

**TOWN OF AYER
MASSACHUSETTS**

Date: DRAFT 5/1/08

**Prepared by
JM Goldson
community
preservation
+ planning**

COMMUNITY PRESERVATION PLAN

Fiscal Years 2009—2013

Town of Ayer
Community
Preservation Act
Committee

PRELIMINARY DRAFT
FOR REVIEW

J M Goldson

community preservation
+ planning

This page was intentionally left blank for double-sided printing.

Adoption

This Community Preservation Plan was adopted by the Town of Ayer Community Preservation Act Committee on xx [date to be determined].

COMMUNITY PRESERVATION ACT COMMITTEE MEMBERS

David Bodurtha, Clerk, appointed by the Conservation Commission

(OPEN SEAT), appointed by the Finance Committee

Mark Fermanian, appointed by the Planning Board

Ric Hammel, appointed by the Parks Commission

Gary Luca, Chair, appointed by the Board of Selectmen

Bob Moore, appointed by the Housing Authority

Bob Pena, appointed by the Historical Commission

Carole Tillis, citizen at large, appointed by the Board of Selectmen

(OPEN SEAT), citizen at large, appointed by the Board of Selectmen

Acknowledgements

This Plan is the result of effective community leadership, foresight, and collaboration. The Community Preservation Act Committee (CPAC) is particularly grateful to Selectman Rick Gilles, former CPAC chair, whose leadership, persistence, and diligence brought this planning effort to fruition. In addition, the CPAC thanks Pat Walsh, former CPAC member, for her extensive service to the Town of Ayer both as a member of the CPAC and Planning Board.

Rest of acknowledgements to be determined.

This page was intentionally left blank for double-sided printing.

Table of Contents

| | |
|--|----|
| Summary of Plan | 1 |
| INTRODUCTION | |
| CPA ACHIEVEMENTS | |
| PLANNING PROCESS | |
| SUMMARY OF PRINCIPLES AND GOALS | |
| IMPLEMENTATION OF PLAN | |
| Chapter 1 Overview..... | 6 |
| GENERAL CPA ELIGIBILITY | |
| ROLE & COMPOSITION OF THE CPC | |
| APPLICATION & FUNDING PROCESS | |
| PROFILE OF AYER'S COMMUNITY PRESERVATION PROGRAM | |
| GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR OVERALL CPA EXPENDITURES | |
| AVAILABILITY OF CPA FUNDS | |
| Chapter 2 Community Housing..... | 13 |
| COMMUNITY HOUSING NEEDS | |
| CPA ELIGIBILITY | |
| PROFILE OF AYER'S COMMUNITY HOUSING | |
| MAP OF COMMUNITY HOUSING | |
| GOALS FOR COMMUNITY HOUSING EXPENDITURES | |
| MINIMUM SPENDING REQUIREMENTS | |
| EXAMPLES OF PROJECT POSSIBILITIES | |
| Chapter 3 Historic Preservation..... | 19 |
| HISTORIC PRESERVATION NEEDS | |
| CPA ELIGIBILITY | |
| PROFILE OF AYER'S HISTORIC RESOURCES | |
| MAP OF HISTORIC RESOURCES | |
| GOALS FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION EXPENDITURES | |
| MINIMUM SPENDING REQUIREMENTS | |
| EXAMPLES OF PROJECT POSSIBILITIES | |
| Chapter 4 Open Space | 26 |
| OPEN SPACE NEEDS | |
| CPA ELIGIBILITY | |
| PROFILE OF AYER'S OPEN SPACE | |
| MAP OF OPEN SPACE | |
| GOALS FOR OPEN SPACE EXPENDITURES | |
| MINIMUM SPENDING REQUIREMENTS | |
| EXAMPLES OF PROJECT POSSIBILITIES | |
| Chapter 5 Recreation..... | 32 |
| RECREATION NEEDS | |
| CPA ELIGIBILITY | |
| PROFILE OF AYER'S RECREATION RESOURCES | |
| MAP OF RECREATION RESOURCES | |
| GOALS FOR RECREATION EXPENDITURES | |
| MINIMUM SPENDING REQUIREMENTS | |
| EXAMPLES OF PROJECT POSSIBILITIES | |
| Chapter 6 Implementation of Plan | 38 |
| CPC PLAN IMPLEMENTATION TASKS | |
| List of Sources..... | 39 |

Summary of Plan

INTRODUCTION

The Town of Ayer Community Preservation Act Committee (CPAC) developed this Community Preservation Plan (Plan) to guide the allocation of Community Preservation Act funds for the next five years (fiscal years 2009-2013). The goals identified through this Plan are intended to further the CPAC's mission: MAXIMIZE THE BENEFIT OF THE CPA FUND FOR AYER.

The Community Preservation Act (CPA), as enabled through Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 44B, was adopted by Ayer voters in April 2001. The Ayer CPA currently receives funds through a local property tax surcharge of 1% and a variable state match of up to 100% of the local receipts. In the first two years of the program, Ayer's local property tax surcharge was 3% - it was reduced to 1% by ballot vote in Fiscal Year 2003. Ayer adopted the CPA surcharge with exemptions for low income households and low/moderate senior households. Since adoption, the Ayer CPA has raised approximately \$1.6M including state matches of 100%.

The law requires CPA to limit funding to four general types of projects: community housing, historic preservation, open space, and recreation, with 10% minimum spending requirements for each of the first three categories.

CPA ACHIEVEMENTS

In order to appropriate CPA funds, Town meeting must act on a recommendation of the CPAC, a nine-member committee with representatives appointed by various boards and committees. As of November 2007, Ayer has appropriated CPA funds for a total of ten projects. With roughly \$1M, CPA funding will result in the following community preservation achievements upon completion of current CPA projects:

- Restoration of the Town Hall's historic slate roof
- Town-wide inventory of historic resources (phases I & II)
- New irrigation system at Pirone Park
- New recreation amenities and preservation of Sandy Pond Beach
- New fencing at Page-Hilltop Playground
- New affordable single-family homeownership unit by Habitat for Humanity
- New elevators at an Ayer Senior Housing Complex
- A greenway project
- Historic restoration of the Pleasant Street School and conversion to affordable housing

PLANNING PROCESS

In Fall 2007, the CPAC developed a mission statement and preliminary goals and action matrix based on its review of past plans and extensive committee discussions. To assist with the transformation of its work into this Community Preservation Plan, the CPAC contracted the planning services of JM Goldson community preservation + planning in February 2007.

Working with JM Goldson, the CPAC further studied existing documents and plans to create resource profiles and a preliminary list of possible goals for the CPA program overall and for each of the four CPA categories. CPAC members also responded to a questionnaire and participated in a planning workshop to prioritize the possible CPA goals. At the planning workshop, the CPAC used a group decision-making technique, referred to as dot voting, to indicate priorities. JM Goldson analyzed the results of the dot-voting exercise to determine the CPAC's top priorities overall and in each of the CPA categories.

The overall principles and goals laid out in this Plan are derived from the goals that the CPAC collectively identified as the highest priorities through the planning workshop and subsequent review and consideration of the preliminary draft Plan.

SOURCES

Much of the data provided in this Plan is extracted from the 2005 *Town of Ayer: Comprehensive Plan Update*. In addition, many of the community preservation resources identified throughout this Plan were based on the 2006 *Ayer Reconnaissance Report: Freedom's Way Landscape Inventory*. The specific sources used in creating this Plan are short-referenced throughout the document and a detailed list of sources is provided on page 39.

SUMMARY OF PRINCIPLES AND GOALS

This Plan establishes three guiding principles for the CPA program overall as well as three to four goals specific to each of the four project categories. These principles and goals were determined through the planning process described on the previous page. This Plan also describes Ayer's CPA activities to date, revenue projections, existing resources, and eligible project possibilities in each of the project categories. The guiding principles and goals, summarized below, are described in greater detail in the following chapters.

GUIDING PRINCIPLES

1. PRIORITIZE OPEN SPACE PROTECTION

Prioritize funding for projects that protect open space that may otherwise be lost, while remaining open to other worthy projects in any of the four CPA categories.

2. MAXIMIZE COMMUNITY BENEFITS

Give the greatest priority to projects that demonstrate the most significant and widespread community benefits resulting from the project, as well as strong community support.

3. BE FISCALLY CONSERVATIVE

Minimize CPA project appropriations through leveraging other public/private funds, pro-bono professional services, donated labor and materials, and other such cost-saving measures.

