

## Chapter 7: Open Space, Historic, and Community Facilities

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### Introduction

The preservation of parks, agricultural land, open space, and historic resources is central to the Town of Orange's community character and quality of life for residents. This chapter identifies the Town's existing parks, open spaces, historic, and community facilities, while providing strategies for future preservation and expansion of these assets.

### Existing Conditions

#### Open Space

Preservation of open space is a critical way to conserve natural resources, provide opportunities for recreational uses, and shape patterns of development townwide. Orange residents consider open space preservation as a high priority for the town and acknowledge its many community benefits. The Orange Land Trust, Conservation Commission, and the local government have successfully acquired a significant amount of land for preservation purposes in recent years. These entities work together to preserve and maintain over 1,000 acres of open space townwide.

The Orange Conservation Commission operates under Town Charter (Section 6.6). The Commission is focused on the conservation and development of natural resources and stewardship of open space in the town. The Orange Land Trust, a private 501(c)(3) non-profit, currently holds 24 properties in Orange, totaling approximately 88 acres. The Land Trust also offers educational programs, environmental scholarships, and hosts events like hikes and wildlife lectures.

Figure 1 shows the various types of open space within the Town of Orange. Open space includes dedicated open space, managed open space, recreational areas, and private open space, i.e. golf courses.

*Racebrook Tract*



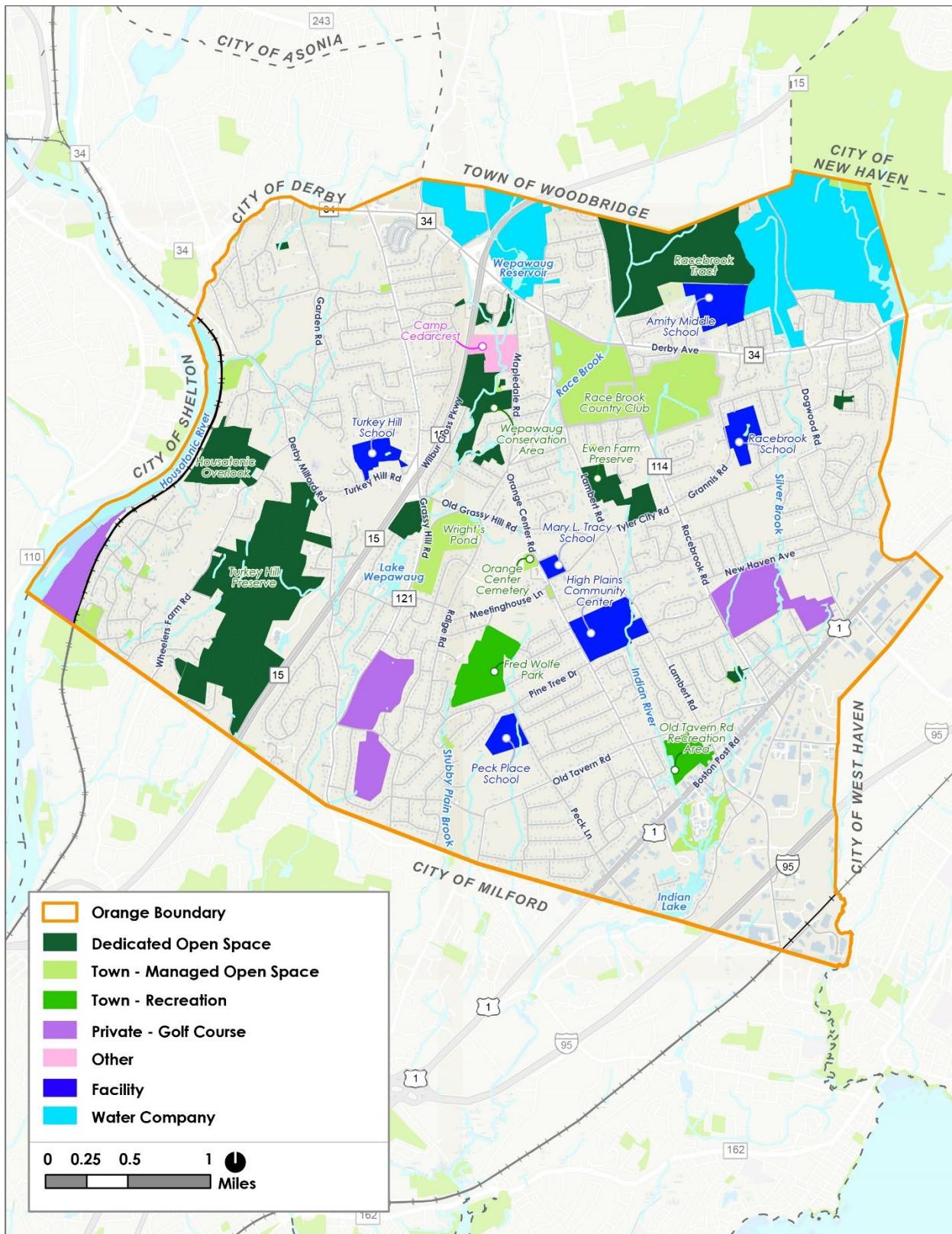
*Housatonic Overlook*



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Figure 1: Open Space in Orange

Source: Esri, CT Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (CT DEEP), BFJ Planning



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### *Dedicated Open Space*

Dedicated open space includes Racebrook Tract, Wepawaug Conservation Area, Housatonic Overlook, Ewen Farm Preserve, and Turkey Hill Preserve. These areas are owned by either the Town or a non-profit organization and allow for public use of the land.<sup>1</sup>

- Racebrook Tract, located on the northern border of Orange, consists of approximately 230 acres of open space in Orange and 181 acres in Woodbridge. It includes blazed trails, a handicapped accessible trail, and the Orange Arboretum.
- The Wepawaug Conservation Area, connected to the Orange Triangle Trail and Kowal Natural Preserve, is owned by the Orange Land Trust, the Town of Orange, and Camp Cedarcrest. The Orange Triangle Trail is of particular significance, as it follows the Wepawaug River and connects to the Wepawaug Conservation Area, the Whetney Tract, and the Ravine.
