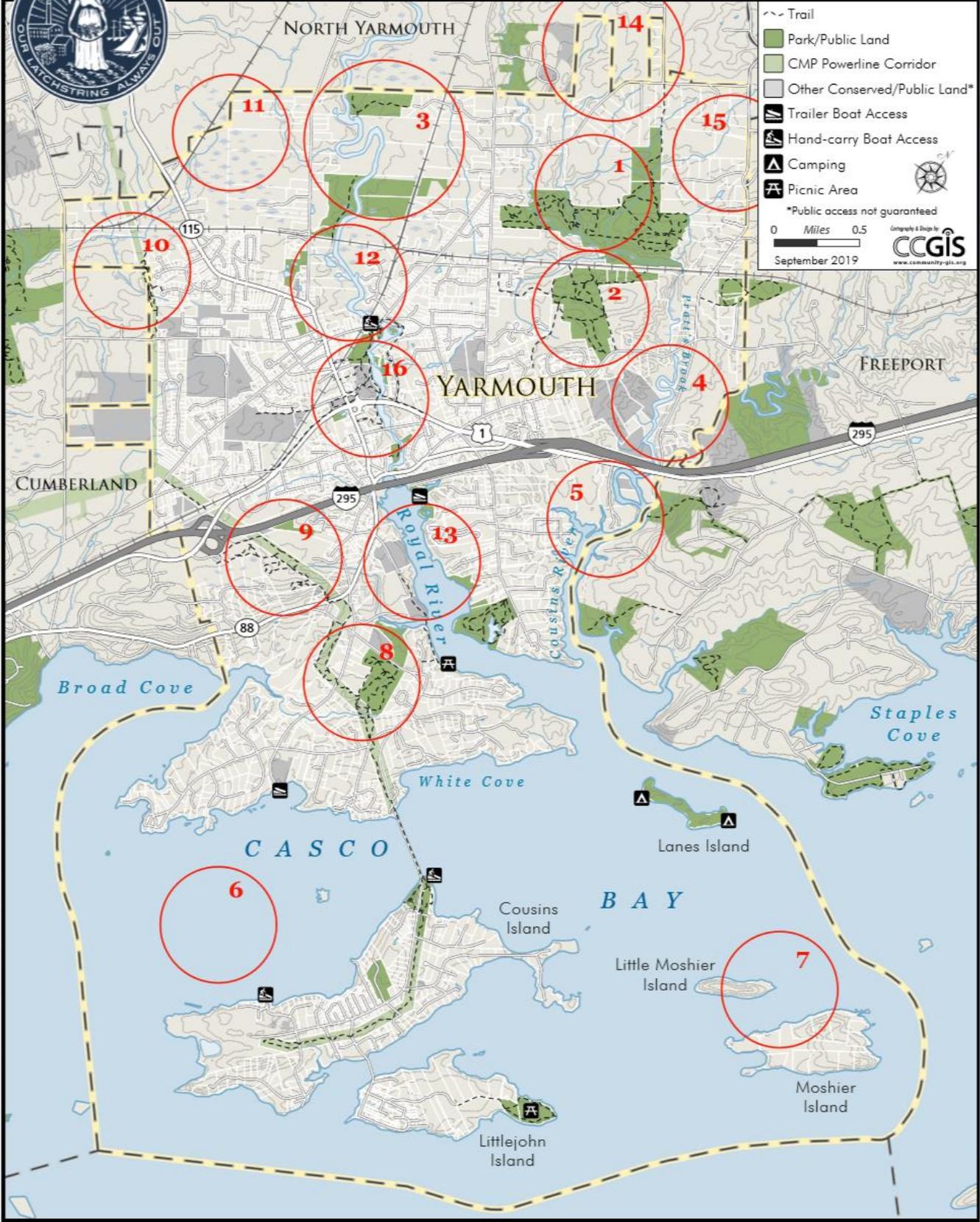
The following recommendations, made in combination with the character and values enumerated earlier and the environmental data identified in the preceding Open Space Priorities map, have resulted in the priority areas for open space expansion.

Map ID #	Priorities to pursue opportunities for (not listed by priority)...
1	Pratt's Brook Park expansion.
2	Frank Knight Forest expansion and protection.
3	Expansions to Riverfront Woods Preserve, Sweetsir Farm Preserve, and Sligo Road, as well as opportunities for connections between each site and into North Yarmouth.
4	Land protection around Upper Cousins River Marsh and Pratt's Brook Marsh and improved trail systems on the associated existing town owned parcels.
5	Land protection around lower Cousins River Marsh and improved water access.
6	Improved water access to Casco Bay
7	Access to and land protection on the islands.
8	Connections around Fels-Groves Farm Preserve, including land protection around undeveloped forest block along Pittee Creek and potential connections and protections around Whitcomb Creek.
9	Land protections of large undeveloped forest block and potential connections to West Side Trail.
10	Connections into Cumberland's Twin Brook Recreation Area and land protection around Maxfield Brook and undeveloped forest block.
11	Connections into North Yarmouth and land protections around forested wetlands and undeveloped forest block.
12	Improved and expanded water access and trail connections along upper Royal River.
13	Improved and expanded water access to lower Royal River including trail connections to existing open spaces.
14	Connections into North Yarmouth open spaces and associated large undeveloped forest block.
15	Connections into Freeport and large undeveloped forest block.
16	Small pocket parks, resting spots, and shaded areas within The Village, with attention given to enhancing village streetscapes.