COMMUNITY HOUSING GOALS

- 1. SUPPORT ACHEIVEMENT OF STATE'S 10% MANDATE**
- 2. CONVERT EXISTING BUILDINGS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING**
- 3. ASSIST ELDERLY AND DISABLED HOUSEHOLDS**
- 4. SUPPORT HOUSING CREATION BY NON-PROFITS**

HISTORIC PRESERVATION GOALS

- 1. RESTORE PUBLICLY-OWNED RESOURCES**
- 2. PROTECT HISTORIC LANDSCAPES AND FARMLAND**
- 3. COMPLETE THE IDENTIFICATION OF HISTORIC RESOURCES**

OPEN SPACE GOALS

- 1. PROTECT AQUIFERS AND DRINKING SUPPLY**
- 2. PROTECT AREAS OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN**
- 3. ACQUIRE OPEN SPACE FOR PASSIVE RECREATION**

ADDITIONAL OPEN SPACE GOALS:

- PROTECT WETLANDS, VERNAL POOLS, AND ADJACENT LANDS, AS WELL AS OTHER SENSITIVE LAND
- PROTECT GREENWAYS TO CONNECT CONSERVATION LAND AND PUBLIC RECREATION AREAS
- PROTECT MGL C. 61 PROPERTIES INCLUDING PRIVATE FARMS, FOREST, AND RECREATION LANDS

RECREATION GOALS

- 1. CREATE TRAIL CONNECTIONS TO THE NASHUA RIVER RAIL TRAIL**
- 2. CONSTRUCT NEIGHBORHOOD POCKET PARKS AND COMMUNITY GARDENS**
- 3. CREATE WATERFRONT ACCESS**

IMPLEMENTATION OF PLAN

The CPAC developed this Plan to provide guidance for the utilization of CPA funds over the next five years (fiscal years 2009-2013). In the CPAC's review of applications for CPA funding, it intends to use these principles and goals to guide its deliberations and selection of projects to recommend to Town Meeting for funding.

The CPAC encourages town meeting participants, town boards and commissions, and future applicants seeking CPA funds to use this document to guide requests for the use of CPA funds and decisions on allocation of funds.

The CPAC intends to re-evaluate its existing selection criteria and application packet to ensure consistency with principles and goals set out in this Plan.

This Plan is not intended to be a static document for the next five years. The CPAC intends to periodically review the Plan to reconfirm or amend its principles and goals based on new experiences, changing circumstances, and citizen feedback, including at the CPAC's annual public hearing.

Chapter 1 Overview

This section addresses Ayer's community preservation program, overall, and is intended to guide the use of CPA funds by providing a general framework for determining funding priorities. This section includes a profile of Ayer's CPA activities to date, revenue projections, and describes the CPAC's guiding principles for overall CPA expenditures.

GENERAL CPA ELIGIBILITY

The CPA provides funding for four general types of projects: community housing, historic preservation, open space, and recreation. While the CPA statute provides a generous amount of flexibility for each CPA community to determine the portion of CPA resources allocated to each of the four categories, it does require that a minimum of 10% of total revenue be set aside for each of three categories: community housing, historic preservation, and open space. There are no minimum spending requirements for the recreation category (locally referred to as "unrestricted open space").

ROLE & COMPOSITION OF THE CPAC

The CPA statute requires all CPA communities to establish a Community Preservation Act Committee (CPAC) of not less than five nor more than nine members, which is charged with studying the needs, possibilities, and resources of community preservation and making recommendations on the use of CPA funding to the municipality's legislative body. In Ayer, the CPAC consists of nine members. By statute, the CPA must include a representative from each of the following five town entities: Conservation Commission, Historic Commission, Housing Authority, Planning Board, and Board of Park Commissioners. In addition to this minimum statutory requirement, the Selectmen appoint a member of the Board of Selectmen and two citizens to serve as at-large members and the Finance Committee also appoints a member.

APPLICATION & FUNDING PROCESS

The CPAC holds two funding rounds each year to correspond with the Spring and Fall town meetings. Copies of the CPAC Project Application Guidelines are available at the Town Clerk and Selectman's offices at Town Hall. Applicants seeking CPA funds are required to submit a complete application to the CPAC for review in accordance with the bi-annual deadlines set by the CPAC each year. The CPAC reviews and deliberates on each application in open public meetings. Through majority vote, the CPAC determines which applications to recommend for funding to Town Meeting. Applications that are not recommended for funding by the CPAC are not eligible for consideration by Town Meeting.

PROFILE OF AYER'S COMMUNITY PRESERVATION PROGRAM

CPA BASICS

- The Community Preservation Act (CPA), Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 44B, was adopted by Ayer voters in April 2001.
- The Community Preservation Act Committee (CPAC), a nine-member body appointed by various Boards and Commissions, is responsible for recommending CPA appropriations to Town Meeting.
- In Ayer, the CPA generates revenue from 1% property tax surcharge and a variable state match, with exemptions for low-income residents.
- Through the local surcharge and 100% state match, Ayer generated over \$234,000 which was available for expenditure in FY08 (current year).
- Four project categories: **open space, historic preservation, community housing**, and recreation.
- At least 10% of annual revenue must be spent (or reserved) for projects in each of the three categories in **bold** (above).

CURRENT CPA PROJECTS

- Roughly \$1M of CPA funds have been appropriated as of March 2008.
- As depicted in the chart below, 57% of appropriations were for community housing projects, 19% historic preservation, and 24% unrestricted open space (recreation).
- No appropriations have been made to date for open space projects, however, on CPAC recommendation, Ayer has reserved close to \$500K, which is approximately 30% of total revenue, for future CPA open space projects.
- Total of ten CPA projects have been funded to date.

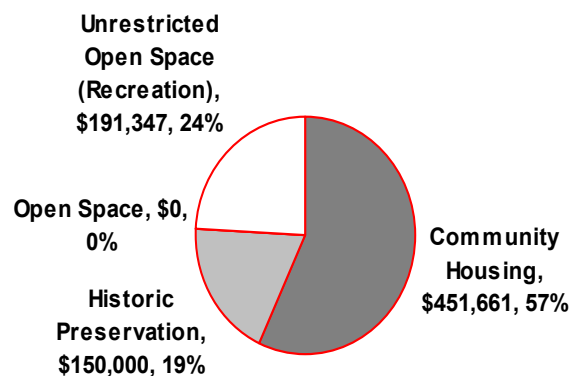
REVENUE PROJECTIONS

- FY09 estimated revenue is \$208,143, which includes an expected 65% state match.
- FY10 estimated revenue is \$175,408 which includes the assumption of a 35% state match.
- FY11 estimated revenue available for appropriation is \$173,979, which assumes a 30% state match. The state match is projected to level off to 30% in subsequent years.

(Ayer Assessing Dept., CP Coalition, calculations by author)

Total CPA Project Appropriations FY02-08

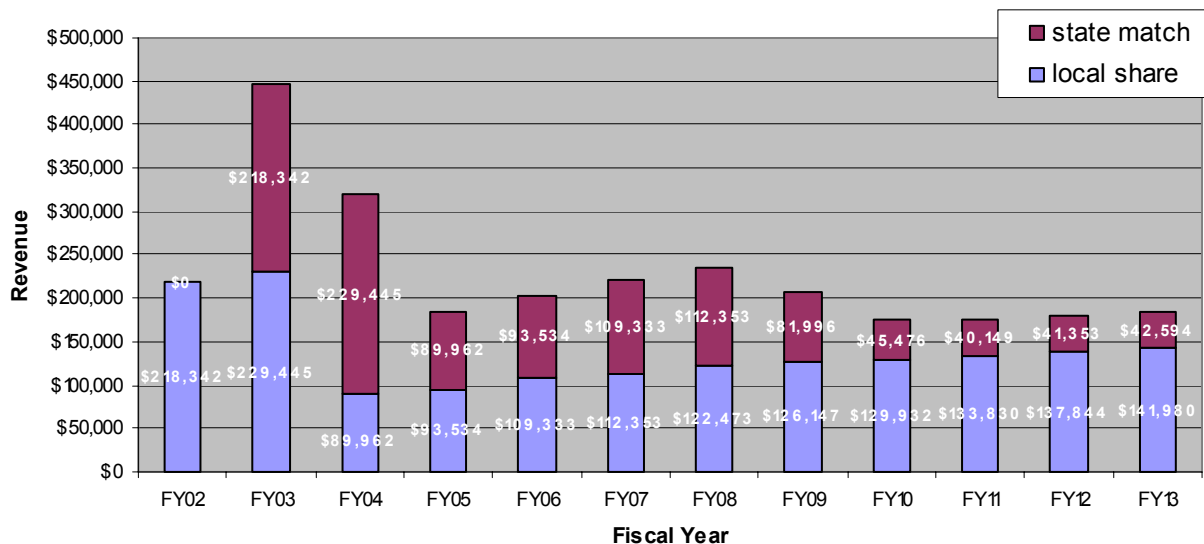
Source: Ayer CPAC, March 2008



| Past & Projected CPA Revenue (FY02-FY13) | | | | |
|---|--------------------|--------------------|---------------|--------------------|
| Sources: Ayer CPAC (past revenue data), Assessing Department (local share projections), CP Coalition (state match projections), calculations by author, February 2008 | | | | |
| fiscal year | local share | state match | state match % | total revenue |
| FY02 | \$218,342 | \$0 | | \$218,342 |
| FY03 | \$229,445 | \$218,342 | 100% | \$447,787 |
| FY04 | \$89,962 | \$229,445 | 100% | \$319,407 |
| FY05 | \$93,534 | \$89,962 | 100% | \$183,496 |
| FY06 | \$109,333 | \$93,534 | 100% | \$202,867 |
| FY07 | \$112,353 | \$109,333 | 100% | \$221,686 |
| FY08 | \$122,473 | \$112,353 | 100% | \$234,826 |
| FY09 | \$126,147 | \$81,996 | 65% | \$208,143 |
| FY10 | \$129,932 | \$45,476 | 35% | \$175,408 |
| FY11 | \$133,830 | \$40,149 | 30% | \$173,979 |
| FY12 | \$137,844 | \$41,353 | 30% | \$179,197 |
| FY13 | \$141,980 | \$42,594 | 30% | \$184,574 |
| Total | \$1,645,175 | \$1,104,537 | | \$2,749,712 |

Past & Projected CPA Revenue (FY02-FY13)

Sources: Ayer CPAC (past revenue data), Assessing Department (local share projections), CP Coalition (state match projections), calculations by author, February 2008



GUIDING PRINCIPLES FOR OVERALL CPA EXPENDITURES

The Community Preservation Act Committee has established three guiding principles. These principles are important because they provide guidance on how to approach CPA spending overall, as described in more detail below.

