

Appendix 1

Open Space & Recreation

Focus Group Report & Supplemental Information

Focus Group Report

Overview

The residents of Brighton have indicated in writing and public meetings that the acquisition and/or preservation of open space is a priority. This is consistent with the 1990 Comprehensive Plan. Brighton's current levels of open space compare favorably to other towns with similar demographics and geographic constraints. However, Brighton does not compare as favorably with outlying towns such as Pittsford and Perinton, the towns that Brighton is most often compared to.

The town needs to acquire more open space, for both active and passive recreation to meet federal and state guidelines for a town of our size. A *Recreation Facility Supply and Demand Analysis* was completed as part of the master plan for the Gonsenhauser farm. This study indicated a need for an additional 120 acres (78 acres active recreation and 42 acres passive recreation). The Gonsenhauser parcels total approximately 70 acres, leaving a deficiency of 50 acres. Acreage requirements were based on the needs assessment developed in the 1990 *Parkland Acquisition Study*. Ten years have passed since the needs were assessed and this figure should probably be considered the minimum.

The most straightforward method of obtaining open space is to buy it. The town continues to be proactive in the acquisition of open space, purchasing parcels with funds allocated for parkland acquisition or by working in conjunction with other preservation minded organizations. The reluctance of the voters to approve bonds for open space limits the rate at which the town can acquire land. The acquisition of open space is made more difficult by the fact that much of Brighton is already developed. Development pressures and a lack of large tracks of open space make the transfer and purchase of developments rights prohibitively expensive.

The town does not have funds to purchase all the open space it needs. The town may need to leverage new development to obtain additional open space. Development requires a certain density to be financially viable. In order to give up developable land, the developer desires to be able to increase the density on the remainder to compensate. An option the town may wish to consider is to allow increased density on one portion of a parcel in order to preserve another portion of the parcel.

Goals

- Provide for the active and passive recreational needs of town residents.
- Preserve open space areas that have significant natural value. Natural areas should be fairly large in size so that they will provide optimal wildlife habitat.
- Protect sensitive environmental areas, placing priority on protecting those areas within or adjacent to new development.
- Improve pedestrian and bicycle access to recreational areas.
- Incorporate open space and recreation areas into the design of new developments.

Strategies & Policies

- Acquire a minimum of 50 additional acres of open space before the opportunity passes and the land is no longer available.
- Acquire large parcels or parcels adjacent to existing open space in preference to acquiring small isolated parcels. Large parcels provide superior wildlife habitat. Furthermore, large contiguous areas are more cost effective to maintain, especially when used for active recreation.
- The town should pursue opportunities to partner with other organizations (i.e. land trusts) to acquire open space.
- The review process for new active or passive town-owned recreation areas should take into consideration the long-term maintenance ramifications of the uses proposed.
- Residential developments should be designed to include adequate open spaces in either private yards or common areas to partially provide for residents' open space and recreational needs.
- Improve the quality of green space provided by new development. Increase the percentage of required green space, and/or promote the inclusion of wildlife habitat and open space in the definition of green space.
- Identify land that is suitable for more intense development and land that should remain open space. Communicate this vision to potential developers.
- Consider allowing projects with higher density in exchange for preservation of open space. Projects would qualify for consideration if they had minimal negative impact on surrounding neighborhoods, provided quality open space that met the town's needs, and were viable for the developer.

- Promote land uses adjacent to the canal that support canal path use for active and passive recreation. Provide linkage to other open space areas and communities via the canal path.
- Provide pedestrian and bike linkages between parks and recreation areas and neighborhoods.
- Provide pedestrian connections between parks and open space areas by implementing the trail plan proposed by the Brighton Trails Task Force.. The highest priority trail is a north/south multi use trail that connects the canal path, the Gonsenhauser parcels, and town hall. Expand the trail plan as development continues to connect parks, open space areas, recreational areas, and commercial areas with neighborhoods and trails in surrounding communities.
- Review existing and desired level of pedestrian access to open space that has already been acquired. There may be room to improve passive recreational opportunities.
- Plan for a new Recreation Center as part of active recreation park development, since the recreation department could lose use of the Brook Side School if student enrollment goes up.
- The town needs to develop a policy on use of wetlands banking in development. Without a clear policy on wetland banking, environmentally sensitive wetlands in Brighton might be eliminated, with mitigation through preservation of wetlands in another community. The Conservation Board should study this issue and recommend an appropriate wetlands banking policy to the Town Board for adoption. Until such a policy exists, all wetland mitigation should take place within the town.

