

Princeton Trail Vision and Action Plan

Spring 2021



Introduction

A committee of town residents operating in conjunction with the Princeton Open Space Committee (OSC) has developed a vision and action plan for Princeton's trails. This document outlines this vision and explains the evolution and management of the trail projects.

The project builds on the prior work of the Trails Around Princeton (TAP), a designation the committee will continue to use as a brand for the project.

The vision was informed by the experiences of the Princeton trail groups, other local trail groups and a survey sent by the OSC to Princeton residents.

Overall Vision

We envision the development and maintenance of multi-use, non-motorized, four-season trail network providing safe connections to key areas of town for all residents thereby promoting active recreation/healthier lifestyle and less dependence on motorized vehicles.

Objectives

The principal objectives of the TAP vision are to:

1. Develop and maintain a non-motorized, multi-use trail network for all residents
2. Increase awareness of trails as recreational opportunities for Princeton residents
3. Promote trail usage by Princeton residents as an alternative to motorized vehicles and to encourage a more active, healthier lifestyle
4. Provide off-road areas and connections near most residents' homes.
5. Identify trail connections that are useful to Princeton residents and establish priorities for development of these connections.
6. Provide a framework for future decisions regarding expansion and improvements to trails.
7. Recruit a strong team of trail stewards

Action Items

The table below shows all action items that have been derived from the Vision process, along with a rough indication of priority. Priority 1 is roughly 2021, 2 is 2022, etc.

Goal/Tasks						
1 Trail Network Development						
	Action Items	Supports Objectives	Start Date	Targeted End Date	Responsibility	Comments
1.1	Provide list of all known trail connections, those that link one area to another.					
1.2	Identify priority trail connections needing to be developed					
1.3	Complete Development of the Worcester Road West Trails					
1.4	Design and gain approval for the Red Fox Farm Trail					
1.5	Explore and gain landowner approval for connection from Calamint Hill area to Brooks Station Road					
1.6	Develop a planned and documented Biking route around town					
	<i>NOTE: Additional action items will be added as we progress with the vision</i>					
2 Signage						
	Action Items		Start Date	Targeted End Date	Responsibility	Comments
2.4	Bullock/McElroy and Cary Trail Kiosk and Signs					We have PLT OK to proceed

2.2	Four Corners Kiosk and Signs					We have an indication from Concom to proceed.
2.3	Peabody-Metcalf Kiosk and Signs					We have PLT OK to proceed
2.4	Gregory-Alexander Kiosk and Signs					We have PLT OK to proceed
2.5	Goodnow Park Kiosk and Signs					Parks and Rec manages this property
2.6	Thomas Prince Nature Trails					Work with the school and Wachusett Meadow volunteers
2.7	Lovers Lane					Town Lane
2.8						

3 Communication and Documentation

	Action Items		Start Date	Targeted End Date	Responsibility	Comments
3.1	Provide list and map of all existing "approved" trails					
3.2	Reformat website to new, easier form					
3.3	Expand the website where needed to cover all trails and connections					
3.4	Princeton Hikes! To draw in more Princeton residents					
3.5	Plan a 'Trail Summit' to review trail strategy					
3.6	Provide Trail Information to residents through presentations (for example Library program)					

4 Management

	Action Items		Start Date	Targeted End Date	Responsibility	Comments
4.1	Formalize new OSC Organizational Role after review with select board					
4.2	Develop a trail maintenance plan					
4.3	Develop a Memorandum of Understanding format to use with private landowners					To clarify the role of both parties and the nature of the agreement.
4.4	Establish an annual Trail Summit to talk to a wider group of landowners about trail status and plans					
4.5	Redefine Trail Steward role and membership during startup of the Worcester Road West trail development					



Trail Network

We aim to develop a town-wide trail network that primarily uses existing trails like the (Midstate Trail) to circle the town and provide access between all areas of town. As envisioned, this network will connect areas like Leominster State Forest, Wachusett Mountain State Reservation, Mass Audubon Wachusett Meadow Sanctuary, Savage Hill Wildlife Management Area, Krashes Field, and East Princeton, as well as the many other conservation areas protected by the Princeton Land Trust and other land designated as open space. Connections will also be developed to include areas like Thomas Prince School, Princeton Center, and the Princeton Business District (Post Office Place, Monty's Market, the Mountain Barn).