1. PRIORITIZE OPEN SPACE PROTECTION
2. MAXIMIZE COMMUNITY BENEFITS
3. BE FISCALLY CONSERVATIVE

1. PRIORITIZE OPEN SPACE PROTECTION

Prioritize funding for projects that protect open space that may otherwise be lost, while remaining open to other worthy projects in any of the four CPA categories.

Due to the importance of open space protection and the fact that no CPA funds have been spent to date on open space protection, the CPAC's greatest priority for the next five years is open space protection. To this aim, the Town has already reserved almost \$500K of CPA funds for future open space projects (close to 30% of total CPA revenue through FY07). In addition, the Comprehensive Plan Implementation Committee has established an ad-hoc Open Space Working Group (OSWG) to identify and evaluate unprotected open space properties. The CPAC intends to work closely with the OSWG and other conservation organizations, as appropriate, to protect critical open space properties with the assistance of CPA funds.

The Ayer CPAC generally does not generate project ideas or initiate projects but instead evaluates project applications on an annual basis, weighing the merits of each application before deciding which to recommend for CPA funding. Given this role, the CPAC intends to remain open to project possibilities and new opportunities in any of the four CPA categories. The CPAC is also, of course, mindful of complying with the statutory 10% minimum spending requirements for community housing, historic preservation, and open space.

2. MAXIMIZE COMMUNITY BENEFITS

Give the greatest priority to projects that demonstrate the most significant and widespread community benefits resulting from the project, as well as strong community support.

The CPAC wants to generate projects that create significant community benefits and have strong community support. Community benefits can be demonstrated in various ways, including:

- Serving more than one CPA purpose
- Providing public access and accessibility

- Serving a significant amount of people
- Supporting underserved populations
- Having visibility or a prominent location
- Having ecological or societal significance
- Demonstrating sufficient capacity to maintain the asset
- Providing for longevity of benefits

3. BE FISCALLY CONSERVATIVE

Minimize CPA project appropriations through leveraging other public/private funds, pro-bono professional services, donated labor and materials, and other such cost-saving measures.

Approximately \$1.7M in total CPA funds is estimated to be available for new project appropriations for FY09-FY13. In order to maximize the effectiveness of this revenue to achieve Ayer's community preservation goals to the greatest extent possible, the funds will need to be significantly leveraged with other funding sources. Whenever possible CPA funds should be viewed as a source for partial project funding that is paired with other public or private funds.

In addition, CPA funds should be used for maximum benefit with minimum project costs, by seeking bargain sales, discounted or donated professional services, labor, and materials, and other cost-saving measures. Through leveraging and cost-saving measures, CPA funds can be stretched to achieve greater community benefits.

AVAILABILITY OF CPA FUNDS

From inception of the CPA program in Ayer through FY13 (the end of the CPAC's current planning horizon), the CPA is projected to generate a total of \$2.7M. This projection assumes a state match of 65% in FY09, 35% in FY10, and 30% in subsequent years (CP Coalition).

Through past project appropriations, roughly \$1M CPA funds have been committed, leaving about \$1.7M available for new project appropriations through FY13.

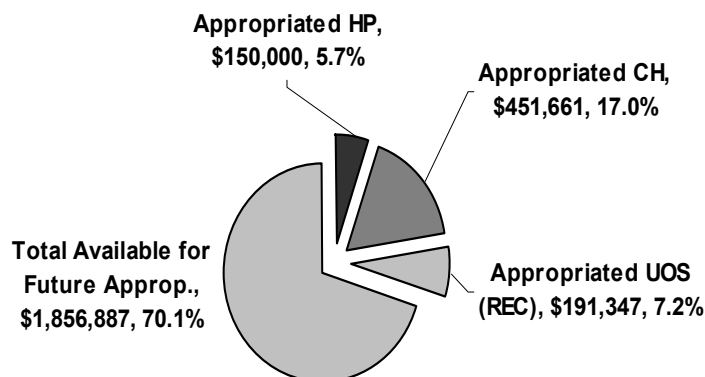
The CPA statute requires that a minimum of 10% of revenues be spent or reserved each of three CPA categories: open space, community housing, and historic preservation. There are no minimum spending requirements for recreation. The remaining 70% of funds can be applied to projects in any of the four CPA categories.

Just over 7% of total past and projected revenue (FY07-FY13) has already been committed to unrestricted open space (recreation), 17% to community housing, and close to 6% to historic preservation (see chart below).

In order to determine the minimum required spending levels and the amount of general revenue for FY09-FY13, CPA spending to date, existing reserve funds, and undesignated funds were factored into the equation (see table on next page).

Total Appropriated and Available Current and Projected CPA Revenue (FY02-FY13)

HP = historic preservation, CH = community housing,
UOS (REC) = Unrestricted Open Space (Recreation)
Sources: Ayer CPAC, calculations by author



**Estimated Available CPA Funds
(FY02-FY13)**

OS=open space; HP=historic preservation; CH=community housing; UOS (REC) = unrestricted open space (recreation)

| Fiscal Year | Total Available Revenue | OS Reserve (30% Total Revenue) | HP Reserve (10% Total Revenue) | CH Reserve (10% Total Revenue) | UOS (REC) Reserve (10% Total Revenue) | Undesignated & Budgeted Reserve |
|--------------------|--------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|---------------------------------------|--|--|
| FY02-FY08 | \$809,256 | \$499,154 | \$29,949 | \$23,867 | \$88,370 | \$167,916 |
| FY09 | \$208,143 | \$62,443 | \$20,814 | \$20,814 | \$20,814 | \$83,257 |
| FY10 | \$175,408 | \$52,622 | \$17,541 | \$17,541 | \$17,541 | \$70,163 |
| FY11 | \$173,979 | \$52,194 | \$17,398 | \$17,398 | \$17,398 | \$69,592 |
| FY12 | \$179,197 | \$53,759 | \$17,920 | \$17,920 | \$17,920 | \$71,679 |
| FY13 | \$184,574 | \$55,372 | \$18,457 | \$18,457 | \$18,457 | \$73,830 |
| Total | \$1,730,557 | \$775,544 | \$122,079 | \$115,997 | \$180,500 | \$536,437 |

Note 1: The term "available " refers to revenue that is unspent.

Note 2: OS Reserve includes 27% of total revenue to date in the existing reserve and assumes continued reserve of 30% of total annual revenue. The HP and CH reserves include current revenue remaining in reserves and assumes 10% of total annual revenue in future years. UOS (REC) assumes continued 10%, as well, however this is not a statutory requirement.

Note 3: Undesignated & Budgeted Reserve funds also include administrative.

Note 4: All figures represented in this table are estimates based on the most accurate data available at the time regarding projected local property tax revenue and State Trust Fund distributions. All figures are subject to change.

Chapter 2 Community Housing

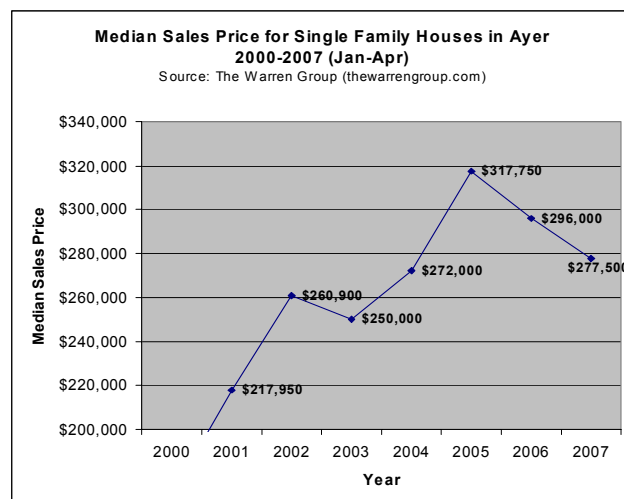
This section addresses the CPA's role in furthering the creation of community housing in Ayer, includes a profile of Ayer's community housing, and describes the CPAC's four priority goals for creation of community housing.

