



# Status of Open Space in Ridgefield



**Prepared by the Ridgefield  
Conservation Commission**

BOS Presentation - February 19, 2020

## Background

- *DEEP Comprehensive Open Space Acquisition Plan* (referred to as the *2016-2020 Green Plan*). Open space is defined by DEEP as:

Any area of undeveloped or relatively natural land, including forest land, land designated as wetland under section 22a-30, and not excluding farm land, the preservation or restriction of the use of which would:

- maintain and enhance the conservation of natural or scenic resources,
- protect natural streams or water supply,
- promote conservation of soils, wetlands, beaches or tidal marshes,
- enhance the value to the public of abutting or neighboring parks, forest, wildlife preserves, nature reservations or sanctuaries or other open spaces,
- enhance public recreation opportunities, or
- preserve historic sites.

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- Open space does not mean undeveloped natural land or land with an unofficial passive recreational use. For land to be termed “open space”, it must be either preserved or protected. It is defined as follows:
  - **Preserved Open Space** – An area of land that has been acquired and is used for open space purposes. Includes DEEP’s State Parks, State Forests, and Wildlife Areas, and Class I and II watershed land.
  - **Protected Open Space** – Any area of land with a restriction that would limit its use to open space. Includes lands subject to conservation restriction, deed restriction, or certain reserved rights.

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- Total estimated open space in Ridgefield is 5,636 acres, or 25.2 percent of the Town’s 22,387 acres of land. Thus, the Town is 1,080 acres short of its stated 30 percent open-space goal of 6,716.

