

## **Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program Action Grant Case Study**

**Municipality:** Town of Lynnfield

**Project Title:** ENV 22MVP 02 – MVP Action Grant – Richardson Green Conservation Acquisition

**Award Year (FY):** FY 22

**Grant Award:** \$ 1,638,750

**Match:** \$ \$761,250

**Match Source:** Cash Match-\$761,250; Lynnfield Conservation Fund-\$200,000; American Recovery Plan Act (ARPA)-\$571,250

**One or Two Year Project:** One

**Municipal Department Leading Project:** Lynnfield Planning & Conservation Department

**Project Website URL:** <https://www.town.lynnfield.ma.us/conservation-commission>

### **Community Overview:**

Lynnfield is located 15 miles north of Boston, in the western part of Essex County, Massachusetts. A small town, it comprises 10.22 square miles with a reported 2020 Census population of 12,968. Most all of the available buildable land in Lynnfield has been developed for single-family homes. Over the years, purposeful conservation efforts have resulted in several large parcels of undeveloped forested land currently stewarded by either the Town of Lynnfield or the Lynnfield Planning & Conservation Department. Several large parcels are held by the Lynnfield Center Water District which supplies drinking water to approximately 70% of residents.

Lynnfield is not an Environmental Justice community, although it borders the cities of Peabody and Lynn, and the Town of Saugus which are EJ communities having Minority, Income and English isolation populations. The cities of Peabody and Lynn have significant climate vulnerable neighborhoods. Lynnfield is largely a residential community, although the 2013 opening of the MarketStreet outdoor mall has provided a large number of retail and restaurant establishments. It is fair to assume that a number of employees, particularly in the hospitality sector may in fact reside in neighboring communities.

A unique feature of Lynnfield is Reedy Meadow, a 540-acre freshwater cattail marsh and the largest cattail marsh in Massachusetts. In 1972 it was registered by the U.S. National Park Service as a National Natural Landmark, one of only 11 such designated sites in Massachusetts.

### **Project Description and Goals:**

The Richardson Green property is located within the recharge area for the Lynnfield Center Water District (LCWD) well-fields, and is in the larger Ipswich River Watershed. Both the LCWD and the Ipswich River Watershed are water-stressed and projected to have even more withdrawals and reduced flows in the next 20 years, due to a predicted increase in local populations paired with changes in precipitation brought about by the changing climate. On April 13, 2021, American Rivers named the Ipswich River among "America's Most Endangered

Rivers of 2021”, citing the grave threat to ecosystem health and regional water security in the context of climate change.

In 2020, a developer held a Purchase and Sale Agreement to buy the 20+ acre property for \$2.71M for development into a 15-lot subdivision (utilizing private wells and septic systems) on the property, adding to the large adjacent parcels on Main Street already under construction. In August, 2021 Lynnfield was awarded a \$1.638,750 MVP Action Grant to support its efforts to purchase Richardson Green and perpetually protect it with a Conservation Restriction held by the Lynnfield Conservation Commission. The Town of Lynnfield had the opportunity to purchase the land through a Chapter 61 right of first refusal, and efforts were underway early to bring an article to October Town Meeting. However, in November 2021, the Lynnfield Select Board assigned its right of first refusal to Essex County Greenbelt Association, who successfully purchased the property May 2, 2022.

The property is adjacent to a ~700-acre forested network of protected land owned by the LCWD and the Town of Lynnfield Conservation Commission. The forest block is the largest intact forest on the northern Ipswich River. This land retains thousands of trees that safeguard ground water in a time of climate crisis. By preventing development and protecting this undeveloped forested parcel through a Conservation Restriction, nature-based solutions include 1) promotion of biodiversity through habitat protection and restoration, 2) reduction of development in climate vulnerable areas, 3) protection of water quality and groundwater recharge, 4) improved air quality 5) climate mitigation through extensive carbon sequestration, and 6) mitigation of inland flooding risks.

This project is also one component/phase of a larger project known as “A Vision for Willis Woods” - a regional effort led by Lynnfield to create a vision, and ultimately a work plan, for these ~700 acres of open space. This aggregate area, to which Richardson Green is a “keystone” parcel, is comprised of various conservation-owned properties, municipal water district lands, watershed lands and two miles of the former Salem-Lowell Rail Line. It is situated at the intersection of the four communities of Lynnfield, Peabody, North Reading and Middleton. This regional land preservation effort will protect drinking water resources, provide passive recreation connectivity, and maintain this aggregate area as open space in perpetuity.