- Located on the west border of Orange, the Housatonic Overlook offers scenic views of the Housatonic Valley and various trails. This area was recently expanded with the Town's purchase of a parcel on Wheelers Farm Road.
- Positioned just to the southeast to the Housatonic Overlook, Turkey Hill Preserve is the largest swath of dedicated open space in Orange, stretching across 376 acres. This conservation area is composed of various natural features, such as ponds, gorges, streams, and steep hills.
- Lastly, Ewen Farm Preserve serves as a reminder of the Town's agricultural heritage, composed of 43 acres of a historic farm.

### *Town -Managed Open Space*

Managed Open Space refers to land that provides the environmental and scenic benefits of open space but may serve specific uses, such as the Orange Center Cemetery.

Wright's Pond is a Town-owned site with various uses and habitats, as well as both active and passive uses. Community members visit for ice skating, fishing, and bird watching year-round, while other areas of the site consist of protected wetlands.

Additionally, in recent years, the Town of Orange has made significant contributions to the preservation of managed open space with the acquisition of previously privately owned open spaces. For instance, in 2021, the Town purchased the 287-acre Racebrook Country Club property. The Town owns the entire facility and leases it to Racebrook Country Club. The Town's acquisition of this land protects its uses as a recreational area and green space.

### *Town – Recreation Areas*

Fred Wolfe Park offers opportunities for play, including soccer fields, as well as trails. Similarly, Old Tavern Road Recreation Area is often used for organized sports, consisting of eight baseball/softball fields.

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<sup>1</sup> Orange Conservation Commission. *Guide to Open Spaces in Orange, CT*. Available at: <https://www.orangectconservationcommission.com/guide.html>.

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### *Private - Golf Courses*

Private golf courses, such as Great River Golf Club, Grassy Hill Country Club, and Orange Hills Country Club, offer recreational opportunities for residents and visitors alike. Although these sites are privately owned, they contribute to the town's total green space and ability for permeable surfaces to absorb stormwater (see Chapter 8: Infrastructure).

### *Facilities*

Schools and community centers, such as Peck Place School, Turkey Hill School, Racebrook School, Amity Middle School, and High Plains Community Center provide open spaces for recreational uses, such as softball/baseball, soccer, ice skating, and walking. These spaces serve as hubs for community interaction, as well as active uses of open space.

#### *High Plains Community Center*



### *Water Companies*

The areas highlighted in light blue on the map are owned by the South Central Regional Water Authority.