COMMUNITY HOUSING NEEDS

Ayer has limited housing opportunities for households with low incomes, both in terms of homeownership and rental opportunities.

Homeownership Affordability

A 4-person household earning 70% of the area median income (80% or below is considered low-income) could afford to purchase a home that costs roughly less than \$209,000 (Mortgage 101, assumptions by author). No three-plus-bedroom units sold in Ayer for less than \$209,000 between February 2007 and February 2008 (Zillow). Whereas, seven three-plus-bedroom units (out of 13 total) sold at prices affordable to moderate-income households in the same period (Zillow). This indicates a need for home-buying assistance for low-income households over moderate-income households.



Rental Affordability

Thirty-six percent of Ayer's rental households and almost 60% of elderly households are housing cost burdened, which means that the household pays more than 30% of its income for rent and utilities (Comp Plan). This indicates a need for housing assistance to rental and elderly households. One of the three primary statutory purposes for community preservation is to create and support community housing. In particular, providing greater housing opportunities for the elderly, renters, and low-income homebuyers is key to support and maintain economic diversity in Ayer.

CPA ELIGIBILITY

Chapter 44B of the Massachusetts General Laws (CPA) defines "community housing" as "low and moderate income housing for individuals and families, including low or moderate income senior housing." Low income housing is affordable to households with annual incomes of less than 80% of the areawide median income and moderate income housing is affordable to households earning between 80% and 100% of the areawide median income. Furthermore, the CPA defines "senior housing" as housing for persons 60 years old or over, who also meet the qualifications for low or moderate income.

The Act allows CPA expenditures for the acquisition, creation, preservation, and support of community housing and for the rehabilitation of community housing that is acquired or created through CPA.

PROFILE OF AYER'S COMMUNITY HOUSING

POPULATION & HOUSEHOLDS

- 7,287 people & 2,983 households (Comp Plan).
 - Since 1990, population has grown by 17.63%, which represents the 3rd highest population growth in the region, following Groton and Westford.
 - Almost 13% of population is elderly (2nd highest in region but lower than state).
 - Just over 16% of population is school age children (lowest in the region and lower than statewide).
- (Based on 2000 Census summarized in Comp Plan).

HOUSEHOLD INCOME & COST OF HOUSING

- \$54,575 estimated median household income in Ayer in 2005 (Report Card); 17% increase in median household income from 2000 to 2005 (Comp Plan & Report Card).
- \$317,750 median cost of single family house in 2005 (Report Card). 87% increase in median cost of single-family house from 2000 to 2005 (Warren).
- Despite the decrease in housing values since 2005, the median cost of a single-family house has increased by over 63% from 2000 to 2007 (Warren).

HOUSING TENURE & CHARACTERISTICS

- Over 44% of occupied housing units are rental (1,320 units); 56% are owner-occupied.
- Elderly households constitute more than 14% of renters.
- 44% of all housing units are single-family detached homes.; over 30% of units are in multi-family homes; 14% of units are in two-families; and 7% of units are in single-family attached homes.

AFFORDABILITY

- 8.3% (262 units) of Ayer's total housing stock is counted as affordable in the State Inventory (DHCD). The State's minimum goal of affordability in each community is 10% of total households.
- Ayer is located in the Boston-Cambridge-Quincy, MA-NH HUD Metro FMR Area (BCQ FMR) which covers most of eastern Massachusetts and portions of southern New Hampshire (HUDUser.org).
- The BCQ FMR median family income (AMI) is \$85,833 (for a family of four) (HUDUser.org).
- 30% max of household income can be spent on housing to be considered affordable.
- Homeownership analysis:
 - ⇒ Moderate income: A 4-person household earning 90% of AMI could roughly afford a home that costs less than \$268,000 (Mortgage 101). Seven out of 13 (54%) 3+ bed single-family/condo units in Ayer were sold for less than \$270,000 between Feb 2007 and Feb 2008 (Zillow).
 - ⇒ Low income: A 4-person household earning 70% of AMI could roughly afford a home that costs less than \$209,000 (Mortgage 101). No 3+ bed units were sold for less than \$209,000 Feb 2007-2008 (Zillow).
- Rental analysis: Low renter incomes and high rents indicate a risk of housing cost burden. As of the 2000 Census, 36% of Ayer's renter households were housing cost burdened (paying more than 30% of their income for rent + utilities).
- Elderly: Almost 60% of all elderly renters are housing cost burdened as of the 2000 Census. This represents an increase of over 114% since 1990.

AFFORDABLE HOUSING STOCK

- 262 affordable homeownership units in Ayer were created through MGL Chapter 40B (Planning).
- Ayer Housing Authority owns 74 units, including 61 units for elderly/disabled and 13 units for families.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

- Although a significant portion (54%) of homes in the past year were sold at prices affordable to moderate-income households, no homes were affordable for low-income households. This indicates a need for homeownership assistance for households with low-incomes.
- Thirty-six percent of Ayer's rental households and almost 60% of elderly households are housing cost burdened, indicating a need for assistance to rental and elderly households.

*INSERT MAP OF AYER'S
COMMUNITY HOUSING*

GOALS FOR COMMUNITY HOUSING EXPENDITURES

Creating community housing to maintain economic diversity is important to protect Ayer's community character. Within this category, the CPAC has four priority goals for use of CPA funds to create community housing. The goals are listed here and described in more detail below.

1. SUPPORT ACHIEVEMENT OF STATE'S 10% MANDATE
2. CONVERT EXISTING BUILDINGS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING
3. ASSIST ELDERLY AND DISABLED HOUSEHOLDS
4. SUPPORT HOUSING CREATION BY NON-PROFITS

1. SUPPORT ACHIEVEMENT OF STATE'S 10% MANDATE

Use CPA funds to create units that would be counted in the Department of Housing and Community Development's Chapter 40B Subsidized Housing Inventory (SHI).

The Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development (DHCD) is charged with maintaining a statewide inventory of units that are affordable in each community per the definitions of Massachusetts General Laws Chapter 40B. Chapter 40B, which is also known as the Comprehensive Permit Law, is a state statute that sets a minimum standard for communities to provide at least 10% of their total housing stock as affordable to low-income households (80% or below of AMI). As of February 2008, Ayer has 262 units that count as affordable on the SHI, which translates to 8.3% of total housing stock. Ayer would require a total of 341 SHI units (an additional 79 units) to achieve the state's 10% mandate. However, please note, this figure is a moving target as it is based on total current housing units.

The CPAC's first priority is to recommend CPA funds for projects that will bring Ayer closer to achieving the state's 10% mandate. Although CPA funds can be used to create units that are affordable for moderate-income households (80% to 100% of AMI), only units that are affordable to low-income households (up to 80% of AMI) count in the SHI. Therefore, the CPAC intends to favor projects that would create low-income units that would count towards the state's 10% mandate and to give less favor to projects that would create moderate-income units. This goal also supports the greater need for low-income housing in Ayer, since the market has been providing housing for moderate-income households.

2. CONVERT EXISTING BUILDINGS TO AFFORDABLE HOUSING

Focus CPA funds on conversion of existing buildings, including residential, commercial, and institutional buildings, to affordable housing through deed restrictions and adaptive reuse, rather than funding construction of new housing.

This goal stems from the dual need for greater housing opportunities to protect the community's diversity and to preserve community character by prioritizing conversion of existing building to affordable housing over construction of new housing units.

Open space and natural resources are highly valued by the community. In order to find balance between creation of housing opportunities and protection of open space, it is key to create community housing opportunities through the use of affordable housing deed restrictions and adaptive reuse of existing buildings over the construction of new housing.

In fact, the CPA statute (MGL c.44B s.5(b)(2) states ". . . the community preservation committee shall recommend, wherever possible, the reuse of existing buildings or construction of new buildings on previously developed sites."

Existing residential buildings as well as commercial and institutional buildings located in downtown Ayer could potentially be converted to provide affordable housing units. The reuse of these buildings would tie into the Town's goals for historic preservation and economic development of downtown.

The affordable units created through conversions such as these would be permanently protected through affordable housing deed restrictions. These restrictions limit sales or rental price of property to a price affordable to a low or moderate income household and would require that the renter/homebuyer be income-eligible. The deed restriction would be permanent so that the property would be permanently affordable.

3. ASSIST ELDERLY AND DISABLED HOUSEHOLDS

Use CPA funds to provide housing assistance to low-income elderly and disabled households.

Approximately 12.7% of Ayer's population is elderly (65+ years), which is the second highest elderly population in the region (second only to Clinton). In addition, almost 60% of elderly renters are housing cost burdened, paying more than 30% of household income

on housing costs. This represents an increase of over 114% since 1990 and is the second highest cost-burdened elderly population in the region (second only to Shirley). Twenty-percent of Ayer's populations reported having a disability in Census 2000, most of which are elderly.