Supplemental Information

(Refer also to Appendix 3: Fiscal Impact for a discussion of the fiscal impacts of Open Space)

Open Space Distribution

The information below is based on the 1995-1996 *Town of Brighton Open Space Index Update*, revised to reflect recent changes, and provides an overview of the characteristics of remaining open space in Brighton (Refer to Figure 1 in the Open Space & Recreation Chapter for open space locations and ownership).

Eastern Brighton (north of East Avenue):

- There are approximately 320 acres of open space identified in eastern Brighton. About 70 acres are owned by the Town of Brighton (largely the town landfill) and 130 by the County of Monroe.
- Approximately 120 acres of the identified open space in eastern Brighton is privately owned.

- Nearly all of the open space in eastern Brighton is located in a watercourse/floodplain, woodlot or steep slopes EPOD, or a combination of the three.

Central Brighton (East Avenue to E. Henrietta Road)

- There are approximately 1,040 acres of open space identified in central Brighton. About 150 acres are owned or controlled by the Town of Brighton (including 18 acres on which the town has a purchase option). About 140 acres are owned by the state or county.
- Approximately 750 acres of identified open space in central Brighton is privately owned.
- While significant portions of open space in central Brighton are impacted by the floodplain of Allens Creek or Buckland Creek, by a steep slopes EPOD (on Pinnacle Hill) or by scattered woodlot EPODs, the area bounded by Westfall Road, S. Winton Road, S. Clinton Avenue and Brighton-Henrietta Town Line Road retains large tracts of privately held land, totaling approximately 450 acres, that is not overly encumbered by EPOD restrictions.

Western Brighton (west of E. Henrietta Road)

- Of the approximately 920 acres of land in western Brighton that has been identified as open space, about 15 acres are owned by the Town of Brighton and 275 by Monroe County.
- There are about 600 acres of privately owned open space in western Brighton. Approximately ½ of this acreage is located in the 100 year floodplain of the Genesee River and/or Red Creek.
- Much of western Brighton is not served by sanitary sewer lines. The location of much of the privately held open space in western Brighton in the Genesee and/or Red Creek floodplain(s) means that tight controls must be placed on the installation of septic systems in that area, which has been a factor in limiting development there - several residential subdivisions have been approved in western Brighton which have yet to be developed.
- Roughly half of the privately held open land in western Brighton is owned by either the University of Rochester or Rochester Institute of Technology. These institutions may be inclined to hold onto their land as an investment, for future expansion of their respective institutions or for the development of uses that complement their educational missions.

Environmental & Habitat Protection

Brighton has numerous tools for controlling the environmental impacts of development. The town adopted, in 1993, four Environmental Protection Overlay Districts (EPODs), which regulate activities in defined sensitive areas. The Planning Board and Conservation Board also have important roles in reviewing projects for their overall environmental impacts, including noise, light and visual pollution and traffic impacts. Administrative reviews of smaller projects such as site clearing are sensitive not only to larger potential impacts, such as siltation of

waterways, but also smaller ones, such as the unnecessary tracking by construction vehicles of dirt onto public roads.

Other methods of protection include the use of incentive zoning, cluster development and the negotiation of Conservation Easements during project review. Each of these methods has a different potential impact on surrounding areas and all or none may be appropriate to consider for a given development proposal, but each has the potential for providing significant open space benefits for the town and should be considered where appropriate.

Of particular environmental sensitivity is the largely undeveloped area west of the abandoned Lehigh Valley rail line in western Brighton. This area is almost entirely within the floodplain of the Genesee River or Red Creek, its soils generally exhibit poor drainage qualities, and there are numerous state and federal wetlands and Woodlot EPODs present. Western Brighton is also generally not serviced with sanitary sewers, and most septic systems are required to be raised with fill above the 100-year flood level. In areas such as this, one method of limiting potential damage caused by septic systems and the floodplain's loss of flood-carrying capacity is to require larger residential development lots than are currently required in Brighton.

