

Amesbury Open Space and Recreation Plan Update Case Study

Municipality: City of Amesbury

Project Title: Amesbury Open Space and Recreation Plan Update

Grant Award: \$37,500

Match: \$12,538.52

Community Overview:

Provide a general description of your community as a brief introduction to the project.

Description of Climate Impact:

Address the community's current and potential future vulnerability to climate change impacts. What are the specific threats to the project area/site and reasons for applying to the grant program?

Open Space and Recreation Plans help guide the protection and management of natural land and recreational facilities within municipalities. Besides enhancing the quality of life, open space planning can provide ecological, climate resiliency and economic benefits by minimizing the misuse or mismanagement of a community's natural resources and by proactively managing natural resources for these multiple co-benefits. At the beginning of the project, the 2012-2019 Amesbury Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP) was still in draft form, and this draft OSRP was written prior to the advent of the MVP program and broad awareness of the importance of planning to enhance the resiliency of communities to climate changes. This project allowed Amesbury to prepare an updated OSRP in a manner that integrates the results and priority Action Items identified during the MVP Planning process, and utilizes the research and mapping of nature-based solutions identified in Amesbury's MVP expanded scope Natural Resource Infrastructure Assessment (NRIA) project. Preparing the 2020-2027 OSRP to include the information and mapping developed during the MVP and NRIA process allowed for comprehensive planning for community level adaptation to climate change and will help ensure that investments in land protection benefit not only resource protection, landscape connectivity, and the recreational needs of the community but also incorporate other aspects of resiliency to climate change. Of note, there is significant overlap between critical areas identified in the Amesbury MVP process and the vast majority of Amesbury's open space and recreational holdings, such as Woodsom Farm, Battis Farm/Powwow Hill Conservation Area, Heritage Park, Lakes Gardner and Attitash, the Town Forest/Great Swamp which provides water storage for the Powwow River.

Project Goals:

What were the specific goals of the project?

- Prepare a 2020-2027 Open Space and Recreation Plan.
- Integrate planning to increase the resiliency of vulnerable populations into the OSRP planning process.
- Integrate downscaled climate data for the Merrimack River Watershed utilizing data on the resilientma.gov website.
- Integrate the information and mapping generated during the MVP expanded scope NRIA project into the OSRP planning process and the final OSRP.
- Provide community outreach and education as part of the OSRP planning process to educate the Amesbury community on opportunities to increase climate resilience, particularly nature-based solutions, and to educate the Amesbury community about the OSRP and associated opportunities for open space conservation and improvement of recreational opportunities

Approach and Result:

How did the project team implement the project? Describe the methodology or your approach to achieve the project goals. Describe, and quantify (where possible) project results (e.g. square footage of habitat restored or created). Provide web links, if available, to your project deliverables.

In February 2020, the City of Amesbury contracted with BSC Group, Inc. to assist with updating the 2012 OSRP based on the MVP planning efforts completed in 2019. A community forum was scheduled and advertised for March 2020, but the continuously evolving nature of the COVID-19 pandemic necessitated revising the approach to meet the required public participation process for the OSRP. Instead of meeting in person, an online community forum was launched using electronic platforms including Zoom, WordPress, ESRI Story Map, and ESRI Online Mapping. These platforms were used to provide community outreach and education as part of the OSRP planning process in order to educate the Amesbury community on opportunities to increase climate resilience, particularly nature-based solutions, and to educate the community about the OSRP and associated opportunities for open space conservation and improvement of recreational opportunities. A virtual presentation was streamed and recorded through Zoom and Amesbury Community Television in real-time and included a run-through of the information posted into the other electronic platforms and a question and answer session. The online platform was used to both share information (e.g., the recorded presentation, nature-based solutions Story Map, and online GIS map) as well as to solicit feedback on the proposed plan goals and objectives, to prioritize interests for additional open space and park amenities, and to allow attendees to provide input on any related concerns. The project website (<https://amesburyosrp.wordpress.com/>) served as the central hub for this community outreach.

The draft OSRP was completed in June 2020, and the Amesbury Planning Board reviewed and issued a letter of support for the OSRP in July 2020. The draft plan that went before the Planning Board is available on the City of Amesbury website: [https://www.amesburyma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif2731/f/pages/draft_2020 - 2027_amesbury_open_space_and_recreation_plan_with_draft_ada_self_eval.pdf](https://www.amesburyma.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif2731/f/pages/draft_2020_-_2027_amesbury_open_space_and_recreation_plan_with_draft_ada_self_eval.pdf)

Lessons Learned:

What lessons were learned as a result of the project? Focus on both technical matter of the project and process-oriented lessons learned.

The Amesbury Open Space and Recreation Plan Update project demonstrates that explicitly incorporating climate adaptation goals into Open Space and Recreation Plans (OSRPs) provides an ideal opportunity to begin comprehensive planning for community-level adaptation to climate change. This approach to the OSRP update process will help ensure that investments in land protection and the management of protected areas stay relevant as the climate changes. Moreover, the OSRP process can address climate change impacts by considering climate change vulnerabilities, management of conservation land, and strategically prioritizing future areas for land protection. The MVP expanded scope NRIA project that Amesbury conducted in concert with the MVP Planning project also provided a unique planning tool for the OSRP update. The NRIA project mapped Amesbury's ecological climate resiliency and identified locations for nature-based solutions that provide both ecological restoration and climate resiliency services. The results of the MVP NRIA project, including the opportunities for nature-based solutions, were incorporated into the OSRP and the required seven-year action plan.

Process Lessons

The project provided lessons about pivoting from in-person public meetings to virtual public meetings to both disseminate and gather information.

Partners and Other Support:

Include a list of all project partners and describe their role in supporting/assisting in the project.

- City of Amesbury
- Amesbury Open Space, Natural Resources, and Trails Committee
- BSC Group, Inc.
- Amesbury residents
- Members of City boards and committees