Princeton has a lot of trails, formal (marked and mapped) and informal, that can be strung together to create a good trail network around town with minimal new trail development. However, there are trail sections that we do not have permission to use, and there are sections that we can use but cannot place on a map or promote.

Additionally, we expect the network to connect to trail systems in other towns. For example, the Midstate Trail connects to the north and south, trails in Leominster State Forest will connect into Leominster leading to Monoosnoc, Sholan Farms, and Sterling's Trails, and trails in South Princeton will connect to Trout Brook in Holden.

Working from the map of existing trails, we will work over time to prioritize links, seek permission from landowners, design, build, and communicate the trail route. This will involve working with landowners to explore possibilities (see Landowner section), designing trail development projects, mapping, marking, and signing new sections, and making residents aware of the resulting trails

We hope to use existing trails in most cases. Where new trails are needed to meet the objectives, we will consider adding new trails.

Attachment 1 shows an idea of how existing formal trails might be extended, primarily using existing informal trails, to create town-wide trails that connect areas of town. Five 'segments' have been defined, and all require some work to accomplish the vision (two segments are close to completion). The vision is to implement these 'town wide' trails with connection 'spurs' to improve trail coverage in Princeton. Attachment 1 also includes a list of connections that have been mentioned during the vision project (primarily in the survey).

As Landowner approval is gained for sections of the trails, we will update the action plan to show additional work required. As a starting point, we have a few trail projects that are already included in our action plan.

The network vision will evolve over time. There are several existing links that may not be practical due to landowner preferences to keep land private. As trail connections are approved, we will add them to the action plan.

Multi-Use

Where practical and permitted, trails will be designed to support all non-motorized use including hiking, biking, horses, hunting, and winter sports. The vision looks to develop a network for ALL use types. However, in some cases we will need to find alternate paths based on use limitations by landowners or based on ground conditions.

For example, hikers may prefer steep and rocky trails in some cases, which are poor for bikes and horses. Some trails in Wachusett Mountain State Reservation do not allow bikes. And hikers will enjoy walking through Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary which restricts use types.

Hunting is permitted in most areas of Princeton and around most of our trails. We plan to make residents more aware of hunting and more conscious of the need to wear appropriately colored clothing during hunting season.

We are aware of the interest in providing more accessible trails and take pride that both Wachusett Mountain State Reservation as well as Mass Audubon's Wachusett Meadow Wildlife Sanctuary provide all person accessibility to some trails and facilities. The OSC will look for additional opportunities to provide for use by people with disabilities.

Signage

A standard approach for signage will be developed and rolled out for most hiking areas controlled by the Town and local collaborating organizations including the Princeton Land Trust. State owned properties such as Wachusett Mountain State Reservation and Savage Hill Wildlife Management Area have their own guidelines and sign standards. Other sites such as the nature trails at Thomas Prince School may also have variations in signage. We plan to develop consistent signage that is easy to follow, functional, and designed for low-cost and longevity.

We look to provide a kiosk at each major trailhead, with a map, description, and use restrictions. Kiosks will also provide more in-depth information, accessible via QR Code. Kiosks may also be photographed for use during a hike. Kiosk size will vary based on the complexity of the trail system. Kiosks will have a common heading to tie trails into the Trails Around Princeton (TAP) network. The TAP logo will be prominently displayed, and a link will be provided to more general information about TAP.

Trails will be blazed with paint. Major routes will be blazed with blue dots, and spur trails will be blazed with white dots.

Trail junction signs will be provided where deemed useful. These will be painted wooded signs, brown background with white lettering.

Attachment 2 lists the current signage needs for existing trail areas in town.