### **Natural Diversity**

In addition to open space management, another critical aspect of sustainability is protection natural resources, such as sensitive habitats. Figure 2 shows areas of known locations, both historic and extant, that contain state and federal listed species. Species included on state lists are considered endangered, threatened, or of special concern under the Connecticut Endangered Species Act (CGS, Section 26-303 and Regulations of Connecticut State Agencies 26-303).<sup>2</sup> These areas of natural diversity should be considered when pursuing conservation opportunities.

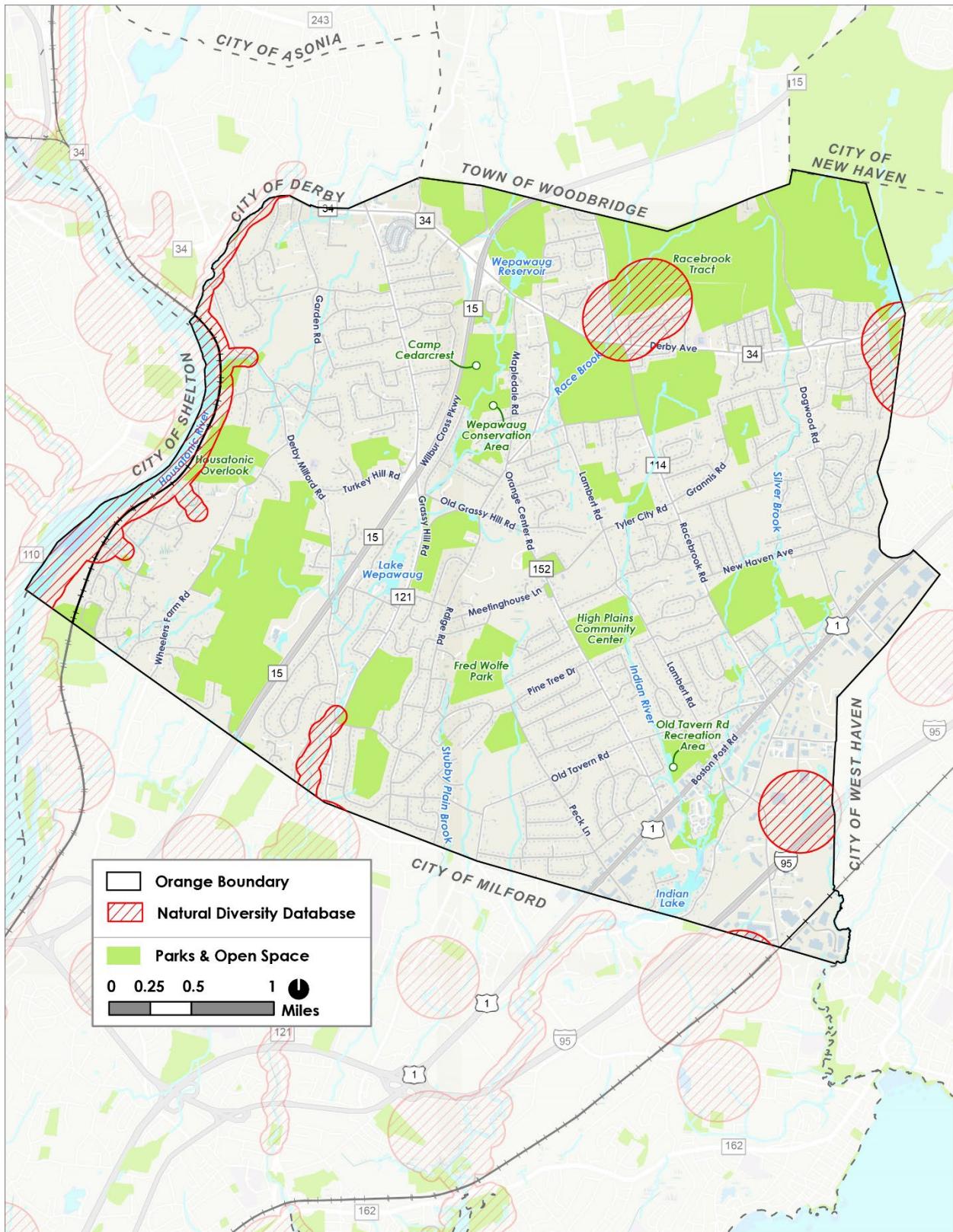
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<sup>2</sup> Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (DEEP). *Natural Diversity Database* . Available at: <https://ct-deep-gis-open-data-website-ctdeep.hub.arcgis.com/>.