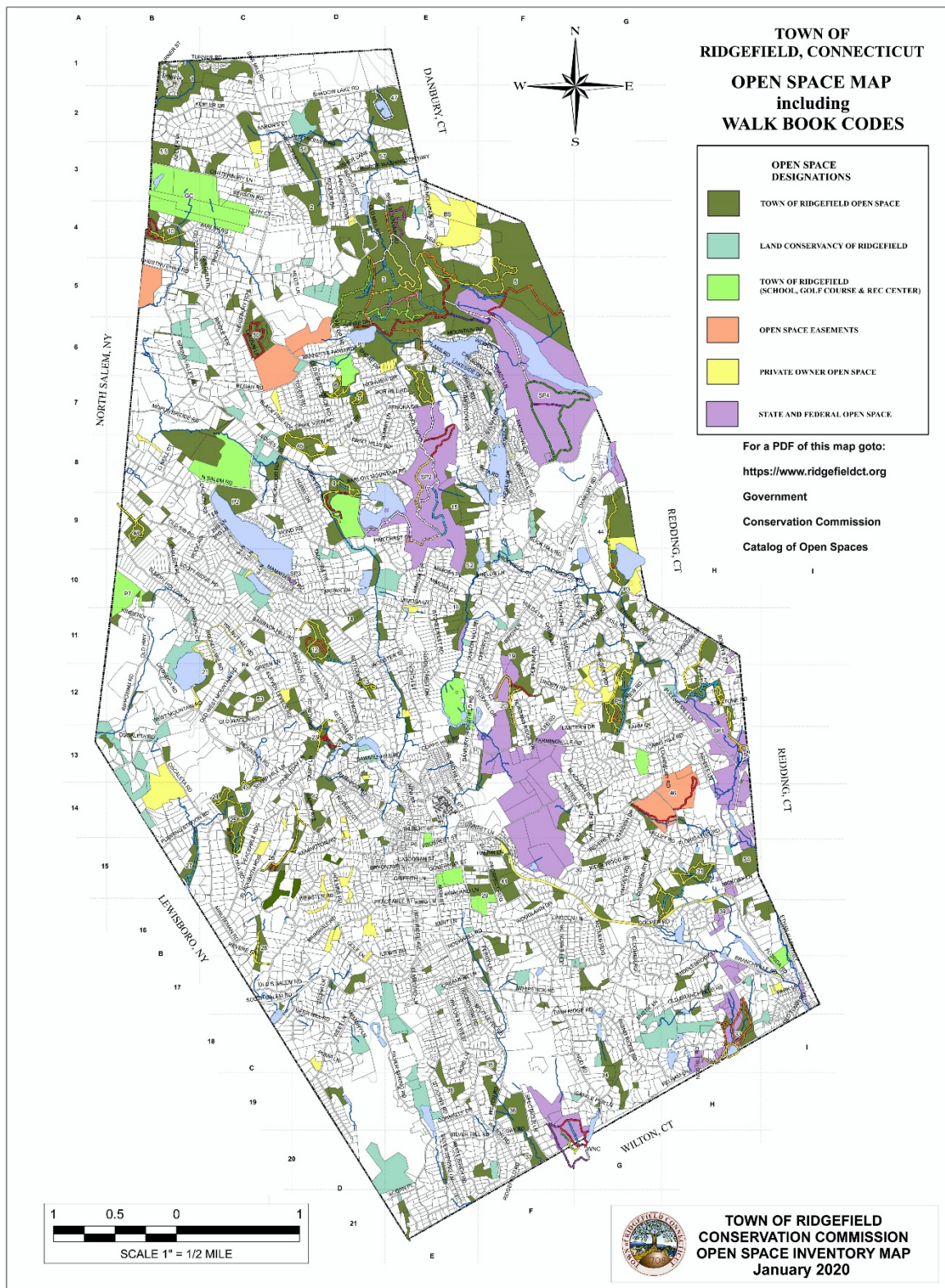


Figure 1

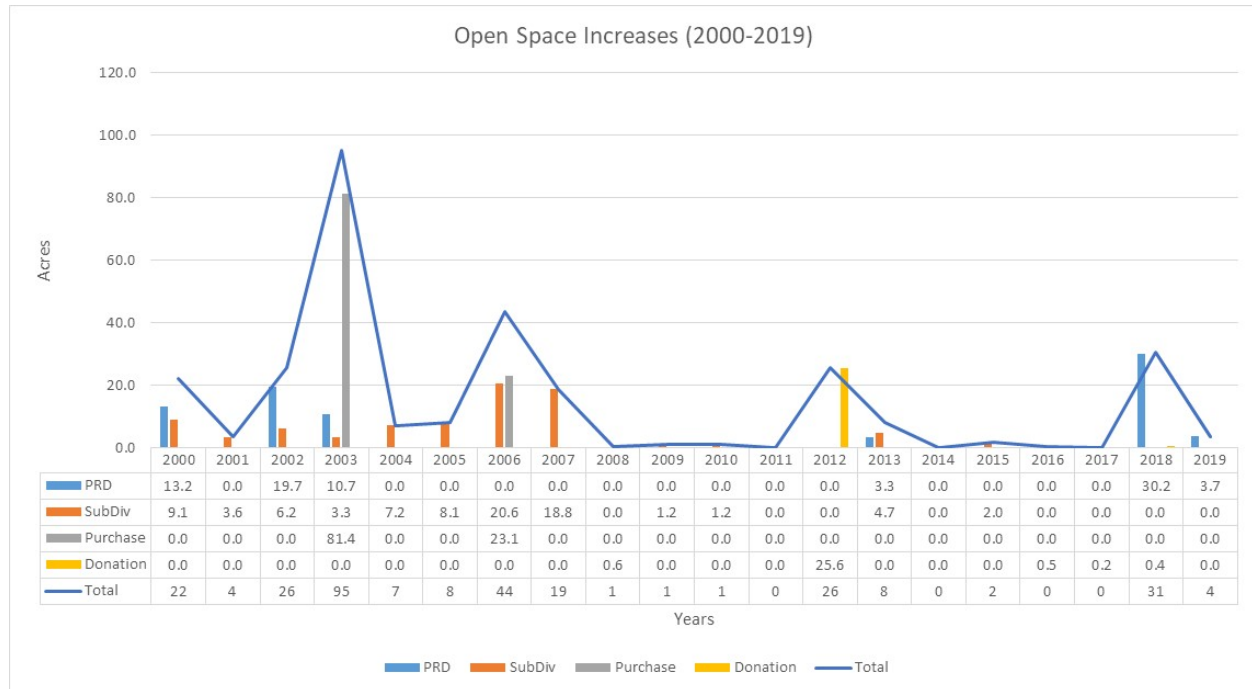
	<b>Town-Owned Open Space</b>	<b>Acres</b>				<b>Acres</b>	
1	Turner Hill/Ridgebury Farms	94		51	Liebowitz Knapp Sanctuary	31	
2	Scodon	35		52	Taylor's Pond	29	
3	Hemlock Hills	385		53	Lynch Brook Road	24	
4	Lake Windwing (also see P1)	63		54	Hickory Lane	21	
5	Pine Mountain	313		55	Keeler Court	37	
6	Peterson Gorge	16		56	Old Trolley	50	
7	Ridgebury Slope	14		57	George Washington Highway	25	
8	Sherwood Refuge	12			Other Owned	491	
9	Kiah's Brook/Titicus Preserve	54					
10	Sarah Bishop	39			<b>Town Conservation Easements</b>	305	
11	Berthier Equestrian Trail	3					
12	Levy Park	46			<b>Parks</b>		
13	Barrack Hill Refuge	9		P1	Lake Windwing	39	
14	High Pastures	8		P2	Richardson Park	29	
15	Limestone Preserve	50		P3	Martin Park	29	
16	Ridgefield Brook (Stonecrest)	33		P4	Sachem Hill	4	
17	Bobby's Court	34		P5	Aldrich Park	52	
18	Topstone Preserve	9		P6	Ballard Park	5	
19,20	John Soluri Preserve (town-owned)	45		P7	Sturges Park	53	
21	Round Pond Preserve	11					
22,23	Mar-Joy Pond/Casey Lane	36			<b>Land Conservancy Open Space</b>	702	
24	West Mountain Refuge:Reed	27					
25	West Mountain Refuge:McManus	28			<b>State and Federal Open Space</b>		
26	Blacksmith Ridge	34		SP1	Norwalk River Env Study Area	10	
27	Colonial Heights	19		SP2	Seth Low Pierrepont State Park	311	
28	Peaceable Refuge	16		SP3	Lake Mamanasco Boat Launch	2	
29	East Ridge Preserve	11		SP4	Bennetts Pond State Park	460	
30	Ivy Hill Road	8		WF	Weir Farm (State)	19	
31	Florida Refuge	63		WF	Weir Farm Federal	37	
32	The Knolls	7		WNC	Woodcock Nature Center (in tow	61	
33	Nod Hill Refuge	30			John Soluri (state portion)	28	
34	Comstock Court (Nod Road)	26			Great Swamp	350	
35	Old Spectacle Lane	4			Floodplains and Other	139	
36,37	Spectacle Swamp/Silvermine Ridg	62					
38	Table Rock	14			<b>Privately Owned Open Space</b>		
39	Whitbeck Preserve	5			Aquarion Water Co.	69	
40	Jill's/Jones Trail	8			Eversource	25	
41	Prospect Ridge	34			Boy Scouts of America	52	
42	Remington Woods	26			Homeowner's Associations	189	
43	West Mountain:Green	9					
44	Laurelwood/Great Pond Area	56			<b>Open Space Summary</b>		
45	Old Stagecoach/Ledges	38			Town of Ridgefield	3,182	
46	Brewster Farm (in easements)	0			Land Conservancy	702	
47	Shadow Lake	59			State and Federal	1,417	
48	Old Sib	21			Privately-Owned Open Space	335	
49	Lakeview Drive	1.0			<b>Total</b>	5,636	
50	McKeon Farm	43					