Responsibility

Current responsibility for trail maintenance and development is informal and shared between various groups. This has worked acceptably. However, as we ask more landowners for permission to utilize their property for connections, a more established and consistent approach towards trail maintenance responsibilities may become important. We want to be able to assure landowners that their property and concerns will be taken care of, and that they have a clear party to contact if there are problems.

The Princeton Open Space Committee will coordinate trail work and assume responsibility and accountability for trail management. The OSC will set priorities, drive the design and development of trails, set up regular maintenance to trails and signage, and coordinate all trail-related work. It will oversee communications and trail promotion activities. It will also liaison with trail groups and activities from other towns, including the Regional Planning Committee trail groups and projects.

The OSC will work with volunteers from town, maintaining the Trail Stewards organization for hands-on trail work.

Private groups, such as Princeton Land Trust (PTC) and Mass Audubon, will be responsible for their trails, but the OSC will look to work with these private groups on improvement ideas and connection projects.

A plan for trail maintenance will be developed and serve as our pledge to landowners that the trails will be kept clean and clear, the trails will not be abused, and use restrictions are being respected.

Funding

The plan is to develop and maintain trails in a cost-effective manner. Most, if not all, of the labor will come from volunteers. However, funding may be needed for signage, bridge and bench construction, or other activities. We expect that these funds will be small, and that fundraising can be kept informal.

On trails owned by Princeton Land Trust or the Town of Princeton, the owner will be responsible for providing the funds.

As needed, the OSC will explore various forms of funding, including grants, business sponsorships, and private donations. Because Mass Law does not allow town committees to solicit donations, fundraising will need to be done by a third-party group. We will plan to use the Parks and Recreation fund raising group for this purpose.

Working with Private Landowners

For a number of the desired connections, links will need to be permitted over land owned privately or by the State of Massachusetts. We will work with these landowners to seek permission to utilize their property for a trail.

Ideally, private trail segments could be permanently pledged to the TAP through ownership or a formal right-of-way, easement, or other conservation commitment. However, setting up formal agreements is often difficult and costly, and landowners may be reluctant to make such a strong commitment. Therefore, we will start out in most cases with informal hand-shake agreements or with a simple ‘Memorandums of Understanding’ (MOUs). An MOU will allow landowners to opt out of the commitment if problems arise. Also, an MOU may ask a landowner to provide advanced warning if the agreement needs to be changed terminated. And the OSC may promise to check the trail annually to identify any problems.

The OSC will develop an approach to promotion and management that ensures landowners that trails will not be overused, and that parking will not become a problem. The OSC will communicate with landowners to make sure their needs are being met, and to make improvements to the trails where warranted.

For State lands, DCR Watershed and MassWildlife have restrictions on their land regarding clearing, marking, or promoting trails. As a result, some of our segments may not be marked or publicly mapped. They CAN be used by hikers. Over time, we intend to work with DCR to make the trails more useable by Princeton residents.

We recognize that we are not likely to get approval for all segments of the envisioned trail network at the start. We will continue to work with landowners to see if we can find a solution that addresses their concerns. However we also plan to leave some segments ‘Wild’...that is...without signage or maps to allow for exploration.

Parking

A goal is to reduce the need for residents to drive to trails, however there is still a need for some trailhead parking around town. Parking areas will be kept small to help keep trails uncrowded. We will seek to place parking areas away from residential areas.

To support year-round use of recreational facilities we will seek ways to keep parking lots open during the winter and cleaned up during annual trail cleanup projects.

We will advocate to relieve excessive on-road parking for trails in popular areas such as several trailheads around Wachusett Mountain.

Promotion and Documentation

The OSC currently has available, via the Town's website, a generous amount of trail and hikes information. As part of the TAP vision, trail documentation will be reorganized and streamlined. The intent is to provide Princeton residents with key trail information, including trailhead location, distance, difficulty, and various other elements. The information contained on the site will serve to help trail users make effective and safe use decisions.