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Figure 2: Natural Diversity

Source: Esri, CT DEEP, BFJ Planning



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### Agricultural Lands

Orange's history of agriculture and farming contributes greatly to the present-day community character. Figure 3 shows parcels classified by SCRCOG as farmland. Additionally, characteristics, such as stone walls and barns, help create the scenic quality of Orange. Continuing to preserve these agricultural features is a key way to support the rural character of the community.

Examples of existing farms within Orange include Treat Farm, Grassy Hill Farm, Homestead Tree Farm, Casner Farms, Shamrock Farm, Sunflower Farm, Cedar Hill Farm, Latella Farm, and more.

*Maple View Farm*



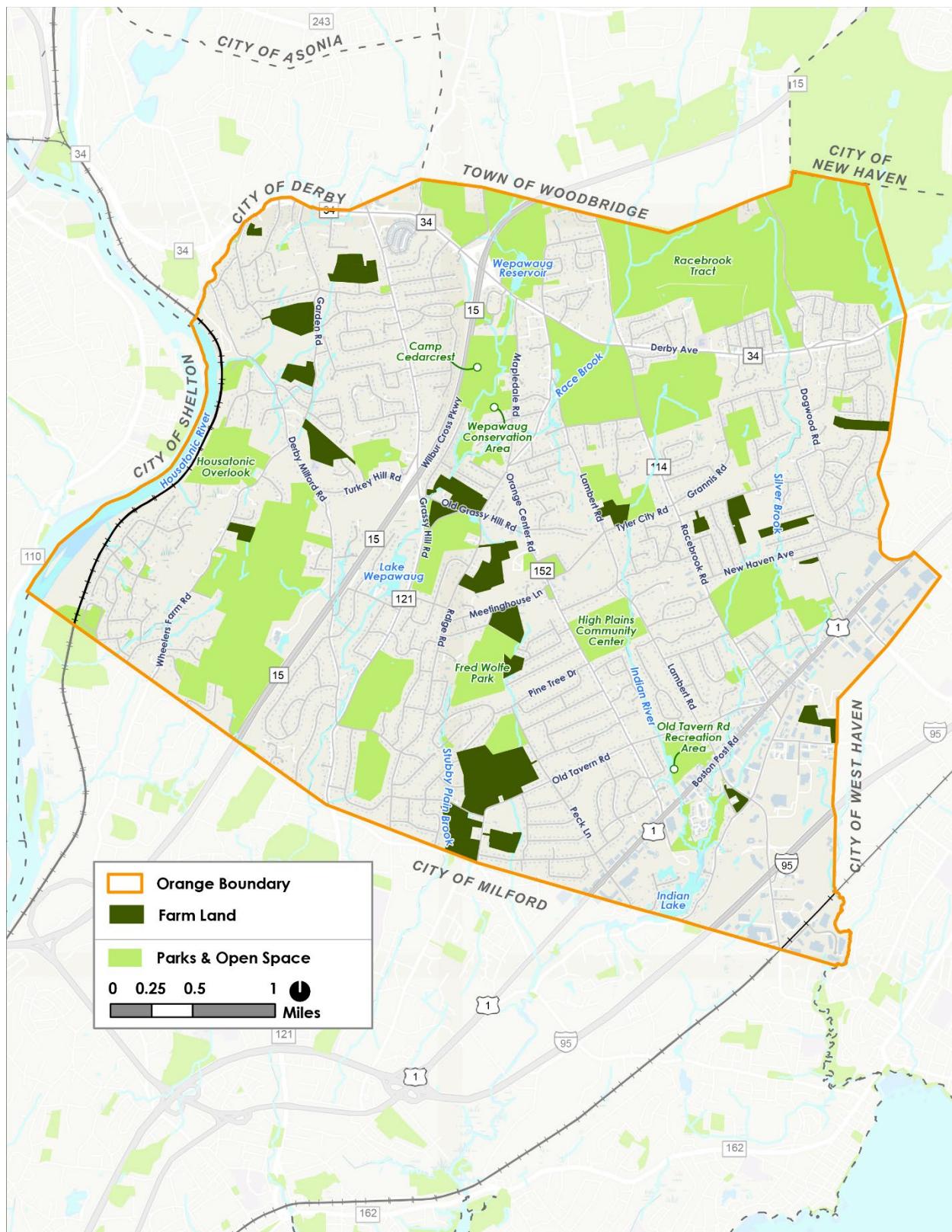
*Treat Farm*



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Figure 3: Farm Land

Source: Esri, SCRCOG, BFJ Planning



## Historic and Architectural Resources

### *Orange Center Historic District*

Key historic resources include the Orange Center Historic District, designated as a Local, State, and National Register Historic District. The Orange Center Historic District was established in 1976 and is in the geographical center of the town (see Figure 4). Historic and architectural resources within this district date back from the late 18<sup>th</sup> to early 20<sup>th</sup> centuries and are centered around the Town Hall and Town Green. The presence of this district is a marker of the historic development of the village of Orange Center.<sup>3</sup>

