

Criteria for the Acquisition of Open Space Monroe, CT

Open space is an open piece of land that is undeveloped (has no buildings or other built structures) and is accessible to the public. The Town of Monroe is a community in an advanced state of development. With diminishing open space, Monroe wishes to preserve, protect, enhance, and acquire through purchase or other options to protect and preserve additional open space with high conservation and recreation value.

Monroe's current open spaces contribute greatly to the town's character, provide significant water and wildlife conservation value, and recreational opportunities. Many of the Town's open spaces also contain historic features.

Monroe's Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) identifies existing town-owned open space and sets forth the goals and objectives for the acquisition of additional open space. The Town of Monroe in accordance with Section 7-131r of the Connecticut General Statutes, established an Open Space and Land Acquisition Fund for the purpose of acquiring additional open space (Chapter 60, Article 5 of Town Code).

Purpose of Open Space Selection Criteria

Monroe wishes to establish open space selection criteria for the orderly acquisition of open space. The criteria should conform with the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development, and Connecticut Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant Program (established pursuant to C.G.S. 7-131d to 6-131k, inclusive). In addition, the selection criteria should take into account The Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust Program, as amended by Public Act 98-157 and the Connecticut Recreational Trails Grant Program, Per CGS Section 23-103 as amended by Public Act No. 15-190.

Existing State Criteria

The Town's open space acquisitions criteria should reflect the existing state criteria in order to avoid conflict with existing statutes and regulations and to enhance the approvability of potential applications for state grants available for the acquisition of open space.

Connecticut state grants may be for the purchase of land that is:

1. valuable for recreation, forestry, fishing, conservation of wildlife or natural resources;
2. a prime natural feature of the state's landscape;

3. habitat for native plant or animal species listed as threatened, endangered or of special concern;
4. a relatively undisturbed outstanding example of a native ecological community which is uncommon;
5. important for enhancing and conserving water quality; or
6. valuable for preserving local agricultural heritage.

Proposed Criteria for the Town of Monroe

Open space has a range of functions and values. The following important open space attributes should be considered in identifying priority lands for acquisition.

1) Acquisition of lands that serve to protect high-quality natural waters and drinking water resources – The CT Green Plan gives priority to these acquisitions. Clean water, including in our rivers, lakes, and inland wetlands, are essential to life and provide some of the richest wildlife habitat in the state. Land conservation is an important part of watershed management for protecting habitat and water quality against impacts by fragmentation, climate change, runoff pollution, and other threats.

Additional benefits

- Groundwater replenishment - Natural land cover promotes replenishment of natural groundwater supplies by encouraging infiltration of precipitation into the soil.
- Flood Control – By promoting infiltration of rain and snowmelt into the ground, natural land helps protect against flooding. Flood prone lands adjacent to water bodies provide storage volume for floodwaters.

2) Recreation opportunities – Natural lands are a valuable recreational resource for such activities as hiking, bicycling, bird watching, and others. Open space that provides recreational opportunities improves quality of life for residents and visitors and also enhances property values. It also can bring revenue to the Town by attracting non-residents who use the resources.

3) Ecosystem and habitat preservation – Open space lands provide habitat for plant, insect, and animal species essential for the healthy ecosystem we depend on. Many of our plants, insects, and animals are threatened by loss of habitat to development. Strong consideration should be made for preservation of habitat for native plant or animal species listed as threatened, endangered or of special concern and/or a relatively undisturbed outstanding example of a native ecological community.

4) Preservation of historical or agricultural heritage or preservation of a natural landscape feature- There are specific open space sites in the Town with historical or other cultural importance that merit their retention as open space. While the most important function of agricultural land is food production, it also contributes greatly to the visual qualities of the community.

Benefits of Open Space

In addition to the quality of life, preservation of natural resources, and enhancement of property values listed in the Proposed Criteria above, open space has an economic benefit due to the avoidance of town services.

Conserved land is less expensive for communities to maintain than developed areas, as undeveloped spaces require a lower level of municipal services including road maintenance, education, trash collection, and public safety. Especially in the case of residential properties, the cost of required Town services for developed land can exceed the revenue generated through taxes.

Additional considerations in evaluating open space opportunities

- Proximity or contiguity to other open space can enhance the value of both spaces.
- Long term strategic planning – Evaluation of prospective parcel acquisitions should also consider the future potential of the acquisition to, for example, create a greenway corridor and enhance an existing trail system, expand a town park, and other opportunities.

This document is a dynamic one, intended to suit a changing community. Not all properties are available for purchase at the same time. Thus, the opportunity for a specific acquisition could be lost. Priority must be given to specific properties that meet the criteria when they become, or are about to become, available for purchase. It is recognized that these criteria may be subject to differing interpretations depending on the nature and circumstances of various opportunities for the acquisition of open space. Any particular criterion may receive more or less weight depending on a variety of factors.

Monroe Conservation & Water Resources Commission

Approved August 8, 2019