Therefore, to the extent feasible, the CPAC intends to support housing projects and assistance programs that provide housing to low-income elderly and disabled households. This could include the creation of new affordable units, conversion of existing buildings (as described in the previous goal) to affordable units, and creation of a local rental assistance program.

4. SUPPORT HOUSING CREATION BY NON-PROFITS

Target CPA funds to support the creation of affordable housing units by non-profit organizations.

Based on the recent success of the Habitat for Humanity project that created a new single-family house, the CPAC intends to support similar projects by non-profit organizations, as is feasible. Projects could include constructing new homes to infill vacant lots in existing neighborhoods or conversion of existing buildings to include affordable units.

MINIMUM SPENDING REQUIREMENTS

As previously described in Chapter 1, the minimum statutory spending requirement for community housing is 10% of annual revenue. The revenue must either be spent or set aside for future spending. Therefore, the estimated minimum amount of spending/reserve for community housing is approximately **\$116,000** for FY09-FY13. The estimated budgeted reserve and undesignated funds, which can be spent in any of the four CPA categories, is approximately **\$500,000** for FY09-FY13.

EXAMPLES OF PROJECT POSSIBILITIES

The following describes some possible projects that could be funded in whole or in part with CPA funds.

TO BE DETERMINED.

Chapter 3 Historic Preservation

This section focuses on community needs and CPAC priorities for spending CPA funds on historic preservation projects and includes a profile of Ayer's historic resources and descriptions of the CPAC's three historic preservation goals.

HISTORIC PRESERVATION NEEDS

Ayer has many historically-significant resources including municipal buildings; private residential, commercial, and institutional buildings; archeological sites; farms; and cemeteries. Ayer's historic resources represent a wide-range of periods that are important in local and regional history, including Native American, Colonial, 19th-century industrial, and early-mid 20th century. Many of these resources are at risk due to lack of available funding for preservation and restoration. The Ayer Historical Commission, through funding from CPA and the Massachusetts Historical Commission, is undertaking phases one and two of an historic resources inventory to survey Ayer's historic resources and, thereby, heighten public awareness and understanding of the amount, type, and quality of historic resources in the town.

CPA ELIGIBILITY

The CPA defines historic resources as "a building, structure, vessel, real property, document, or artifact that is listed or eligible for listing on the state register of historic places or has been determined by the local historic preservation commission to be significant in the history, archeology, architecture or culture of a city or town." CPA funds are allowed to be used for the ". . . acquisition, preservation, rehabilitation, and restoration of historic resources."

Furthermore, within the definition of "rehabilitation" CPA is allowed to fund improvements to make historic resources functional for their intended use, including improvements to comply with the Americans with Disabilities Act and other building or access codes. All rehabilitation work with respect to historic resources is required to comply with the Standards for Rehabilitation stated in the US Secretary of the Interior's Standards for the Treatment of Historic Properties (codified in 36 C.F.R. Part 68).

PROFILE OF AYER'S HISTORIC RESOURCES

LISTED ON THE NATIONAL REGISTER OF HISTORIC PLACES (1)

- Ayer Main Street Historic District: Located on Main Street between Park Street and the Main Street B&M Railroad Bridge. Most of the buildings date to the late 19th and early 20th century. (Reconnaissance Report)
- Fort Devens Historic District: Located between El Caney Street, Antietam Street, Sherman Avenue, MacArthur Avenue, and Buena Vista Street, with 58 early-twentieth century properties.
- Ayer Town Hall, built in 1876, is individually-listed on the National Register.
- Pleasant Street School, a Colonial Revival style building built in 1894, is also individually-listed on the National Register.

MUNICIPAL & INSTITUTIONAL BUILDINGS

- District School #11 (a.k.a. Sandy Pond School House), built in 1792, is located at a junction of Sandy Pond, Westford, and Willow roads, and is owned by the Town.
- Ayer Town Hall and Pleasant Street School, described above.
- Ayer Library, c. 1894, on East Main Street.
- Old Fire Station at 14 Washington Street was a Works Progress Administration (WPA) project built in 1934.

PRIVATELY-OWNED HISTORIC RESOURCES

- Over 900 houses built prior to 1939, totaling 29% of the town's housing stock.
- As part of the 1997 *Open Space and Recreation Plan*, Ayer residents identified a variety of locally historic resources including the Victorian-era homes on upper Washington and Pleasant Streets.
- The West Main Street neighborhood consists of a range of modest 19th century homes including Greek Revival, Italianate, and Stick Style houses in addition to St. Mary's Catholic Church (Reconnaissance Report).
- Page/Moore Block at 33-47 Main Street is one of the most noteworthy historic commercial buildings on Main Street. (Reconnaissance Report)
- Horgan Icehouse located near the dam on the Nashua River north of West Main Street.

- Camp Stevens, on the Nashua River, which was used as a training ground for the Union Army during the Civil War.

CEMETERIES

- St Mary's Cemetery, established circa 1857, on Bishop Road and Woodland Cemetery, established circa 1859, on Harvard Road. (CPAC & Reconnaissance Report)

ARCHAEOLOGICAL SITES

- Area along MacPherson Road, extending along the east side of the Nashua River, is likely to have archaeological resources associated with Native American use of the river corridor.
- Remnants of the Sandy Pond Icehouse located off of Sandy Pond Road.
- The Moore Airfield is reported by citizens to have value as a Native American artifact site.
- Nonacoicus Plantation is thought to be the site of battle in the King Philip's War.
- Remnants of the Shaker Village Foundation on Snake Hill Road.

(Reconnaissance Report)

INDUSTRIAL ARCHAEOLOGY

- Railroad artifacts, including a turntable, bridges, and abandoned rail lines, are physical remnants of Ayer's history as an important railroad junction.

(Reconnaissance Report)

AGRICULTURAL AREAS

- Between 1971 and 1999 Ayer lost more than half of its agricultural land leaving only 125 acres.
- There are two remaining farms on the east side of Ayer/Groton Road (a.k.a. N. Washington Street): Eliades and Smith farms. The 80-acre Eliades farm, includes a barn, sited in the midst of a rolling hay field.
- The Smith farm includes an early 19th-century house and a 20th-century dairy barn complex located close to the road.
- The Ayer State Game Farm on Fitchburg Road, an 87-acre state-owned farm, includes a house and agricultural buildings.

(Reconnaissance Report)

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

- Ayer's historic resources include both public and private properties and are diverse in type—expanding beyond historic buildings to include cemeteries, archaeological sites, and farms.
- Ayer's historic resources represent a wide range of periods important in Ayer's history, including Native American, Colonial, 19th-century industrial village, and early-mid 20th century, influenced heavily by Fort Devens.

INSERT MAP OF HISTORIC RESOURCES

GOALS FOR HISTORIC PRESERVATION EXPENDITURES

Preserving and protecting historic resources is a key factor to preserve and enhance Ayer's unique character and to keep history alive for future generations. The CPAC has established three goals for spending CPA funds to further historic preservation efforts:

1. RESTORE PUBLICLY-OWNED RESOURCES
2. PROTECT HISTORIC LANDSCAPES AND FARMLAND
3. COMPLETE THE IDENTIFICATION OF HISTORIC RESOURCES

1. RESTORE PUBLICLY-OWNED RESOURCES

Use CPA funds primarily for the preservation of publicly-owned historic resources.

Ayer's historic resources include many publicly-owned resources such as the District School #11 (a.k.a. Sandy Pond School), Town Hall, Pleasant Street School, Library, County Courthouse, old Fire Station, Ayer State Game Farm, and other sites as described in the profile of Ayer's historic resources on the previous pages. Some of these historic resources may be considered for adaptive reuse after they are no longer needed for their current function. Others may be in need of restoration and rehabilitation, including improvements for handicap accessibility and other upgrades to make the resource more functional.

Given this need coupled with limited funding, the CPAC intends to prioritize the protection and improvement of publicly-owned historic resources over privately-owned resources, with the exception of private landscapes and farmland (described below).

2. PROTECT HISTORIC LANDSCAPES AND FARMLAND

Target CPA funds used for privately-owned resources on the preservation of historic landscapes and farmland at risk of development.

In the late 17th and through the 18th century, Ayer was primarily an agricultural community. After the construction of the Fitchburg Railroad line in 1845, the community was rapidly transformed into an industrial village with a great expansion of housing, establishment of large-scale industry, and growth of the commercial center. Between 1971 and 1999, Ayer lost more than half of its agricultural land, leaving only 125 acres (Reconnaissance Report)

In order to preserve vestiges of the community's agricultural past, CPA funds can be used to assist with the protection and permanent preservation of historic landscapes and farmland through land acquisitions or deed restrictions. This goal ties into the CPAC's open space goals, described in Chapter 4.