# History of Property Open Space Increases (2000-2019)

## Town Property

- Only about 300 acres has been added to the roster of town-owned open space in the last 20 years.
- This property was acquired through Planned Residential Development (PRD), subdivision of development properties, town purchase, and land donations.



## Land Conservancy Property

- Only 78 acres were donated in the last 20 years.
- This is in addition to the town-owned increase of about 300 acres bringing added open space to about 380 acres.

### Land Conservancy Open Space Acreage Increases

Type	Pre-2000	2000-2019	Total
Owned	484	47	532
Easements	139	31	170
Total	623	78	702

# Potential for Future Acquisitions

## Review of Specific Parcels

- The commission has identified 1,127 potential acres of space for open space acquisition. Of these lands, only 703 acres are virgin territory. In 2012, the commission estimated that 1,900 acres were available.
- Available property for open space acquisition dropped by 40 percent in 7 to 8 years.
- We need 1,080 acres to meet our 30% goal; there are only 1,040 acres potentially available.

## Financing Open Space Land Acquisitions

Strategies that can be used singularly or in combination are:

- **Town Budget Line Item** - Several towns (e.g., Norwalk, Hebron) include an annual line item in their budget to contribute to an Open Space Land Acquisition Fund.
- **New Tax or Fee** – Any new tax or fee will be subject to significant scrutiny but could be used for land acquisition. The high approval rate for open space in Ridgefield in recent polls may permit this strategy to be successful.
- **Bonding** – Open space bonds have raised \$250,000,000 in Connecticut since 1988. Local towns who have used this approach include Danbury and Newtown. About 88 percent of town bonding initiatives that were proposed have been approved by voters statewide.
- **Payment in Lieu of Open Space** – Ridgefield currently uses this approach. Other towns are using a higher percentage of land value in their calculation and we could do this also. Since 1995, the commission has received about \$540,000 in cash with about half of that since 2011.
- **Tax Abatement for Conservation** – State law allows municipalities to waive taxes for property owners in exchange for preservation of their land for open space. Danbury is a town in this region that uses this approach. The result is land for open space rather than funds to acquire land.
- **Seller Conveyance Tax** – This tax in Connecticut includes state (0.75 percent and up depending on the value of the property) and local (0.25 percent for most towns) portions. Ridgefield currently has a 0.25 percent seller conveyance tax. In the fiscal year ending 2019, the tax collected was \$700,017, which goes to the Town General Fund as a revenue. Some towns use a portion of these funds for open space acquisition funding.
- **Pending CT bill** – A statewide buyers' conveyance tax has been proposed to be used for funding open space acquisition. Towns would have the ability to opt in or opt out of this program.

## Review Potential for Deed Restricting More Town Parcels

- There are a number of larger town parcels that have not been included in our calculation of open space acreages as they do not meet the State of CT definitions of preserved or protected open space. Notably, these properties include the Golf Course, Recreation Center, Schlumberger, and schools. If some portions of these properties were deed restricted to prevent future development; that action could add to the Town's inventory of open space.