# Town of Yarmouth

# Yarmouth Open Space Priorities



## Open Space Recommendations

### Goal 1 - Maintain and enhance current Town-owned lands.

Yarmouth's diverse portfolio of conservation lands and Village parks is incredibly valuable to residents and visitors alike. As a critical public asset, this network of properties must be protected and maintained over time.

#### **A. Increase attention to maintenance and amenities, especially for open space in the Village and neighborhood properties, to highlight the best of Yarmouth's values and character.**

Yarmouth's diverse portfolio of parks, open spaces, and trails has the potential to be even more of an asset for the community. In particular, Royal River Park is a rare downtown resource of a type enjoyed by only a few communities in the state. As detailed in the Royal River Corridor Master Plan (2009), increased maintenance and landscaping will further enhance Royal River Park and other Village and Neighborhood Open Spaces.

Because properties like Latchstring Park and Village Green Park, along with Memorial Green and the green area around Merrill Memorial Library all front on Main Street, they are an integral part of the Village streetscape. They provide places to enjoy the Village. These places are small; therefore even modest improvements will have outsized impacts on the quality of Village life.

1. Yarmouth should consider in-town open space improvements to the streetscape and street life on Main Street in order to attract people to Main Street and enhance the public experience in Yarmouth Village.
  - a. The new Route One bridge (2019) over Main Street, and the inviting space beneath it, serves as an inspiring example and focal point for such improvements.
  - b. The Main Street Streetscape Plan (2019) includes recommendations that support this goal through improved walkways, including the addition of green esplanades and street trees. The Streetscape Plan further enhances the pedestrian in-town experience by supporting and encouraging improvements to pocket parks along Main Street. The small parks are crucial open spaces which are accessible to people of all ages and abilities.

#### **B. Update the Royal River Corridor Plan (2009) with a focus on amendments to:**

- a. Maintain and enhance wooded buffers along the river and adjacent to trails,
- b. Initiate a vegetation management program, which includes removing invasive species, additional plantings of native species, and adding visual interest to Royal River Park and the corridor,

- c. Maintain, enhance, and create new trails and paths to improve access to Main Street and surrounding neighborhoods,
  - d. Coordinate the design of benches, lighting, signage, and other improvements for a common aesthetic for development both within and surrounding the corridor.
2. Extend the study area from the harbor to the town line with North Yarmouth.
- C. Draft and adopt management plans for all municipally owned open spaces that clarify appropriate uses for property in its current state, as well as a vision for potential uses in the future. This may include a plan that addresses common management needs throughout Town-owned lands.**

Management plans do not need to be overly complex or lengthy documents, but they are critical in assisting the Town in maintaining properties as attractive assets in the community and in balancing user group needs. Management plans should also address the balancing of user group needs and desires with often competing conservation and habitat goals, public safety, or the differing needs/desires of other user groups.

- 1. Management plans should list any deed restrictions or conservation easements on open space properties, identify management approaches on each property, and identify strategies for enabling permissible activity, natural resource management, maintenance, and permissible development. User counts and user surveys should be included as part of management plans to account for user needs and desires.
    - a. Review management plans on a regular basis, perhaps every 10 years, and update them to reflect changing community needs.
    - b. Current Management Plans, with year completed include:
      - Fels-Groves Farm Preserve (2012)
      - Spear Farm Estuary Preserve (2012)
      - Tinker Farm Preserve (2017)
      - Pratt's Brook Park (2017)
      - Riverfront Woods Interim (2019)
  - 2. The Parks and Lands Committee (PLC) is tasked to work with staff on drafting and reviewing management plans in order to expedite the plan drafting process. The PLC can augment staff capacity with this work, but the Town Council should consider additional resources for the Community Services Department such as contracted services or a temporary hire to ensure timely completion of this task.
- D. Participate in research to acquire local, regional, state, or federal financial opportunities to help fund enhancements and maintenance projects within our Town-owned lands.**



Yarmouth, ME

Photo Credit: Andy Smith-Petersen

## Goal 2 - Prioritize new acquisitions around values that have stood the test of time.

There are several recommendations for adding to Yarmouth’s portfolio of public open spaces that appear again and again through all of Yarmouth’s planning documents going back to the 1988 Public Access and Recreation Plan. These recommendations persist because they have maintained broad public support over time.