3. COMPLETE THE IDENTIFICATION OF HISTORIC RESOURCES

Create a comprehensive inventory of Ayer's historic resources, building on accomplishment of the first phases of the Historic Resources Inventory.

Ayer has a wealth of historic resources that represent a wide range of periods important in Ayer's history, including Native American, Colonial, 19th-century industrial, and early 20th century. Ayer CPA funds have already funded phases I and II of an historic resources inventory. Additional phases will be necessary to complete a comprehensive town-wide inventory, which is key to understanding the extent and nature of historic resources in the community.

In order to build on the historic resources inventory, the creation of public educational signage, including historic markers and maps, can foster public appreciation for history and historic buildings, structures, and places that played a role in the community's history.

MINIMUM SPENDING REQUIREMENTS

As described in more detail in Chapter 1, the minimum statutory requirements for historic preservation is that 10% of annual revenues must be spent or set-aside for future spending. Therefore, the estimated minimum available funds for historic preservation is roughly **\$122,000** for FY09-FY13. In addition, the estimated available funds in the budgeted reserve and undesignated funds is about **\$500,000** for FY09-FY13, which can be spent on projects in any of the four CPA categories.

EXAMPLES OF PROJECT POSSIBILITIES

To be completed

Insert photo of historic farm buildings or public building

Chapter 4 Open Space

This section addresses the use of CPA funding to support open space protection efforts, includes a profile of Ayer's open space and natural resources, and describes the CPAC's open space goals.

OPEN SPACE NEEDS

Over 23% of Ayer's total land area (excluding Devens Regional Enterprise Zone) is considered unprotected open space—vacant land with evident or potential development capacity, including land that is temporarily protected through MGL c.61, 61A, and 61B. Nearly 86% of Ayer's vacant developable land is zoned residential. (Comp Plan)

Water is a critical component of Ayer's natural resources—the community relies on ground water as its drinking source. In addition, the Nashua River, five small brooks, and the small and large ponds that dominate Ayer's topography provide important wildlife habitats as well as scenic value and recreational opportunities. Ayer is also steward of portions of two Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) designated by the state as priority sites for habitat conservation. In particular, the Petapawag ACEC contains a significant amount of unprotected open space.

Ayer's open space and natural resources, particularly water resources and wildlife habitat areas, are key characteristics of the community's quality of life and character. Protection of these resources is a community preservation priority.

CPA ELIGIBILITY

The CPA defines the term "open space" as including, but not limited to, land to protect existing and future well fields, aquifers and recharge areas, watershed land, agricultural land, lake and pond frontage, beaches, and lands to protect scenic vistas. CPA allows the use of CPA funds for the acquisition, creation, and preservation of open space and allows for the rehabilitation or restoration only for open space that was acquired or created with CPA funds. Per MGL c. 44B s.5(f), CPA funds may not be used to acquire real property, or property interest, for a price exceeding the value of the property.

In accordance with the CPA statute (MGL c.44B s.12(a) and (b)), an acquisition of real property is required to be owned by the municipality and to be bound by a permanent deed restriction. Therefore, any open space acquisitions by the Town using CPA funds will require execution of a deed restriction that runs to the benefit of a nonprofit, charitable corporation, or foundation and that is in accordance with the requirements of MGL c.184.

PROFILE OF AYER'S OPEN SPACE & NATURAL RESOURCES

PERMANENTLY PROTECTED OPEN SPACE

- Roughly 344 acres of permanently protected open space, representing under 8% of Ayer's total land area (4,533.67, excluding 1,100 acres of Devens Regional Enterprise Zone). (Comp Plan, calculations by author)
- 0.097 acres of protected open space per capita, which is substantially lower than Ayer's neighboring towns and many other towns in Massachusetts.
- Permanently protected land is all publicly owned. There is no privately-owned permanently-protected open space in Ayer.
- Pine Meadow Conservation Land (a.k.a. Erskine Property) is over 129 acres of forested land used for hiking, picnicking and horseback riding (Reconnaissance Report).

TEMPORARILY PROTECTED OPEN SPACE

- Approximately 452 acres are temporarily protected under Chapter 61, 61A, and 61B tax abatement programs for open lands in forestry, agriculture, or recreational use.
- Largest holdings of temporarily protected open space include several forestry and agricultural parcels on Snake Hill Road and Old Groton Road, and the Ayer Sportsmen's Club on Snake Hill and Wright roads.

UNPROTECTED OPEN SPACE

- Roughly 1,072 acres of vacant land with evident or potential development capacity (including temporarily protected land). This represents over 23% of total land area.
- Nearly 86% of Ayer's vacant developable land is zoned residential.
- Camp Stevens near the Nashua River was used as a training ground during the Civil War and is privately owned (Reconnaissance Report).

WATER RESOURCES

- Approximately 829 acres are wetlands and open water, about 13.5% of total land area.
- Ayer is within two watersheds: Nashua River and Merrimack River.
- Most of the town lies within the Nashua River Watershed, which encompasses 538 square miles and 31 communities in north central MA and southern NH.

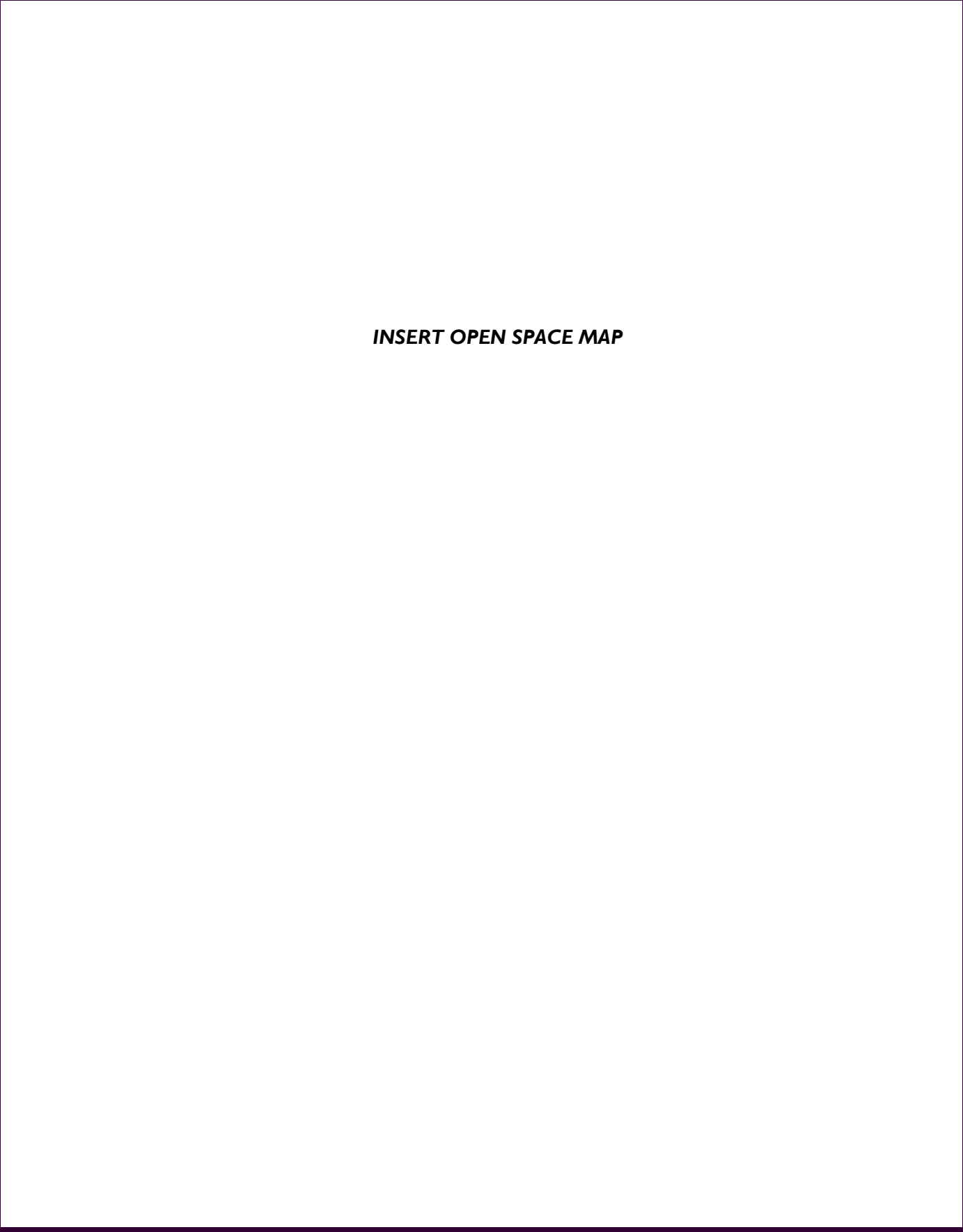
- The Merrimack River watershed is the fourth largest in New England with more than 200 cities and an area of 5,010 square miles.
- Nashua River is the largest watercourse in Ayer and is a regionally significant river that provides drinking water, wildlife habitat, recreational opportunities, and scenic views.
- Five small brooks in Ayer feed the Nashua River and local ponds.
- Small and large ponds dominate Ayer's topography; Three of Ayer's ponds are Great Ponds (Long, Sandy, and Spectacle) and must, therefore, be open to general public use.
- Water quality in town's ponds is a significant concern: three of the ponds are federally required to have pollution control plans.
- Ayer relies on groundwater as its drinking water source. Portions of two groundwater aquifers are located in Ayer: Nashua River Basin aquifer and Merrimack River Basin aquifer.
- Groundwater from these two aquifers supplies the four town wells that provide drinking water for Ayer. The Town is considering development of additional well to accommodate growth.
- Three areas in Ayer with strong potential for flooding: Snake Hill Road intersection with Sandy Pond Road; Carlton Circle; and Bishop Road.