On the north side of the district is the Orange Shopping Center, a retail area within the Local Shopping District (LSC) zone. This local shopping area could use significant improvement. The Town might encourage the existing owner to upgrade the area so that it better serves the Town Center residents and employees and is more compatible with the design quality and aesthetics of the Historic District. Such improvements would identify and distinguish the Town Center.

### *Orange Historic District*



### *Historic Places<sup>4</sup>*

Three significant sites in Orange are listed on the National and State Register of Historic Places (see Figure 4).

- The Col. Asa Platt House, a federal style building, was constructed in 1810. It is thought to have been built by the same architect as the Orange Congregational Church, David Hoadley.
- The Henry F. Miller House, an international style house, was built in 1949.

<sup>3</sup> Orange Historical Society. *Orange Historic District*. Available at: [https://orangehistory.org/orange\\_historic\\_district.htm](https://orangehistory.org/orange_historic_district.htm).

<sup>4</sup> Orange Historical Society. *Town of Orange Historic Places*. Available at: [https://orangehistory.org/town\\_of\\_orange\\_historic\\_places.htm](https://orangehistory.org/town_of_orange_historic_places.htm).

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- The William Andrew House, also referred to as the Bryan-Andrew House, was constructed around 1750 for the Bryan family. The area became known as “Bryan’s Farm.” The house was bought by the Town in 2000 and restored to be a museum.

Additionally, the Town owns three properties which are maintained by the Historical Society as educational sites and tributes to the town’s history (see Figure 4).

- The Stone-Otis House was built in 1830 on the east side of the Town Green. The home was purchased by the Town of Orange in 1965. The Historical Society restored the home, and it is now open to visitors.
- The William-Andrew House/Bryan-Andrew House is in the process of being restored by the Historical Society. It is open as both a house museum and for local school tours to experience a typical day in early Orange.
- The Academy Museum was built in 1812 as a school and sits on the east side of the Town Green. It functioned later as Orange Town Hall and is now used by the Orange Historical Society. It is home to the Mary Rebecca Woodruff Research Center, which contains much of Orange’s historical materials, including primary source documents, maps, newspapers, municipal documents, and more.