Using the existing prioritizations assembled from natural resource mapping and input from many planning forums, the town planning board, council, and local land trust can assess opportunities in a way that provides consistency and predictability for common themes;

The Town should plan to be prepared and ready to react when opportunities for expanding the current portfolio when properties become available, as long as the values meet one or more of the following values.

### **A. Increase public access to the Royal River, Cousins River, and Casco Bay.**

Existing public access to the Royal River, Cousins River, and Casco Bay is facing complex management challenges and opportunities. This becomes increasingly important as time goes on

and properties change hands. In partnership with the Royal River Conservation Trust and other funding sources, the Town should complete a study of existing public salt-water and fresh-water access options in Yarmouth.

Access to these waters should include:

1. Additional hand carry boat launches,
2. New trail network development,
3. Visual access and passive enjoyment of these resources.

**B. Expand linked trail systems and connect to open spaces and off-road connections between neighborhoods, parks, businesses, and municipal services.**

This includes building out local and neighborhood connections to nearby Yarmouth Open Spaces in addition to working with towns in the region to provide greater opportunities for regional bike and multi-use trails. When connecting open spaces, give consideration to wildlife corridors and habitat blocks.

1. Local connections. Connecting neighborhoods to open space and open spaces to each other are important steps to improve open space access. This will also continue the transition from a collection of valued open spaces to an open space network that is integrated into the character of the community and the lives of Yarmouth residents.
  - a. *Open space access and recreation*. On-street connections as well as trails on easements or public land can create more opportunities for users to access spaces. New links to explore include connecting:
    - Brookside Drive and Bluff Road neighborhoods to the Yarmouth Community Garden and Frank Knight Forest.
    - Smith Street neighborhood through Riverside Cemetery and along the Royal River, to Whitcombs Creek, and across to Fels-Groves Farm Preserve.
    - St. Lawrence and Atlantic Rail Trail from Cleaves Street to Main Street, or extending from Cleaves Street to the Royal River/Yarmouth History Center on East Elm Street to the north, and south, on to Portland Street and beyond to the MDOT Park and Ride lot near Exit 15.
    - West Elm Street to Hillside Street and Hillside Street to West Main Street.
  - b. *Access to businesses, services and other destinations*. The opportunity exists to create bike and pedestrian connections that would reduce the need to make car trips for day-to-day activities. Examples of these types of connections include connecting:

- The Rogers Road/Rebecca Lane neighborhood to Forest Falls Drive and the Hannaford Plaza.
  - Extending the Beth Condon Pathway south from its current terminus to the Cumberland Town line and north to Freeport.
  - Providing for either on-street or off-street connections from Princes Point to Yarmouth Village.
2. Regional connections. Connections to trails and open space beyond Yarmouth's town lines add to the environmental and recreational value of Yarmouth's Open Spaces and trails. Examples of these types of connections include:
- a. Extending the Beth Condon Pathway north into Freeport, and the Casco Bay Regional YMCA.
  - b. Connecting the Beth Condon Pathway to the West Side Trail.
  - c. Continuing the West Side Trail work into Cumberland and North Yarmouth.
  - d. Creating a St. Lawrence and Atlantic Rail Trail from Yarmouth to Portland.



Fels-Groves Work Day, Yarmouth, ME

Photo Credit: Josh Royte

### **C. Protect significant natural views.**

The 1988 PARC Plan identified 26 places where there were important views, which can be categorized as either views of places or as views from places. In general, places where long views (1/4 mile or more) are available should be identified, and to the extent possible, prioritized.

1. Update the list of places with scenic values from the PARC Plan to reflect vistas compromised by development and changes in use and to potentially add new places with unique perspectives. Priority should be placed on protecting views of fields, salt marshes, river corridors, Casco Bay, or other scenic resources from existing public properties and protecting new viewpoints where long or expansive views are accessible.
2. A program involving a purchase of development rights should be established to protect views on an updated priority list. Rather than buying property outright, the Town or partner organization could purchase the rights to develop the property, so that there would be no change in current ownership or the way the land is used.

### **D. In more rural settings, prioritize the acquisition of properties close to existing Yarmouth or regional open spaces and those located in relatively unfragmented habitat blocks, and those that protect ecological systems of high value to the Town.**

1. Open spaces in the rural open space areas could benefit by expansion through adding adjacent land when it is available. Properties with a focus on conservation and preservation of rural landscapes and systems could benefit the most from acquisitions based on adjacency to enhance and preserve unfragmented blocks of natural lands.
  2. Focus on acquisition of marsh and upland buffers and conservation easements to limit shoreland development and restrict shoreline hardening and other development that alters the natural hydrology.
- E. In the Village and Neighborhood areas, prioritize the provision of smaller open spaces especially for residents that don't have nearby access to larger parcels and ensure connections to and between open spaces.**
1. New or larger open space within walkable distances of homes and businesses will be most valuable in the Village and Neighborhood areas. These areas may enlarge existing open spaces or be stand alone "pocket parks" that serve an individual neighborhood. This is particularly important in our more densely developed neighborhoods, which lack convenient access to the large open spaces enjoyed in other parts of town. These types of spaces may be publicly or privately owned. In the 1988 PARC Plan they were referred to as matrix open spaces. In Task Force discussions they have been called interstitial open spaces. Either way, smaller, less formal areas of open space can add value to a built up area by adding diversity and interest within a neighborhood.
  2. Prioritize new trails and paths that connect neighborhoods, businesses, town service areas and open spaces. These new connections can enhance the usage and value of existing spaces and serve as interstitial open spaces in their own right.