HABITAT & BIODIVERSITY RESOURCES

- Portions of two Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC) as designated by the state Secretary of Environmental Affairs, are located in Ayer: the Petapawag and Squannassit ACECs. There is very little protected open space within Ayer in the Petapawag ACEC, which is a priority site for habitat conservation—particularly land on Long Pond.
- The state Natural Heritage & Endangered Species Program has documented four species of vascular plants and four species of vertebrates that are endangered, threatened, or of special concern. NHESP has designated four Priority Habitat areas in Ayer.
- Ayer has three important wildlife corridors: (1) riparian corridor along Nashua River; (2) undeveloped forests in eastern Ayer; and (3) high-tension power line corridor.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

- Ayer has a shortage of protected open space compared to surrounding towns and many towns statewide.
- Water resources play a critical role in Ayer's quality of life and community character—providing drinking water, scenic value, recreational opportunities, and wildlife habitat.
- Critical open space and natural resources remain unprotected, including land in the Aquifer Protection District, Areas of Critical Environmental Concern, Chapter 61 program, and providing public access to town's ponds.



INSERT OPEN SPACE MAP

GOALS FOR OPEN SPACE EXPENDITURES

Protecting open space and natural resources is a key factor in preserving Ayer's community character. In fact, the CPAC has determined that open space preservation is the most important function of the CPA funds in Ayer at this time and has demonstrated this by building an open space reserve with approximately 30% of all CPA revenue generated to date. Due to the importance of open space preservation to the community, the CPAC identified a multitude of goals. This Plan lays out these six open space goals, from highest to lowest priority, immediately below. The three top priority goals are discussed in more detail further below.

1. PROTECT AQUIFERS AND DRINKING SUPPLY
2. PROTECT AREAS OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN
3. ACQUIRE OPEN SPACE FOR PASSIVE RECREATION

ADDITIONAL GOALS:

- PROTECT WETLANDS, VERNAL POOLS, AND ADJACENT LANDS, AS WELL AS OTHER SENSITIVE LAND
- PROTECT GREENWAYS TO CONNECT CONSERVATION LAND AND PUBLIC RECREATION AREAS
- PROTECT MGL C. 61 PROPERTIES INCLUDING PRIVATE FARMS, FOREST, AND RECREATION LANDS

1. PROTECT AQUIFERS AND DRINKING SUPPLY

Permanently protect open space within the Town's aquifers through land acquisition or deed restrictions.

Since Ayer relies on groundwater as its drinking source, it is critical to protect the open space within the two groundwater aquifers that are located in Ayer: Nashua River Basin and Merrimack River Basin aquifer. These aquifers supply the four town wells that, in turn, supply Ayer's drinking water for residents and business. Ayer adopted an Aquifer Protection District Zoning By-law that protects the water quality of the aquifers by prohibiting storage of hazardous materials, landfills and other high-risk land uses. (Comp Plan)

The By-law does not prohibit land development. Maximizing protected open space within the aquifer areas can minimize pollutants entering groundwater, thereby providing further protection of water quality. Therefore, the CPAC's top priority is to utilize CPA funds to acquire land or deed restrictions to permanently protect land within the Town's aquifers.

2. PROTECT AREAS OF CRITICAL ENVIRONMENTAL CONCERN

Permanently protect open space within the state-designated Petapawag and Squannassit Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC).

ACEC's are state-designated areas that receive special recognition and assistance due to the quality, uniqueness, and significance of their natural and cultural resources. Ayer comprises a portion of two ACECs. The ACECs are located in the north, northeast, south, and west sections of Ayer, surrounding all of the ponds, and extend north into Groton and west into Shirley and portions of the Devens Enterprise Zone. The ACECs overlap with the aquifer areas primarily in the west and southwest sections of Ayer, including the area of Grove and Plow Shop ponds.

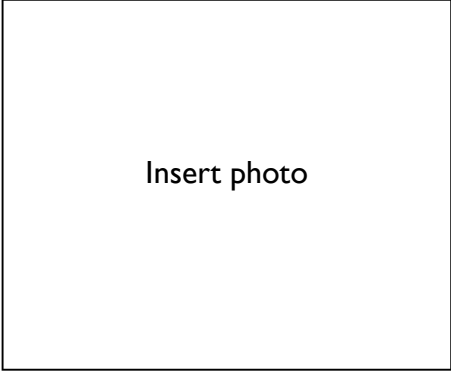
Utilizing CPA funds for acquisition of land or deed restrictions to assist with the protection of open space in these environmentally-sensitive areas is one of the CPAC's priority open space goals.

3. ACQUIRE OPEN SPACE FOR PASSIVE RECREATION

Acquire and permanently protect open space land for passive recreation including hiking, walking, wildlife observation, environmental education, and access to water bodies.

As of 2005, Ayer had less than 1/10th of an acre of protected open space per capita, which is substantially lower than Ayer's neighboring towns and many other towns in the state. The roughly 344 acres of permanently protected open space is less than 8% of Ayer's total land area (excluding 1,100 acres of Devens Regional Enterprise Zone). (Comp Plan)

The community values the passive recreation opportunities that open space provides, such as hiking, wildlife observation, environmental education, and, in some cases, access to water bodies for fishing, boating, or other water-based passive recreation. The CPAC intends to prioritize the permanent protection of open space that enables the public's use and enjoyment of the land for passive recreation.

A rectangular box with a thin black border, containing the text "Insert photo".A rectangular box with a thin black border, containing the text "Insert photo".

MINIMUM SPENDING REQUIREMENTS

The minimum statutory spending requirements for open space are 10% of annual revenue, which must either be spent or set aside for future spending. However, since protecting open space is Ayer's top priority use for CPA funds for the next five years, the Town has already reserved approximately 30% of total revenue generated in FY02-FY08 for future open space projects. The CPAC intends to continue to recommend reserving 30% of total revenue for future open space projects for FY09-FY13. Therefore, the total estimated revenue that would be generated for open space projects from FY09 to FY13 is approximately **\$775,000**, including the currently unspent open space reserve. In addition, the estimated available budgeted reserve and undesignated funds for FY09-FY13, which can be used in any of the four CPA categories, is about **\$500,000**.

Given high land values, coupled with the CPAC's overall principle of being fiscally conservative, the CPAC encourages land protection projects that demonstrate substantial leveraging of other public or private funding, and those that minimize project costs in the form of bargain (discounted) sales and other cost-saving mechanisms.

EXAMPLES OF PROJECT POSSIBILITIES

To be completed

Chapter 5 Recreation

This section focuses on priorities for spending CPA funds for improving public recreation opportunities, includes a profile of Ayer's recreation resources, and describes the CPAC's two priority goals for CPA recreation (also referred to by CPAC as undesignated open space) expenditures.

RECREATION NEEDS

Ayer has a variety of recreation areas, providing both passive and active recreation opportunities. Areas for passive recreation, such as picnicking, hiking, horseback-riding, and wildlife observation, include the Nashua River Rail Trail, Pine Meadow Conservation Land, Smith Conservation Land, and The Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge. However, there are limited areas in Ayer that provide public access to the Nashua River and the Town's ponds for water-based recreation.

The Ayer Parks Department has approximately 20 acres of land and the School Department has roughly 60 acres. The Town provides a variety of active recreation facilities on the Park and School lands including playgrounds, basketball courts, soccer fields, and baseball/softball diamonds. According to the analysis of the National Recreational and Park Association standards as cited in the Ayer Comprehensive Plan, there is a particular need for more neighborhood parks, a major community park, and a tot lot. (Comp Plan)

CPA ELIGIBILITY

The CPA defines recreational use as "active or passive recreational use including, but not limited to, to the use of land for community gardens, trails, and noncommercial youth and adult sports, and the use of land as a park, playground or athletic field." The definition goes on to prohibit ". . . horse or dog racing or the use of land for a stadium, gymnasium or similar structure."

CPA allows use of CPA funds for the acquisition, creation, and preservation of land for recreational use and allows rehabilitation or restoration only for recreation land acquired or created with CPA funds. Maintenance costs are not eligible for CPA funds.