*Stone-Otis House*

Source: Orange Historical Society



*The Academy Museum*

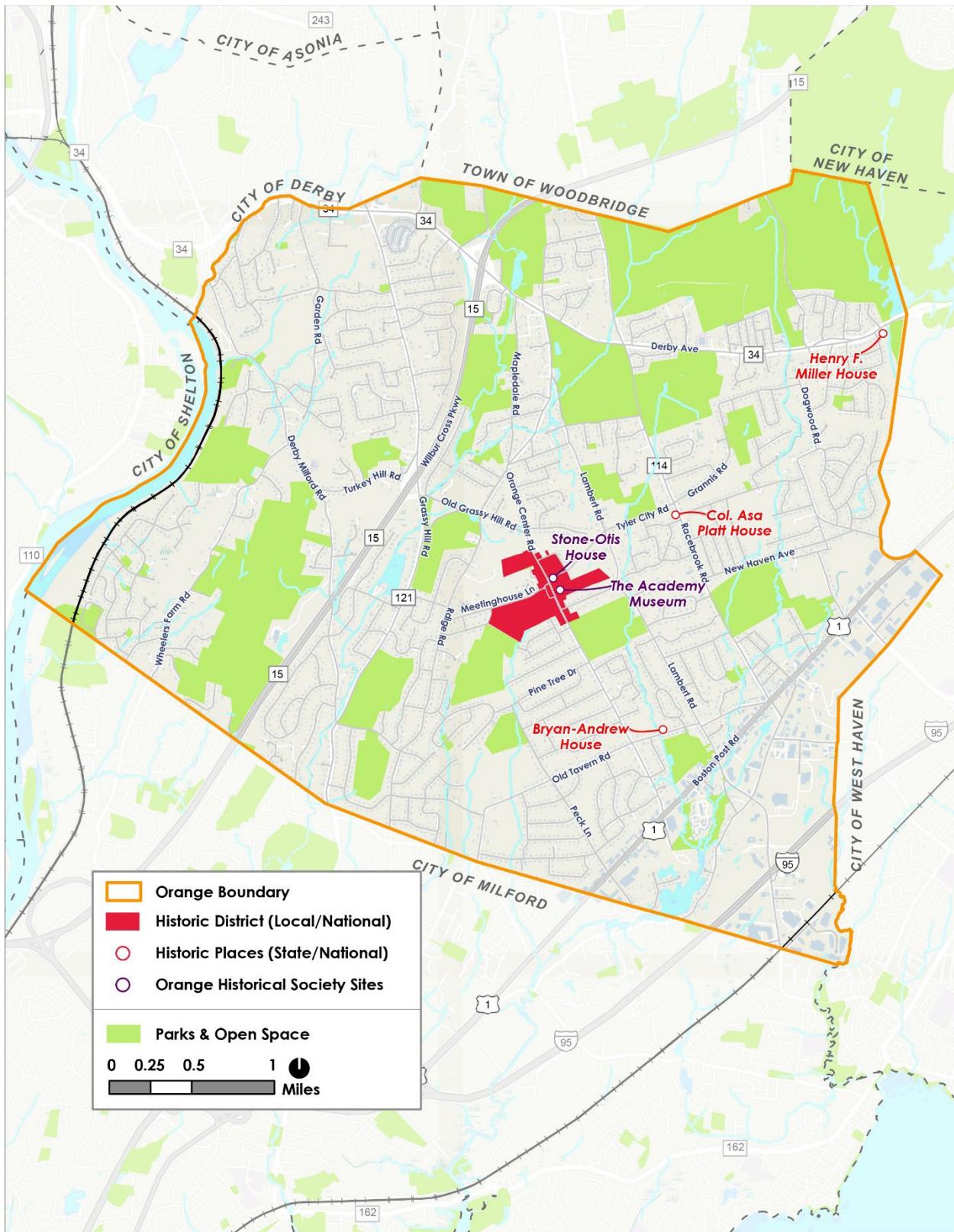
Source: Orange Historical Society



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Figure 4: Historic Resources

Source: Esri, Orange Historical Society, BFJ Planning



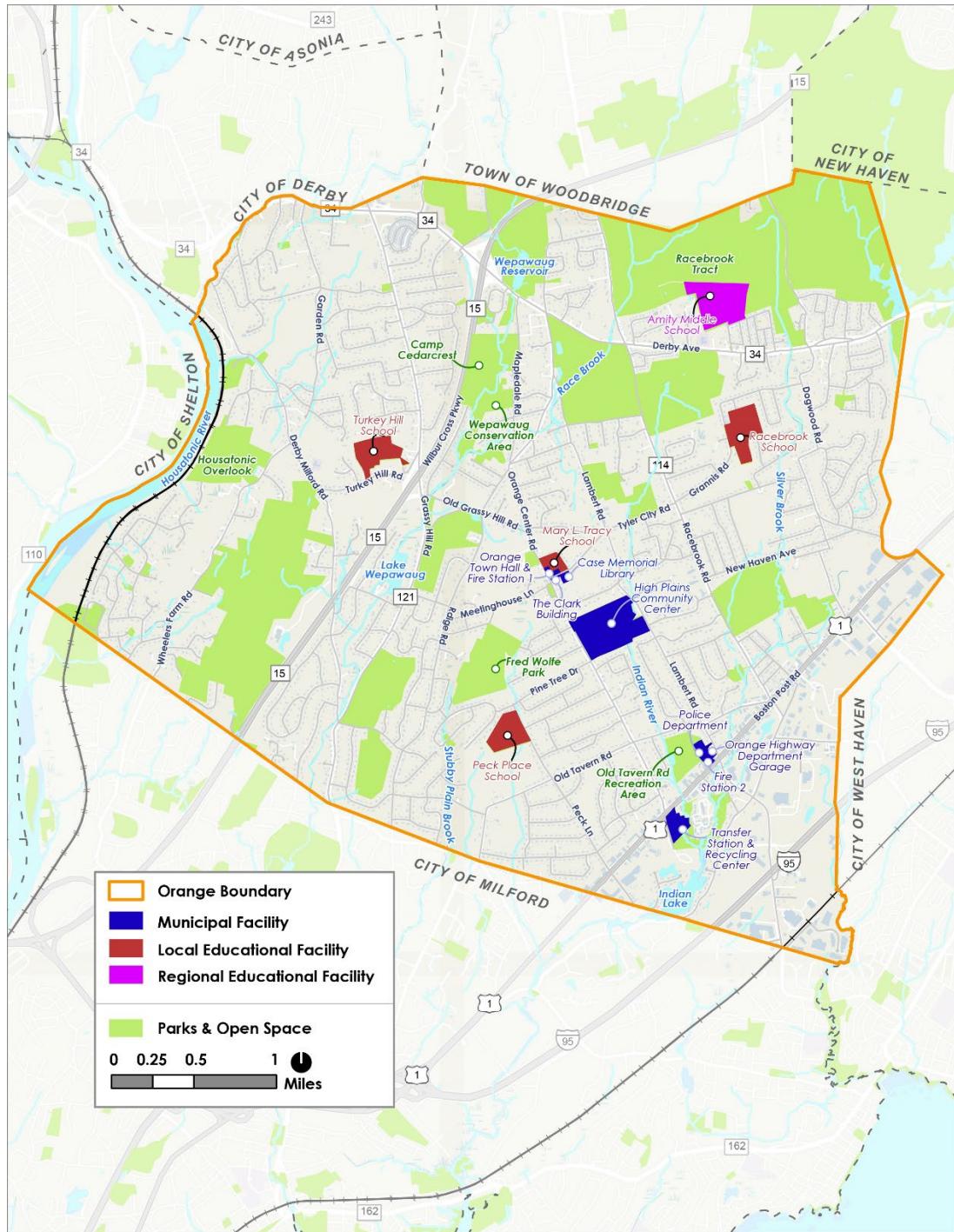
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### Community Facilities