## Goal 3 - Update Town Ordinances and Policies

### A. Update subdivision and site plan ordinances to require the creation of public open spaces and connections as development occurs.

1. Conservation subdivisions: Update the existing Open Space Residential Development zoning provisions to:
  - a. Prioritize preservation of a property's most valuable natural features;
  - b. Increase the percentage of the gross parcel area required to remain as open space in Rural Residential zoning districts; and
  - c. Add wetlands to the Chapter 701 definition of Land Not Suitable for Development, by revising sub-section c. thereof, to read: *"c. Land that constitutes Wetland or that has been created by filling or draining a pond or Wetland."*
2. Major Site Plans: Require the provision of public places, like pocket parks, small public sittings areas, and quasi-public entry areas/plazas, where appropriate. For example, this could mean a requirement to provide seating or other public amenities within a front setback that connects to a sidewalk in the Village.
3. Subdivision Ordinance: Require pedestrian connections to community facilities, abutting properties, and bicycle and pedestrian destinations that go beyond the existing wording, which states that "All developments shall be designed so as to be consistent with applicable master plans and facilities plans and, if and as applicable, to connect with off premises infrastructure including but not limited to public water, sewer and stormwater, street networks, trails, pedestrian and bicycle network, environmental management or other public facilities" (Section 601.Article 1.E.6, emphasis added).
  - a. Sidewalks, pedestrian ways, or paths should be required to connect to neighboring properties and any pedestrian destinations within a certain distance, even if they are not directly abutting properties, or to close gaps in connectivity. Such wording should be considered for the Site Plan Review Ordinance, as well.
4. Designate tree clearance or removal activities exceeding certain area thresholds as minor or major site plans, with standards for maintaining wooded buffers along property lines and maintaining wooded views from public streets, facilities, and open spaces.

### B. Inventory and map the existing open spaces within subdivisions and incorporate these into the overall open space network.

1. Inventory all open space created or set aside through the development process with copies of easements or deed restrictions.

2. Track and add new open space to the inventory as development occurs.

**C. Extend protections for existing open spaces, shoreland areas, and other sensitive lands.**

1. Create a new Park/Open Space Zone to extend protections for open space, shoreland areas, and other sensitive lands.
2. Amend property deeds to add restrictions on use so today's open space properties remain as public open spaces that cannot be sold as surplus public property or used for other municipal purposes.
3. Update existing Shoreland Overlay, Resource Protection and Stream Protection districts to protect water quality and natural systems. This should include increased limits on tree removal and development options in these areas.
4. Strategically consider the grant of third-party protections such as conservation easements on Town-owned land such as the Pratt's Brook marsh shoreline (Transfer Station), for permanent ecological benefit.

**D. Adopt a municipal Open Space Acquisition Policy to guide future decision making for town staff and the Town Council when opportunities arise to acquire land or development rights.**

This policy should be based in large part on the values that have stood the test of time, listed above. It might also include guidance on the authority level required for properties of various sizes or values, so it is clear which types of acquisitions can happen at the discretion of the Town Council and which are subject to larger town processes or votes.



Kids and Dad Fishing, Yarmouth, ME

Photo Credit: RRCT

**E. Incentivize preservation of privately owned lands.**

1. Expand the use and awareness of Current Use Tax programs that provide property tax reductions for landowners who choose to enroll. These state programs require that land enrolled in these open space, Farmlands, and Tree Growth programs are maintained in their current state. These state property tax reduction programs are sometimes enough to help landowners preserve their property from development. However, the Town should consider additional programs or incentives to aid landowners especially if they are on fixed incomes, or are retirees interested in preserving their land.
2. A local property tax program for active agricultural operations is the Voluntary Municipal Farm Support Program (VMFSP). This program allows towns to reduce or rebate property taxes to as low as 0% in exchange for 20-year conservation easements on working agricultural lands. This allows towns to gain medium-term protections on working lands without using their acquisition fund to buy development rights or to buy properties outright.
3. Yarmouth should consider an active program for the purchase of development rights, especially in partnership with 3<sup>rd</sup> party conservation organizations. This program might be funded through annual appropriations, occasional municipal borrowing, or through an impact fee on new development specifically for open space acquisition or a combination of these methods. Purchase of development rights costs less than purchase of the land and keeps the property in private ownership and use.