Seven partner organizations are working on this regional effort; Greenbelt | Essex County’s Land Trust, Ipswich River Watershed Association, Lynnfield Center Water District, the Towns of Lynnfield, Middleton, North Reading, and the City of Peabody. Specifically, this regional resource has the potential to connect to Peabody’s East West Independence Greenway. North Reading has a rail trail feasibility study currently underway. Middleton is now working on a dam removal project with the owners of the private Bostik, Inc. property on the Lynnfield Middleton line which could result in both water access and recreational trail parking access once the dam is completely removed. In every facet of this work, public involvement has been a strong factor with specific outreach geared to EJ neighborhoods. These public engagement avenues have been identified and will be well utilized going forward.

Finally, the project has been completed on time. On May 2, 2022 Essex County Greenbelt Association purchased the Richardson Green parcel. The Conservation Restriction which is held by the Lynnfield Conservation Commission was formally recorded at the Salem Registry of Deeds on May 2, 2022.

### **Results and Deliverables:**

The Richardson Green property includes an estimated 3,000 mature trees, which will now be permanently protected by the Conservation Restriction. This parcel abuts ~700 acres of already conserved lands owned by the Lynnfield Conservation Commission and the Lynnfield Center Water District. The Richardson Green parcel is entirely within the Lynnfield Groundwater Protection District. It is largely mapped as Prime 2 Forest land, an indication of the richness of the soils for growing healthy forests. The parcel includes areas designated by the MA Division of Fisheries and Wildlife as BioMap2 designed to guide strategic biodiversity consideration in Massachusetts. Public access will be allowed for passive recreational uses and for trail connectivity to adjacent protected land. Conservation of this property furthers the MA Statewide Comprehensive Outdoor Recreation Plan (SCORP), specifically Objective 1, to “Fill in the gaps of existing trail networks”, and Objective 2, to “Support the acquisition of land that will increase water supply protection.” Further, the protection of this parcel is specified in Lynnfield’s 2020 Municipal Vulnerability Plan and the 2021 Open Space and Recreation Plan.

In addition to the project deliverables for the assessment, purchase and conservation restriction transactions, a link for the Willis Woods project is here:

<https://www.town.lynnfield.ma.us/willis-woods>

### **Lessons Learned:**

There was a significant benefit to having a broad partnership come together to motivate the land conservation effort. Ipswich River Watershed Association was a key early advocate – knowing the importance of forested parcels in the headwaters of the river. They brought in Greenbelt, an organization with real estate and conservation finance skills. Ultimately both non-profit organizations played an important role helping to educate community members and help local leaders understand the process and the options as they collectively assessed the opportunity. The Town of Lynnfield’s boards, committees, and staff, along with the Lynnfield Center Water District asked hard questions, listened, and ultimately came together around a plan.

Lynnfield’s MVP planning process played a critical role in the success of this project as it identified protection of this land as a key strategy. Having that planning foresight helped set the table for a significant grant to facilitate the project.

From a technical standpoint, the conservation real estate was not particularly challenging or unique, though the stay of the Chapter 61 timelines because of the COVID Emergency Order

certainly helped the project succeed by giving an opportunity for the right funding to come to bear.

Other communities should see the benefits of the public-private partnership that helped to get this project done. Creating and maintaining relationships with key stakeholder groups and resources sets the table for success in future projects. In Lynnfield, there were enough contacts between the Town, Lynnfield Center Water District, IRWA, and Greenbelt that we were able to create the coalition, but it did take a little while to gel. Part of that delay was COVID-related, as we met virtually on ZOOM for over a year, but regardless, we would have been even better poised to react to the opportunity if some of those relationships had been stronger at the outset.

#### **Partners and Other Support:**

- Essex County Greenbelt Association: Purchaser of the Richardson Green parcel who will steward this parcel, adding it to their substantial inventory of conserved lands throughout Essex County.
- Ipswich River Watershed Association: The non-profit which works to protect the Ipswich River watershed as it provides drinking water to 350,000 people and thousands of businesses in 14 communities in northeastern Massachusetts.
- Lynnfield Center Water District: Water district in northern Lynnfield which owns hundreds of abutting undeveloped acres and provides drinking water to ~70% of Lynnfield residents.
- Town of Lynnfield – Planning & Conservation Department: MVP Action Grant applicant and the lead community for the “Vision for Willis Woods” project.
- Town of Middleton: Partner community for Willis Woods Ipswich River Watershed protection and potential connectivity of Willis Woods’ passive recreational trails development to existing and proposed trails within Middleton.
- Town of North Reading: Partner community for Willis Woods Ipswich River Watershed protection and potential connectivity of Willis Woods’ passive recreational trails development to existing and proposed trails within North Reading.
- City of Peabody: Partner community for Willis Woods Ipswich River Watershed protection and potential connectivity of Willis Woods’ passive recreational trails development to existing and proposed trails within Peabody.

#### **Project Photos:**

The photographs below are courtesy of Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC) and Greenbelt | Essex County’s Land Trust.





*Photo courtesy of Metropolitan Area Planning Council (MAPC)*



*Photo courtesy of Greenbelt | Essex County's Land Trust.*