Understanding CPA eligibility for recreation projects on existing recreation lands that were not originally acquired with CPA funds can be confusing. Essentially, as a rule of thumb, CPA is allowed to be used for projects that will protect the resource from harm (preservation), but not for projects intended to extend the resource's useful life (rehabilitation). In some cases, there may be a fine line between "preservation" and "rehabilitation" and the CPAC may require an opinion from Town Counsel to determine project eligibility.

PROFILE OF AYER'S RECREATION RESOURCES

PASSIVE RECREATION

- The Nashua River Rail Trail is an 11-mile regional trail that runs through Ayer, Groton, Pepperell, and Dunstable and is managed by the state Department of Conservation and Recreation. The trail is open for waling, bicycling, skating, and cross country skiing. A portion of the trail is also open as a bridle path.
- There are limited locations that provide public access to the Nashua River and the Town's ponds for water-based recreation.
- The Ayer Game Farm, owned by the state, located off Groton Shirley Road, is comprised of 87 acres of land and includes a house and agricultural buildings as well as diverse natural habitats (Reconnaissance Report).
- The Pine Meadow Conservation Land, also known as the Erskine Property, is over 129 acres of forested land used for hiking, picnicking and horseback riding (Reconnaissance Report).
- The Smith Conservation Land. [Need more info.](#)
- The Oxbow National Wildlife Refuge, controlled by the US Fish & Wildlife, is located along the Nashua River and MacPherson Road and consists of approximately 1,667 acres of upland located in Ayer, Shirley, Harvard, and Lancaster (Reconnaissance Report & stateparks.com).
- The Ayer Sportsmen's Club, a private club on almost 100 acres of land, provides opportunities for fishing, hunting, hiking, picnicking, archery, and target shooting.

ACTIVE RECREATION

- Approximately 20 acres of land are under the control of the Ayer Parks Department—includes opportunities for both passive and active recreation.
- Pirone Park, located in downtown Ayer, includes a playground, 2 basketball courts, 2 soccer fields, and 4 baseball/softball diamonds.

- Sandy Pond Beach, which is Ayer's only developed recreation site on a waterfront, includes a playground and basketball court in addition to a beach and access to the pond.
- Kosher's Park is undeveloped, providing opportunities for passive recreation.
- Nonaicoicus's Park is a 7-acre site on West Main Street.
- Approximately 60 acres of school land, which include recreation facilities at the Ayer Middle and Senior High School and the Page-Hilltop Elementary School.
- Ayer Middle and Senior High School include an indoor basketball court, a football field, soccer field, baseball/softball diamond, 3 tennis courts, and a track.
- The Page-Hilltop Elementary School includes a playground.

RECREATION STANDARDS

- The National Recreation and Park Association (NPRA) issues guidelines for amount and type of recreational amenities based on town size. The following table summarizes NPRA standards for a town of Ayer's size:

| Type of Facility | Size | Recommended Amount |
|----------------------|-------------|--------------------|
| Small Tot Lot | < 1 acre | 1 |
| Neighborhood Parks | 5-8 acres | 5-10 |
| Major Community Park | 35-50 acres | 1 |

Note: Park uses are often divided into two categories: active and passive recreation.

- Passive recreation emphasizes the open-space aspect of a park and involves a low level of development, including picnic areas and trails.
- Active recreation typically requires intensive development and often involves cooperative or team activity, including playgrounds and ball fields.

WHAT DOES THIS MEAN?

- Ayer has diverse resources for passive recreation, providing public access to a variety of ecologies, including forests, fields, ponds, and the Nashua River.
- The regional Nashua River Rail Trail is a unique resource that provides opportunities for a variety of recreational activities.
- Active recreation facilities appear to be deficient considering the NPRA standards, with particular need for neighborhood parks, a major community park, and a tot lot.

INSERT MAP OF RECREATION RESOURCES

GOALS FOR RECREATION EXPENDITURES

Creating and preserving public recreation facilities is important in preserving and improving quality of life for Ayer's citizens. The CPAC has established three goals for spending CPA funds on recreation, as further described below.

1. CREATE TRAIL CONNECTIONS TO THE NASHUA RIVER RAIL TRAIL
2. CONSTRUCT NEIGHBORHOOD POCKET PARKS AND COMMUNITY GARDENS
3. CREATE WATERFRONT ACCESS

1. CREATE TRAIL CONNECTIONS TO THE NASHUA RIVER RAIL TRAIL

Create biking, walking, and/or hiking trail connections to the Nashua River Rail Trail from adjacent neighborhoods and other recreation resources, such as Ayer's ponds.

The Nashua River Rail Trail is an 11-mile regional trail that runs through Ayer and other communities and is managed by the state Department of Conservation and Recreation. The construction of new trails from adjacent neighborhoods and/or other recreational resources would create additional access to the rail trail and provide links to other recreation opportunities, such as water-based passive recreation at Ayer's ponds. Trail projects, particularly those that are proposed through existing neighborhoods where land is in private-ownership, can be complex to execute. CPA funds could be utilized to first study the feasibility and determine possible locations for new trail connections prior to moving ahead with land assembly and the design/construction phases. In addition, a feasibility study could provide documentation necessary to secure additional public or private funding to further leverage CPA funds.

2. CONSTRUCT NEIGHBORHOOD POCKET PARKS AND COMMUNITY GARDENS

Construct small parks on infill sites in Ayer's neighborhoods that could include playground equipment, picnic benches, areas for community gardening, and other amenities.

In addition to school recreation facilities, Ayer only has two developed park areas: Pirone Park and Sand Pond Beach. Vacant properties within existing neighborhoods could serve as infill sites to develop neighborhood pocket parks and/or community gardens. These small parks would be neighborhood-centered and could provide residents with areas for play, picnicking, gardening, informal pick-up games, or the like. CPA funds could be utilized to fund acquisition of land and/or construction of new pocket parks and community gardens.

3. CREATE WATERFRONT ACCESS

Acquire land or public access easements to create additional areas for public access to Ayer's water bodies including the Nashua River, the three Great Ponds (Long, Sandy, and Spectacle ponds), and other ponds and brooks.

Sandy Pond Beach, which was substantially improved through CPA funds, is the only developed recreation area in Ayer that provides public access to the water. In addition to Sand Pond Beach, there are only a few places in Ayer that provide public access to the Nashua River and the town's ponds for water-based recreation such as boating or fishing (Comp Plan). CPA funds could be used to develop existing town-owned waterfront properties to provide public access and/or for the acquisition of land or public access easements to provide access on land that is currently privately-owned.

MINIMUM SPENDING REQUIREMENTS

As described in Chapter 1, the CPA statute sets no minimum spending requirements for recreation. However, Ayer has already reserved approximately 10% of funds generated in FY02-FY08 for recreation projects (unrestricted open space reserve). The CPAC intends to continue to recommend 10% of CPA annual revenue be set aside in the Unrestricted Open Space Reserve, which translates to an estimated **\$180,500** that would be available for future recreation projects.

Recreation projects can also be funded through the Budgeted Reserve and with undesignated funds, which are available for projects in any of the four CPA categories. Estimated funds available in the budgeted reserve and undesignated funds for FY09-FY13 are about **\$500,000**.



Insert Photo

EXAMPLES OF PROJECT POSSIBILITIES

To be completed

Chapter 6 Implementation of Plan

To be completed

List of Sources

Except where otherwise noted, the primary source for the resource profiles in chapters 2, 3, 4, and 5 was the following:

| | |
|-----------------------|---|
| Comp Plan | <i>Town of Ayer: Comprehensive Plan Update</i> , Ayer Planning Board, Community Opportunities Group, Inc, March 10, 2005. |
| CPAC | JM Goldson consultations via email and telephone with members of the Ayer Community Preservation Act Committee |
| DHCD | Chapter 40B <i>Subsidized Housing Inventory</i> , Massachusetts Department of Housing and Community Development, updated February 7, 2008. http://www.mass.gov/Ehed/docs/dhcd/hd/shi/shiinventory.htm |
| HUDUser.org | http://www.huduser.org/datasets/il.html |
| Mortgage 101 | www.mortgage101.com , home affordability calculator |
| Open Space Plan | <i>Town of Ayer: Open Space and Recreation Plan Update</i> , Community Opportunities Group, Inc., May 17, 2004. |
| Planning | JM Goldson consultations via email and telephone with Ayer Planning Department. |
| Reconnaissance Report | <i>Ayer Reconnaissance Report: Freedom's Way Landscape Inventory</i> , Massachusetts Heritage Landscape Inventory Program, Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation, Freedom's Way Heritage Association, June 2006. |
| Report Card | The Greater Boston Housing Report Card 2005-2006, Bonnie Heudorfer and Barry Bluestone, The Center for Urban and Regional Policy, Northeastern University, Sept 2006. http://www.curp.neu.edu/publications/reports.htm |
| (stateparks.com) | http://www.stateparks.com/oxbow.html |
| Warren | www.thewarrengroup.com |
| Zillow | www.zillow.com |