4. Educate landowners through public outreach on options to preserve their land, include partnerships with local and State conservation groups and how to ensure land stays undeveloped for future generations.

**F. Explore local options for creating and leveraging additional funds for land acquisition. Options include but are not limited to:**

1. Communicating with landowners regarding options for donating property and development rights in high-priority locations.
2. Annually funding a standing capital budget line item for open space acquisition, to be used for the purchase of property or the purchase of development rights, or in combination with other partner funding sources.
3. Developing an open space impact fee on new residential development. Impact fees can be used for capital costs associated with new open space required as a result of the new development.
4. Borrowing funds through local bonding authority. A local land acquisition bond in the amount of \$1.5 million was issued by the town in 1989 as one of the implementation items from the 1988 PARC Plan.

## Appendix A – Comprehensive Plan and Royal River Corridor Policies & Strategies

The 2010 Comprehensive Plan and the Royal River Corridor Master Plan (described on page 15), were based on extensive public participation, including community forums and a survey of residents and business owners. The survey showed strong support for:

- Acquiring more open space and shorefront access and managing and improving the open space and conservation lands that the Town already has,
- Providing trails, sidewalks, and other connections in the Village between neighborhoods and open spaces in the Village, and
- Requiring developers to preserve portions of future developments as open space and stricter requirements for protecting wildlife habitats.

The survey also showed support for:

- Prioritizing managing and improving existing open space and lands over acquiring new open space,
- Improving parking and shorefront access at Town owned mooring sites and beaches,
- Protecting land along the Royal River north of East Elm Street, and
- Stricter requirements for protecting wetland areas.

Based on the public input, the Comprehensive Plan suggests four specific policies related to open space in Yarmouth, along with strategies for implementing those policies. The policies include:

- Rural Character and Open Space Policy G.1. New residential development in areas outside of the Village should be required to be designed and developed in a manner that preserves the remaining rural character to the extent practical.
- Rural Character and Open Space Policy G.2. Consider all elements of the Town's "green infrastructure" holistically.
- Rural Character and Open Space Policy G.3. Continue to selectively acquire additional land for public Open Space and conservation purposes.
- Rural Character and Open Space Policy G.4. Maintain and enhance the land that the Town currently owns for public open space and conservation purposes

## Appendix B – Current Open Space Inventory

### Rural Areas and Regional Connections Town and Land Trust Properties

Open Space/Property Name	Year Acquired	Acres	Management or Ownership
<b>Bayview Marsh</b>	<b>2004</b>	<b>9</b>	RRCT
<b>Camp SOCI</b>	<b>1991</b>	<b>6</b>	Town
Central Maine Power (CMP)/Kennebec Girl Scout Council	1991		
<b>Even Keel Rd. Marsh</b>		<b>4.6</b>	Town
<b>Fels-Groves Farm Preserve*</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>55</b>	Town*
Maine Coast Heritage Trust to Town	2002	55	
<b>Frank Knight Forest and Community Garden</b>		<b>86</b>	Town
Evelyn M. Parks	2001	75	
David and Brenda Klenda	2018	11	
<b>Lanes Island</b>	<b>2013</b>	<b>28.2</b>	MCHT
<b>Larrabee's Landing</b>		<b>0.6</b>	Town
Esther Alden Corson	1941		
<b>Littlejohn Island Overlook</b>			Town
<b>Littlejohn Island Preserve</b>	<b>2006</b>	<b>26</b>	RRCT
<b>Littlejohn Town Dock</b>	<b>1980</b>	<b>0.5</b>	Town
<b>Madeleine Point</b>	<b>1959</b>	<b>0.1</b>	Town
<b>North Road Back Woods</b>	<b>2002</b>	<b>15</b>	Town
<b>Old Town Landing</b>		<b>0.5</b>	Town
<b>Pratt's Brook Park</b>		<b>235.2</b>	Town
Hamill	1991	41	
Whittemore #1	1991	34.5	
Apex Richards	1991	94	
Whittemore #2	1999	30.5	
Kelly	2000	29.3	
Gunnoe	2003	5.85	
<b>Prescott Park</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>0.4</b>	Town
<b>Riverfront Woods Preserve*</b>		<b>47.6</b>	Town*
Hilda L. Barker	2001	22.9	
Riverboat LLC	2019	26.7	
<b>Royal River Town Landing</b>	<b>1967,1980</b>	<b>8</b>	Town
<b>Sandy Point Beach</b>		<b>3</b>	Town, Central Maine Power
<b>Sunset Point Overlook</b>	1951	<b>0.2</b>	Town
<b>Sligo Road</b>	<b>2001</b>	<b>35</b>	Town
<b>Spear Farm Estuary Preserve*</b>		<b>50.87</b>	Town*
From Trust for Public Land (Phase 1)*	2004	35	
Geoffrey R. Spear (Phase 2)*	2005	13	
Cattell (Phase 3)	2011	2.87	
<b>Sweetsir Farm Preserve</b>		<b>30</b>	Town
Moulton/Oldfield Road Subdivision	1999		
<b>Tinker Farm Preserve*</b>		<b>15.4</b>	Town*
Katherine P. Tinker / The Nature Conservancy	1970		
<b>Transfer Station Salt Marshes</b>		<b>40</b>	Town
<b>Wharf Road Public Dock</b>	<b>1980</b>		Town