Other levels of government also help to protect Brighton's sensitive areas.

- Activities in wetlands are regulated by either the NYS Department of Environmental Conservation or the US Army Corps of Engineers.
- The Monroe County Health Department ensures that solid waste and sewage are controlled and disposed of in a safe and appropriate manner.
- The state mandates that the State Environmental Quality Review process is followed for most types of development.

Environmental Protection Overlay Districts

Brighton has designated four types of EPODs: woodlot, watercourse/floodplain, steep slopes and waste disposal site. EPODs serve to define, geographically and by description of site characteristics, sensitive environmental areas in Brighton, and provide standards for development and other activities occurring within the defined areas. The determination of EPOD areas is aided by official maps kept in the Building and Planning Department. These maps serve to indicate known environmental features at the time of their production, but actual determination of the existence of an EPOD is determined by site inspection. EPOD regulations do not prohibit development within a district, but provide standards so that development is sensitive to existing conditions and preserves, to the extent possible, natural features of the site, and so that off-site impacts from the project are prevented or mitigated.

Impact of Monroe County Land Ownership

Important to environmental protection in Brighton is Monroe County's ownership of large areas of open space in western and eastern Brighton. As mentioned above, Monroe County owns

approximately 130 acres in eastern Brighton, much of it in Ellison Park. In western Brighton the County owns approximately 275 acres of open space. The majority of this land has significant environmental and habitat features: much of the western Brighton land is located in the 100-year floodplain of the Genesee River or Red Creek, has state or federal wetlands, and has town-designated woodlot areas; much of the land in eastern Brighton has either steep slopes, woodlots, or is located in the floodplain of Irondequoit Creek.

Parks & Recreation Areas: The Bayer Associates Report

In 1997, the town acquired 64 acres of open space in central Brighton, known as the Gonsenhauser properties (for their former owner). In 1998, Bayer Associates was hired to analyze park and recreation area needs in the town and develop a master plan for the Gonsenhauser properties - their *Recreation Facility Supply and Demand Analysis* is included here by reference.

The Bayer Associates analysis built upon the findings of the 1990 *Parkland Acquisition Study*, updating the town park/recreation inventory to include areas acquired by the town since the study, comparing the results of the 1990 study to newer state and federal standards, commissioning a survey (administered by the Gordon S. Black Corp.) of Brighton residents to discover new demand trends for the use of town parkland, interviewing representatives of Brighton recreation leagues to identify recreation needs not met by using the state standards, and comparing Brighton's acreage of park and recreation land with the acreage of surrounding towns.

The results of the analysis included the following:

Park and Recreation Land Supply

- “Brighton’s park system currently consists of approximately 148 acres of passive use and/or undeveloped parklands and 28 acres of active use parklands. Active use parklands are generally considered to be those lands used primarily for aerobic activities such as basketball, soccer and football. Passive use parklands are generally considered to be those lands used primarily for non-aerobic activities such as casual walking, picnicking and nature study. If the 18 acre parcel “C” at the Gonsenhauser Farm is exercised, Brighton’s total parkland area will be approximately 194 acres.”
- “School fields in the township account for another 75 acres of land, however, these fields are heavily used by the school district and therefore are not always available for organized town recreation use and general neighborhood play.”
- “Regional parks owned by either the City of Rochester, Monroe County, or New York State which are within walking distance for many town residents include Genesee Valley Park (800 acres), Ellison Park (447 acres), Highland Park (150 acres), Cobbs Hill Park (63 acres) and the Erie Canal pathway.”