Having a centralized location for all Princeton trails will only be beneficial if residents know it exists. Therefore, as part of the trail documentation redesign, we will look for ways to effectively inform residents of how to access this information. In doing so we hope to provide residents with ways that they can continue to enjoy the type of natural environment that makes living here so special.

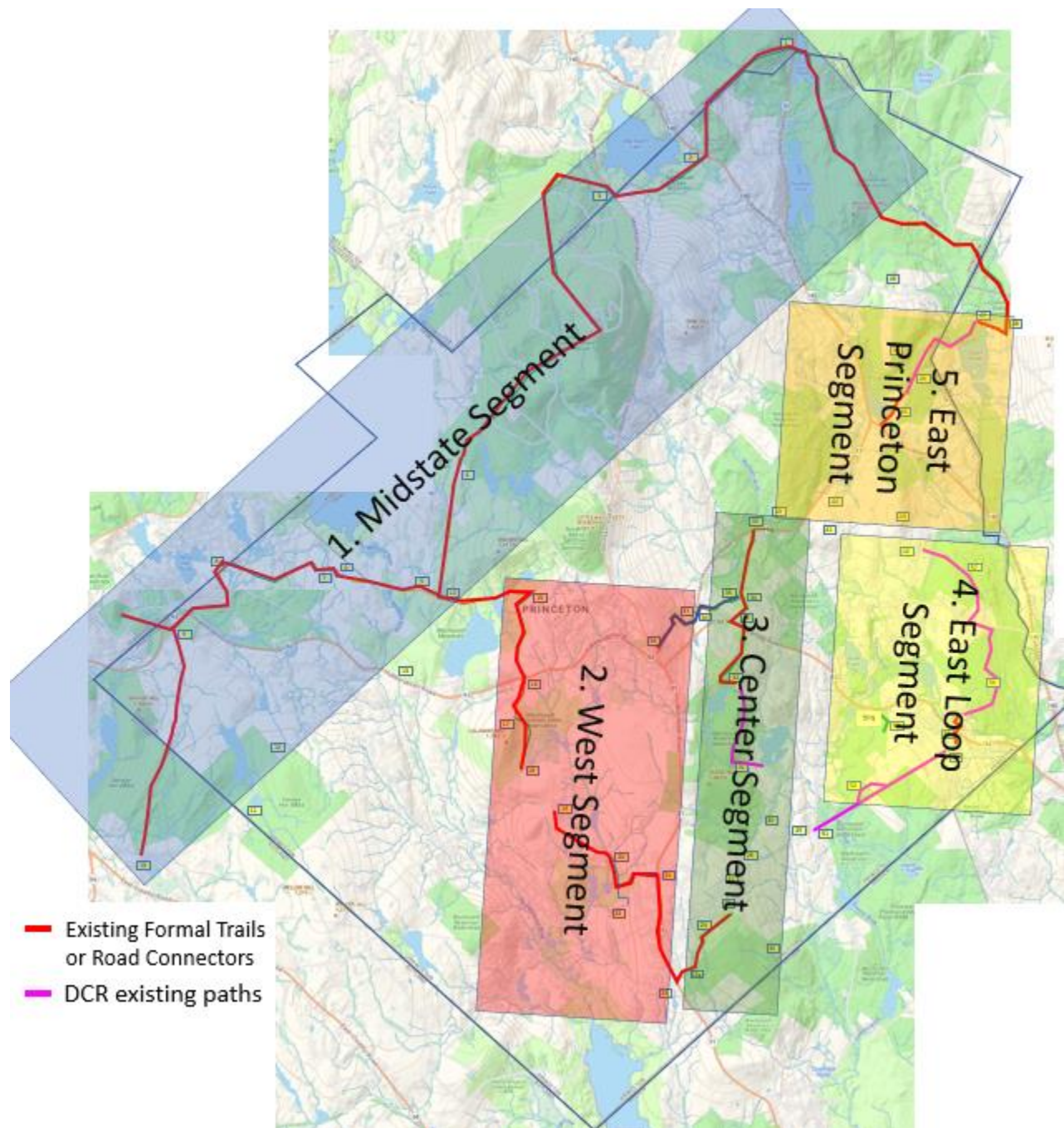
In addition to the website documentation, we will plan to hold periodic events to inform Princeton residents of the available trails. For example, we may host an annual a trail summit to talk about trail priorities and plans, and conduct library presentations to residents to make people aware of the town trails. Also, we will continue to host guided hikes over trails in Princeton and surrounding towns.