\*Town Properties with conservation easements see inventory of Conservation Easements below for more information

## Village and Neighborhoods Town Properties

Open Space/Property Name	Year Acquired	Acres	Management or Ownership
Applewood Farms Playground	1988	0.28	Town
Beth Condon Butterfly Garden		0.5	Town
Gendall Memorial	1980	0.1	Town
Village Run/Sledding Hill		6.9	Town
	Sligo Road Associates LLC	2017	
Grist Mill Lane Field	1981	4	Town
	N.E. Construction, Inc.	1984	
Grist Mill Park		0.5	Town
	F.M. Beck, Inc.	1986	
Factory Island + Forest Falls Drive Land	1999		Town
	Marchant	1999	3.7
History Center + Boat Launch	2010	0.7	Town
Latchstring Park		0.08	Town
	Malar, Inc.	1989	
McKearney Village Open Spaces	2013	28.8	Town
Memorial Green/Town Office		1	Town
Merril Memorial Library Lawn Area	1904	0.3	Town
North Road Playground + Athletic Fields		8	Town
Plimoth Way Open Space	2005	3.2	Town
Royal River Park + Pathway	1962,1970, 1971,1977, 2001	22	Town
Village Green/Railroad Park	1965	1.2	Town
Winslow Athletic Fields		30	Town

## Regional Trails and Water Trails

Trail Name	Length	Oversight
Beth Condon Pathway	1.7 Miles	Town
Maine Island Trail	375 Miles	Maine Island Trail Association (MITA)
Royal River Water Trail	26 Miles	RRCT
West Side Trail	9 Miles	Town

### Inventory of Conservation Easements on Town Owned and Private Lands

Protected Space Name	Date	Acres	Owner	Easement Holder	Public Access
Fels-Groves Farm Preserve	2002	54	Town	RRCT	YES
Fels-Groves Private Land	2002	9	Private	RRCT	NO
Gooch Island	2007	1	Town	RRCT	YES
Greely Road#77		61	Private	RRCT	NO
Phase 1	1995	54			
Phase 2	2004	7			
McCartney Street Wetlands	1991	27	Town	RRCT	YES
Morton Road #35	2002	1	Private	RRCT	NO
Old Town Landing Adjacency	2002	10	Private	RRCT	NO
Riverfront Woods		48	Town	RRCT + Project Agreement Bureau of Land Management	YES
Barker Parcel	2019	22			
Dugas Parcel	2019	19			
Open Space Lot	2010	7			
Spear Farm Estuary Preserve			Town	RRCT + Project Agreement Bureau of land Management	YES
Phase 1	2004	30			
Phase 2	2005	13			
Tinker Farm Preserve	1970	15.4	Town	TNC	YES
Wyman Station Wetlands	1991	3	Utility	RRCT	NO

## Appendix C – Open Space Partners and Resources

### Stakeholders and Community Partners

Maine Land Trust Network  
Royal River Conservation Trust  
Maine Coast Heritage  
Gulf of Maine Climate Network  
The Nature Conservancy  
Beginning with Habitat

### Funding Resources

Maine Coast Heritage Trust  
<https://mcht.org/conservation-work/land-trust-program>  
*Maine Coast Heritage Trust's list of programming and funding opportunities.*

Maine Land Trust Network  
<https://www.mltn.org/resources/funding/>  
*List of various public and private conservation funding sources.*

Royal River Conservation Trust  
<https://rrct.org/donate/saving-land/>  
*Royal River Conservation Land Acquisition Reserve Fund information.*

### General Resources and Continued Reading

Beginning with Habitat  
[https://www.beginningwithhabitat.org/toolbox/about\\_toolbox.html](https://www.beginningwithhabitat.org/toolbox/about_toolbox.html)  
*Beginning with Habitat toolbox which is a guide to help municipalities achieve conservation goals. This toolbox includes Beginning with Habitat data.*

Criteria and Public Benefits Checklist  
<https://www.mltn.org/wp-content/uploads/2019/07/mcht-guiding-principles-and-land-protection-criteria-2016-10-30.pdf>  
*Guide document to assist in prioritizing land conservation efforts.*

Gulf of Maine Climate Network  
<http://www.gulfofmaine.org/2/climate-network-community-toolkit/>  
*Extensive resource toolkit including climate related materials designed to assist communities work on climate mitigation and adaptation.*