Community facilities in Orange are essential for the functions of education, public works, public safety and health, and recreation. Figure 5 shows the Town's municipal facilities, as well as local and regional educational facilities.

Figure 5: Community Facilities

Source: Esri, Orange Historical Society, BFJ Planning



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### *Local Educational Facilities*

Residents of Orange are served by four public local educational facilities: Mary L. Tracy, Peck Place, Race Brook, and Turkey Hill.<sup>5</sup>

Mary L. Tracy School was built in 1910 as Orange Center School. It currently houses an Early Childhood Center offering pre-school and kindergarten programs. Peck Place School, Race Brook School, and Turkey Hill School serve students in grades one through six. The Board of Education is currently undergoing a facilities study for the various public schools, evaluating potential improvements, such as air conditioning.

Local school enrollments (PK-6) have increased slightly since the previous POCD. In 2013, total enrollment was 1,193. By 2024, it had risen to 1,247 and remained stable in 2025 at 1,246. See Chapter 2 on Demographics for more data on school enrollment.

*Table 1: 2024-2025 Orange Public School Enrollment*

Source: Orange Board of Education

School	2024 Enrollment	2025 Enrollment
Mary L. Tracy	190	188
Peck Place	381	386
Race Brook	378	374
Turkey Hill	298	298
<b>TOTAL</b>	<b>1,247</b>	<b>1,246</b>

### *Regional Educational Facilities*

The Amity Regional School District (Regional School District #5) serves students from Orange, Woodbridge, and Bethany. Amity Middle School- Orange provides education for students in grades seven through eight. Amity Senior High School, located in Woodbridge, serves students in grades nine through twelve.

### *Municipal Facilities*

Orange's municipal facilities are essential for the day-to-day function of the town and contribute to a high quality of life for residents.

#### High Plains Community Center

The High Plains Community Center features several recreation amenities, including picnic pavilions, soccer fields, tennis courts, softball fields, a disc golf course, fitness center, gymnasium, indoor pool, nature trail, and walking track.

The Center also houses the town's Community Services Department, which provides senior services, youth services, and accessible transportation. The Senior Center hosts classes, events, and recreational activities like pickleball, pool, and bingo. Transportation services are offered through donation-based program for seniors and residents with disabilities, focusing on medical

<sup>5</sup> Orange Elementary School System. *Mary L. Tracy School Information*. Available at: <https://www.oess.org/our-schools/mary-tracy>.