We hope to keep many of the Princeton-specific trails quiet, and so our strategy will be to use communication channels like the town website to keep documentation on these trails. In addition, other activities such as Princeton hikes will be more strongly focused on Princeton resident.

Attachment 1: Trail Vision

Princeton has a lot of existing trails that can be connected to form a trail that passes close to many areas of town. While there are a few places where new trails are needed, much of this network exists and can be walked today. But we lack formal agreements with landowners in some cases, and in other cases landowners permit trail use but do not allow marking or mapping of trails.

The map below shows a rough plan for creating a town-wide trail and explains the challenge ahead for the five segments indicated. Existing trails and useable roadways are shown behind the segment boxes. Private trails are NOT shown in detail on the map.



Map of Princeton showing the existing or permitted trails/road (red) and 'segments' of the Trail Around Princeton' vision.

Some notes about the segments:

1. Midstate Segment: formal marked trails are available for this segment. There is one area where use is limited (no bikes/horses) and we will be looking for a way to bridge the gap with a bypass.
2. West Segment: We have formal trails in place or planned for most of this segment but lack approval for a .25 mile section. This is a high priority because it is close to completion and allows a walk or bike ride from Midstate to South Princeton.
3. Center Segment: There are some excellent trails on this segment but while DCR and Nimrod do allow access and are willing to allow group hikes through the trails, they do not want the trails to be promoted. Therefore we will leave this as a 'wild' area, where residents can explore the trails, and can learn them through guided hikes and word of mouth.
4. East Loop: This segment is nearly all on DCR land, so it can be walked but bikes and horses are not allowed at present. As with the center section, we will leave this as a 'wild' section.
5. East Princeton Segment: We have good connections from East Princeton to Leominster State Park. We will need landowner approval for trails from Krashes Field to East Princeton.

We plan to use existing trails for the vast majority of these trails. Restrictions will apply and over time we will seek to reduce the restrictions.

In addition to the major 'segments' shown above, we realize that there are many connections that are of interest to residents, and our plan is to work on these in parallel with work on the larger segments. The following is a list of connections requests that were suggested by residents in the town-wide trail survey. Where a connection will be implemented as part of the town-wide segments, the second column shows the segment involved. The third column shows where a trail already exists.

Many of these connections will be implemented as we work through the creation of a town-wide trail network, and the column to the left indicates which segments will create the various connection. Many of these connections will require some help from private landowners.

Connection	Town Segment	Trail Exists
Beaman/Mirick Trails	No	Some
Calamint Hill to Brooks Station Rd	No	No
Calamint Hill To Center	No	No
Calamint Hill to Wachusett	West	Yes
Center to Post Office Place	West, Center	No
Center to TPS Trails	Center	No
Coal Kiln to TPS	Center	No
Connect DCR Lands	Various	Some
Downhill Ski connections to trailheads	No	No
East Princeton to Center	East Princeton, Center	Yes
East Princeton to Gleason Road	East Princeton	Yes
East Princeton to Redemption Rock	No	No
Gleason to Krashes Field	East	Yes
Lovers Lane Connections	No	Yes
Midstate Trail to Old Town Dump	No	No

Merriam Rd to Town Center	Center	No
Old Mill Rd to Jefferson Rd	No	No
Parallel to Mountain Rd (East Side)	No	No
Quinapoxit Reservoir	No	No
Redwood Road to Hickory Drive	No	Yes
South Calamint Hill DCR Land	No	No
South Worcester Rd to Calamint Hill	West	No
South Worcester Rd to Coal Kiln/TPS	Center	Yes
South Worcester Road to Brooks Station	West	Yes
South Worcester Road to Wachusett Mountain	West, Midstate	No
Thompson Road to Four Corners	No	Yes

Attachment 2: Signage and Marking Needs

During this strategy work, a survey was done of existing Princeton Trail areas, to evaluate the needs for improved signage. The following is a recap of the work needed. This work will be built into the action plan in coming years.