Maine Coast Heritage - First Year Management Plan Guide

<https://mltn.org/wp-content/uploads/2018/12/appendix-c-1st-yr-management-plan.doc>

*Maine Coast Heritage framework for creating management plans.*

Master Project Checklist for conservation projects

<https://www.mltn.org/resources/publications/master-project-checklist/>

*Master project checklist used by Maine Coast Heritage Trust throughout conservation projects.*

Royal River Conservation Trust

<https://rrct.org/stewardship/>

*Additional information on stewardship and ownership.*

The Nature Conservancy Data & Tools

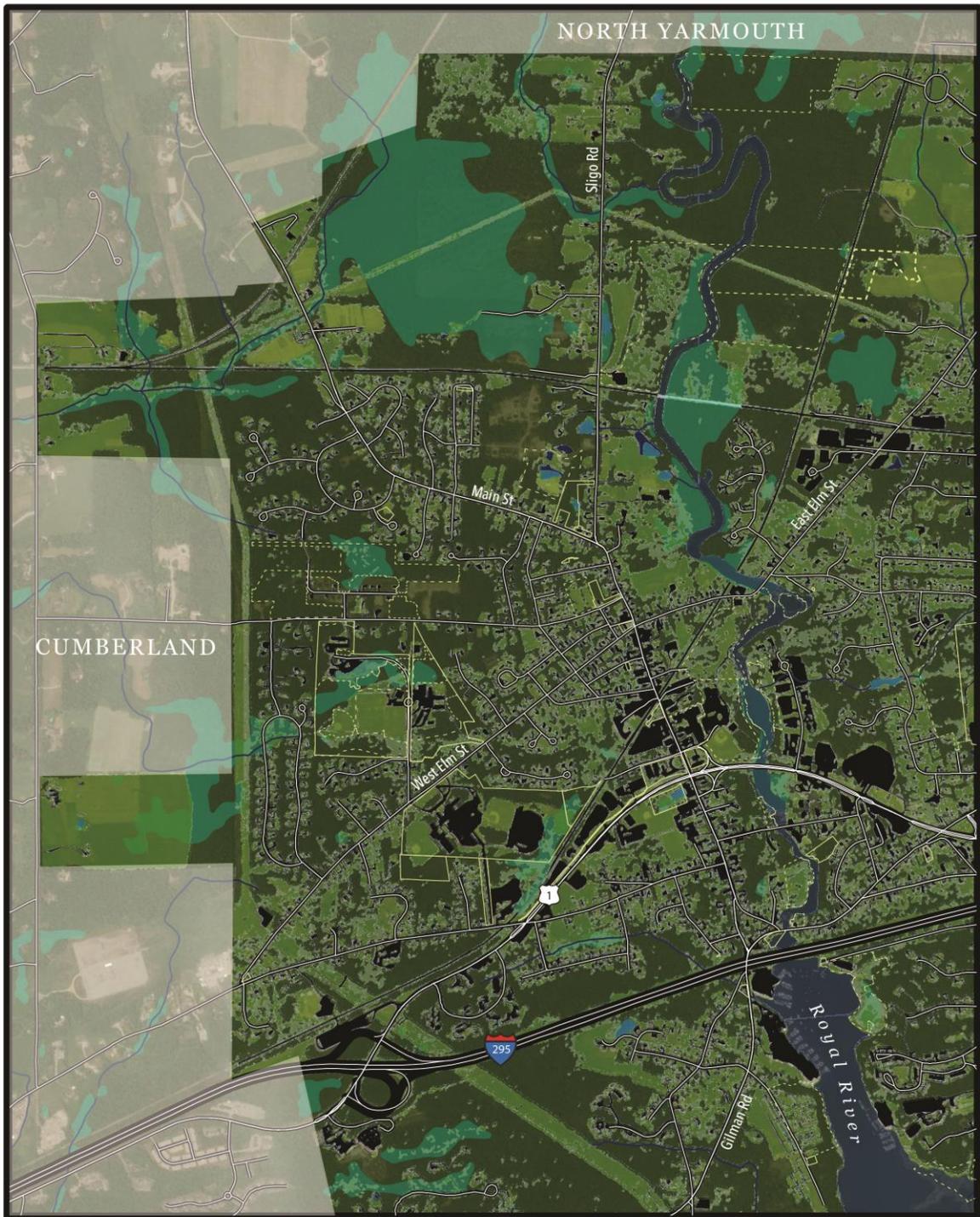
<http://maps.tnc.org/resilientland/>

*Results of resilient and connected landscapes throughout the region with online tool and report.*

<https://www.nature.org/en-us/what-we-do/our-insights/data-and-tools/>

*Extensive database of climate related data sets and tools published by The Nature Conservancy and partners.*

## Appendix D – Yarmouth Land Cover Maps (2015 Data)



YARMOUTH LAND COVER MAP: NORTHWEST QUADRANT

- |   |  |   |  |
|---|--|---|--|
|  Tree Canopy     |  Field/Lawn |  Shrub Scrub     |  Wetland              |
|  Water/Saltmarsh |  Developed  |  Parks/Preserves |  Other Municipal Land |