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appointments and, when possible, recreational/social errands. The transportation fleet consists of three handicapped-accessible vans and two cars. There have been increased transportation requests due to more residents aging in place.

### Case Memorial Library

The Case Memorial Library, located in Orange Center next to Town Hall, provides a multigenerational educational and community space for residents. The library hosts a variety of events, including story times, arts and crafts clubs, and book clubs. It also offers computers for public uses, as well as meeting rooms for use by non-profit organizations and local government agencies.

*Case Memorial Library*



### Orange Town Hall

The Orange Town Hall shares a site with the Orange Center Firehouse (Fire Station 1) and the Mary L. Tracy School. It houses several departmental offices essential to the day-to-day operations of Orange. It features a meeting room on the lower level, used for public meetings such as the Board of Selectmen and Plan and Zoning Commission regular sessions.

*Orange Town Hall*



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### Police Department

The Police Department is responsible for public safety in the Town of Orange. They also manage calls for both medical and emergency services. Recent facility upgrades include improving the department's communication infrastructure, replacing the roof, and expanding the women's locker room.

### Fire Stations

Orange has an all-volunteer fire department. There are two firehouses, Fire Station 1 and 2. The Fire Station adjacent to Town Hall was constructed more recently. The Fire Marshal's office, separate from the volunteer fire department, is responsible for enforcing fire and life safety codes and conducting fire prevention presentations.

Maintaining an effective all-volunteer fire department presents challenges in recruiting staff and securing adequate funding for operations. There may be an opportunity to consider transitioning to a hybrid arrangement of paid staff supplemented by volunteer staff.

*Fire Station 1*



### Public Works

The Department of Public Works (DPW) supervises the Highway Department (plowing, paving, equipment maintenance), solid waste and recycling, and building facilities. The Department also oversees sewered areas of the town, as well as Town-owned buildings, including capital improvement projects, maintenance, and repairs.

## Recommendations

### Open Space and Parks

#### **7.1 Continue Open Space Preservation Efforts**

- 7.1.1 Continue to preserve open space as opportunities present themselves.
- 7.1.2 Continue to convert managed open space and perceived open space into dedicated open space owned by the Land or Trust.
- 7.1.3 Continue to coordinate open space preservation efforts with the Conservation Commission, Orange Land Trust, and similar organizations.
- 7.2.4 Consider areas of natural diversity when pursuing conservation opportunities.

#### **7.2 Document and Promote Recreational Spaces**

- 7.2.1 Update the Conservation Commission's Guide to Open Spaces.
- 7.2.2 Update the open space inventory in Orange regularly and categorize parcels as appropriate.
- 7.2.3 Document and publicize existing trails and recreational spaces on the Town's website.
- 7.2.4 Create a Trail Plan that documents opportunities to enhance, expand, and connect trails townwide.

#### **7.3 Maintain Investment in Recreational Facilities**

- 7.3.1 Modernize existing recreational infrastructure and implement ADA upgrades where appropriate.
- 7.3.2 Consider the effects of climate change when investing in upgrades to recreational areas.

### Agricultural Lands

#### **7.4 Continue Agricultural/Farmland Preservation Efforts**

- 7.4.1 Continue to preserve existing agricultural lands and lands that have potential for agricultural use.
- 7.4.2 Continue with reduced local tax assessment on agricultural lands (PA-490 farm assessment).
- 7.4.3 Continue to seek ways to support local farms and farmers, including leasing Town land to farmers.

### Historic and Architectural Resources

#### **7.5 Protect Historic Resources**

- 7.5.1 Continue to identify and protect historical and architectural resources and support commissions that protect them.
- 7.5.2 Encourage improvements to the existing local shopping center adjacent to the Orange Historic District.
- 7.5.3 Promote educational programs about historic resources and increase awareness of historic resources through appropriate signage, displays, and events.
- 7.5.4 Offer educational resources for private owners of historic properties and available funding opportunities to support building maintenance.

## Community Facilities

### **7.6 Maintain and Improve Community Facilities and Services**

- 7.6.1 Maintain effective services related to education, public works, public safety/health, and emergency services.*
- 7.6.2 Maintain and improve educational and municipal facilities when needed.*
- 7.6.3 Address the needs of both youth and aging populations through programmatic and facility offerings.*
- 7.6.4 Continue to maintain and improve transportation services for seniors and residents with disabilities.*
- 7.6.5 Consider the options for transitioning to a hybrid paid/volunteer arrangement for the Fire Department.*

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