Comparison to Shortage Identified in 1990 Parkland Acquisition Study

- Based on the minimum acres recommended for town acquisition noted in the *Parkland Acquisition Study*, the town should acquire an additional 50 acres of passive and active recreation land to minimally satisfy future needs. Acquisition of the 18 acres of former Gonsenhauser farmland on which the town has a purchase option would lower the minimum need to 32 acres.
- Based on the minimum active recreation facility needs recommended in the *Parkland Acquisition Study*, the town should develop 1 junior baseball/softball field, 1 baseball field, 3 soccer/multi-use fields, 2 tennis courts, 1 or more outdoor basketball courts, and 1 ice skating rink.

Additional Factors Related to Park/Recreation Land Needs

- Comparing town-owned or leased land in Brighton (5.11 acres / 1,000 pop.) with other towns, Brighton compares favorably with the towns of Gates (4.62 acres / 1,000 pop.) and Irondequoit (2.84 acres / 1,000 pop.), but lags significantly behind outlying towns with less development (Penfield: 14.13 acres / 1,000 pop.; Perinton: 24.11 acres / 1,000 pop.; Pittsford: 40.86 acres / 1,000 pop.).
- The National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA) has for years developed the generally accepted national standards for park and recreation land needs. In 1996, the NRPA discontinued the use of numerical standards in favor of recommending a “systems approach” for the local determination of parkland needs. New York State continues to use numerical standards, updated every four years.
- Interviews with representatives of Brighton Baseball and Brighton Soccer indicated present and future needs for fields significantly in excess of the needs identified through use of state standards.
- The Bayer Associates analysis was concerned only with town’s need for active and passive recreation lands. The report, however, also noted that other functions of open space, such as preservation of natural resources and sensitive environmental areas, are important considerations in the acquisition or control of open spaces.

Trails and Linkages

An important component of any open space plan is the recommendation of safe, convenient and pleasurable trails and linkages. Trails can be pedestrian only or multi-use (bicycle, skateboard, etc.) and can provide access by these modes of transportation between neighborhoods and recreation areas, link neighborhoods together, or be used for passive recreation and nature observation. Urban links provide for safe pedestrian and bicycle travel along established streets and can also provide access to recreation areas and between neighborhoods, but also connect neighborhoods with popular commercial areas.

The 1990 *Master Plan* proposed a trail and linkage system for Brighton that identified important street linkages along Clover Street, Monroe Avenue, Elmwood Avenue and portions of East River Road, S. Winton Road, Blossom Road, Penfield Road and Landing Road North: it also proposed paths through developed and open space areas.

In 1998, the Brighton Trails Task Force (BTTF) was formed to take a fresh look at the needs and opportunities for a trail/linkage system in Brighton: their report is included here by reference. The system proposed by the Task Force differed substantially from that of the 1990 *Master Plan*. Important differences include:

In western Brighton, the *Master Plan* proposed a linkage along E. River Road that connected to a path along the CSX West Shore Line ROW, ending at Jefferson Road. The BTTF recommended : 1) a footpath through the Stowell Conservancy and along the RG&E power line ROW and the West Branch of Red Creek, connecting E. River Road with Crittenden Road near Genesee Valley Park, and 2) a multi-use trail along the abandoned Lehigh Valley Railroad ROW, connecting the Erie Canal Path with Brighton-Henrietta Town Line Road near Jefferson Road. The Lehigh Valley trail provides the better option because: it is along an abandoned rail line, while the CSX line is actively used; it is centrally located and more readily accessible to more neighborhoods and streets (E. River Road, Crittenden Road and B-H Town Line/Jefferson Road; and it is adjacent to the eastern edge of Genesee Valley Park and would provide access to an undeveloped area of the park.

The *Master Plan* proposed a winding linkage between the open space behind West Brighton Plaza (W. Henrietta Road) and the Erie Canal. This area is largely commercially developed, although the proposed trail passed close to Rustic Village Apartments and through Monroe Community College. The trail would be difficult to implement because of the large number of parcels in private ownership to be negotiated. It would also suffer from having to traverse two major streets, East and West Henrietta Roads, and would provide little in the way of nature enjoyment. The BTTF proposed two major footpaths in central Brighton, one connecting Elmwood Avenue with Westfall Road near the Town Park, and the other connecting Elmwood Avenue near the Town Hall with the Erie Canal path. Both would offer significant opportunities for nature enjoyment (depending on future development of the areas).