0 0.25 0.5 1  
MILES



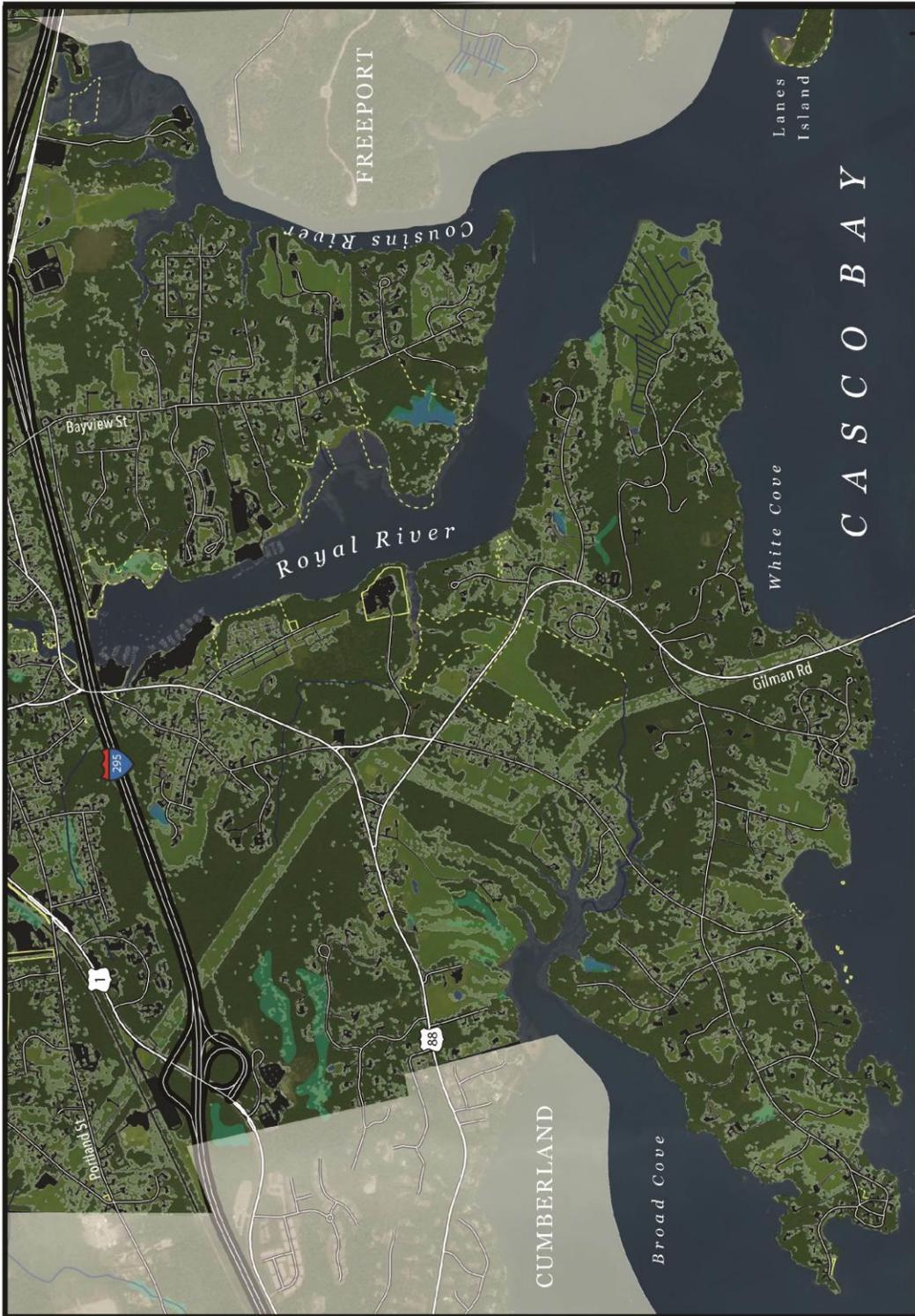


YARMOUTH LAND COVER MAP: NORTHEAST QUADRANT



- Tree Canopy
- Field/Lawn
- Shrub Scrub
- Wetland
- Water/Saltmarsh
- Developed
- Parks/Preserves
- Other Municipal Land





**YARMOUTH LAND COVER MAP: PENINSULAS**

- Tree Canopy
- Field/Lawn
- Shrub Scrub
- Wetland
- Water/Saltmarsh
- Parks/Preserves
- Other Municipal Land
- Developed





YARMOUTH LAND COVER MAP: ISLANDS

- Tree Canopy
- Water/Saltmarsh
- Field/Lawn
- Developed
- Shrub Scrub
- Parks/Presences
- Wetland
- Other Municipal Land