Four Corners and Old Colony

- Large Kiosk (existing) with new Map including a site specific map as well as map that shows connections east and west, Mid State Trail as well as alternative on road route for mountain bikes, horses and dog walkers.

Goodnow Park

- Need a small kiosk with map in our format. I think only one by the annex.
- Needs blazing
- Directional signs: Start of the 'east loop' that goes up by the tree, Other end of the east loop, coming back from the pine area, and to show the way down to Hubbardston Road
- Directional sign at Hubbardston road pointing up across from pizza shop
- Consider sign on Mountain Road. By large oak tree so people can walk along sidewalk and then walk into park there- it is all public land

PLT Gregory/Alexander Trails

- A small kiosk with a map on both ends- Prospect St and Rt 31
- Directional signs where the loops converge, including a sign for the Gregory Spring spur
- Directional sign pointing down to the Alexander property
- Refresh Blazing
- Rick is concerned about the way the trail heads down the hill from Prospect St. It is steep and eroding and may consider re-routing it to do more of a switchback in that area.

Cary Trail from Merriam Rd to McElroy/Bullock *(near Gregory/ Alexander to McElroy / Bullock Conservation Areas off Bullock Lane with Trails that connect to Krashes Field)*

- Need trail head signs on Rt 31 and on Merriam

PLT Bullock/McElroy Trails and Krashes Field - Princeton Land Trust

- We have kiosks at both ends but a large new map needs to be produced to go in the kiosks and can include abutting trails and conservation areas including Peabody/Metcalf/Poor and Cary Trail to Alexander/Gregory Spring Conservation Areas.
- Need to mark the three trail connections at the Bullock Field/ Woods connections - Cary Trail, (2) Trail Connections to and from Krashes Field
- Directional signs at the two trail terminuses on the Bullock side and the one on the Krashes side
- Directional sign where the cross-trail (the one blazed white) hits the main loop
- Directional sign for the 'Cary Trail';
- Blazing was refreshed last summer for the blue blazes

Princeton Land Trust Peabody Metcalf Poor Loop

- Small kiosk at parking lot
- Directional signs at the loop terminus and where the trail turns right up to the poor stone
- Directional signs for the spur trail to the dam
- Blazing has not been done on the spur trail to the dam. Rick did refresh the blazing on the main loop last summer.
- I would not do anything on the trail that leads down to the Bice/Hall field since we do not own that piece.

PLT Red Fox Farm

- Once landowner preferences are determined, trails can be blazed, and possible additional connections mapped including those to Trout Brook and possible route through Nimrod lands with permissions

Thomas Prince Schools Nature Trails

- large kiosk needed by ball field entrance and butterfly garden with map showing the trails
- Blazing could be updated in a few spots, but it has good plastic disc blazes on most trails – red, blue and yellow
- Work with Clair Degutis who oversees Junior Trial Guide Program at the school and with Mass Audubon whose volunteers help maintain trails and ponding platform by vernal pool

Lovers Lane/Overlook Road

- Add a small kiosk and map at the end of Lovers Lane, include City of Worcester regulations regarding access to water supply watershed lands adjacent to road/walking path, no blazing needed on main path
- Work with the Overlook Farm folks on signage for trails on their property. We have not talked to them in a long time. It is in Rutland, but would be nice to include their trails on any kiosk, maybe help with markings and signage?

Savage Hill WMA – OSC agreed that this is Mass Wildlife lands and local signage not appropriate