

Thank you for your willingness to serve on the steering committee for the Town Forest Recreation Planning process. As a steering committee member, your role will be to help the process by facilitating public engagement and helping to develop the recreation plan. This committee will meet throughout the planning process to provide input, prepare for public workshops, discuss the public's feedback and ideas for the forest, and develop the action-based recreation plan for the town forest.

## Inventory Existing Conditions

The committee should begin by compiling existing information about both the town forest and the community. Committee members should create:

- A Community Profile (see Existing Condition and Assessment Pod)
- Maps, including a base map, context map, and natural resources map (see Existing Condition and Assessment Pod).

Both these items should be available at the steering committee kickoff and all public workshops.

## Steering Committee Kickoff

The committee should meet to kick-off the project. At this meeting, the committee should review the planning process, discuss the committee's role, and discuss scope and timelines for the project. A powerpoint presentation is included in the Public Engagement Pod to help facilitate this discussion. The committee should also begin thinking about their vision and goals for this project with the facilitator worksheet and SWOT exercise included in this toolkit (see Public Engagement Pod).

If possible, the committee should walk together around the forest to think about the needs and vision of the town forest.

### Steering Committee Composition

*The steering committee should bring a variety of perspectives to the table. The committee should include a variety of user groups, a member of the selectboard, town staff (such as the recreation staff and town planner), any local forestry school or outdoor education program representatives, and representatives of the land trust that manages or hold easements to the property.*

## Public Visioning Workshop

The steering committee should put on a public visioning workshop to gather public input for the future of the town forest. The workshop will be an open house format, drop in anytime in a two-hour window. The committee should select a large room with an open floor such as a gym or meeting space in the town offices where tables and chairs can be pushed to the side. In advance of the workshop, the committee should fill in the promotional materials with the meeting date and location (see the Public Engagement Pod).

The steering committee should also fill in the name of the town/forest and date on the planning boards for the meeting (found in the Public Engagement Pod) and print them on 24" x 36." For the Town Forest Overview board, the committee will need to prepare a few bullet points about the forest and a photo to provide context for anyone unfamiliar with the forest. The base map, context map, and natural resources, developed by committee members, should be printed on 11" X 17" with 5-10 copies of each. Print a large-scale base map for the community members to draw on to share their ideas for the forest. The community profile board should be printed as well. Other materials necessary for this meeting include:

- writing implements
- dot stickers
- and tape or easels for posting the boards.

The boards should be posted on the edge of the room with stickers and pens available at each board.

At the meeting itself, a sign-in table should be near the doorway for people to provide e-mail addresses to stay updated on the project. The sign-in table should also have general project information, survey flyers, and a public comment box. Steering committee members should greet attendees and explain the format of the meeting. Other committee members should be available for conversations with people who want to provide verbal comments. Committee members should also inform people about the survey, having them encourage their friends and family members who could not make it to the workshop to take the survey.

### Professional Facilitation

*If public engagement proves particularly challenging or daunting, professional meeting facilitation may be considered—many consultants may be willing to work with you on some or all of your public engagement process and may be flexible on costs, particularly if you are able to share some of the responsibilities.*

## Survey

The steering committee should distribute a survey to collect additional feedback from the broader community. A hard-copy of the survey is available in the Public Engagement Pod. The steering committee could also make an online version on free survey software such as survey monkey or google forms. The survey should be open for 4-6 weeks and be publicized with promotional materials. Hard-copy surveys should be available at community gathering places such as the general store, library, and school, the forest trailhead kiosk, and community events.

Once the survey has closed, the steering committee must analyze the results, along with those of the public workshop using the survey results template (in Public Engagement Pod). For an example of how to pull all the visioning workshop feedback and survey data into the template, see Bradford's results report (in Public Engagement Pod).

## Draft Vision Framework

Once the visioning results are complete and all stakeholders have had time to review them, the steering committee can begin drafting the vision framework. Each steering committee member can complete the vision framework worksheet (in the Plan Development Pod), on their own and then meet as a committee, or the committee can meet together to discuss as a group. When completing this worksheet, the steering committee should have the visioning results, the facilitator worksheet, the SWOT exercise, the conservation easement, and the management plan of the forest available. The committee should select the key attributes and the strategies that they feel suit the town forest. For the strategies, the committee should tailor the description to the situation in the town forest.

## Strategies Workshop

Once the committee has developed a vision framework, it should host a draft strategies workshop to present the feedback heard in the visioning process and receive input from the community on the strategies selected in the framework. This meeting will include a slightly different format than the visioning workshop, with a 20-minute powerpoint presentation leading to an open house format event. The room for this meeting should have chairs and a space for a presentation but also room for the boards and people to have conversations about the forest afterward. Again, the committee should fill in the promotional materials and promote the meeting around town and on the internet (see Public Engagement Pod). A committee member should prepare the strategies workshop powerpoint presentation template (in Public Engagement Pod), fill in the strategy prioritization planning board with the strategies selected in the vision framework, and prepare a list of location-based strategies for the public to draw preferred locations for on the large map (see survey workshop materials in Public Engagement Pod). The powerpoint, presented by a member or two of the steering committee, presents

information about the project and the strategies. Given that information, the workshop attendees should place sticker dots on the boards to indicate the prioritization of the various strategies. Once they indicate locations for strategies on the large map, they are free to go. Compile photos of these boards into the strategies result template (see Public Engagement Pod).

## Plan Development

The committee should meet to begin developing the plan. To begin, the committee should analyze the results of the strategies workshop. What strategies were the highest priority? Where did attendees think pause places or new trails should be in the forest? The committee should compile a list of the top 5-10 strategies and create a bubble diagram (see Plan Development Pod) with locations for these strategies in the town forest. The committee should also work together to fill in the full strategies table for the selected strategies – thinking together about whose responsibility the project will be, what the timing should be, who potential partners are. Other columns, such as funding and planning required, can be filled out based on the strategies database.

At this point, it may fall on one or two committee members to draft the plan. With the committee's past work, it should be fairly easy for the plan writers to fill in the template. Town-specific information should be filled in at the bold italicized text. Once the draft of the plan is complete, it should be sent to the entire steering committee for review. The committee should meet again as a group to go over the edits and produce a final plan that the entire committee supports.

## Plan Presentation Workshop

Once complete, the steering committee should present the plan. This could be to the select board, the planning commission, the conservation commission, or the public at large. Regardless of the format, the community as a whole should be invited to show their support and offer input using the promotional materials provided in Public Engagement Pod. The meeting should take place in a room with projector capability – the select board's usual meeting room would likely be appropriate. The committee should present the plan using the powerpoint template in the Public Engagement Pod. After the presentation, incorporate any additional feedback or revisions to the plan and then finalize the document. While the committee does not need the select board or community to officially adopt the plan, presenting the final plan back to the community is an important step in securing support for implementation.

## General Public Workshop Guidance

During the public workshops, the committee members should be responsible for the following:

- ❖ Make sure that attendees sign in as they enter but also estimate the number of attendees. No matter what, a few attendees won't sign in and it is important to have an accurate number of attendees to demonstrate community support for future grants.
- ❖ While the workshop is going on, take photos of the workshop for use in the plan document. After the meeting is over take photos of the boards with all the stickers and write-in comments for use in results documents.
- ❖ Engage with community members interested in sharing their opinions verbally
- ❖ Be an open-minded listener – your opinions will guide the process but it is important that all voices feel heard
- ❖ On write-in boards, write an answer before attendees arrive. People don't like to be the first to write on a board.
- ❖ Make sure that the boards don't run out of stickers!