

## **B. Public and Non-Profit Parcels**

### **Parcels Owned by the Town**

The town of Essex owns 107 parcels (41 of which are under one acre in size) totaling approximately 510 acres. Some of the larger parcels contain buildings and/or recreational land as well as open space in the form of marshes, forested land, or beaches. Town-owned parcels include:

- Town Landings
- Town Hall
- Memorial Park/Ball fields
- Transfer Station
- Centennial Grove/Field of Dreams
- Chebacco Lake
- Conomo Point
- Coolidge Trust
- Essex Elementary & Middle School
- Land managed by the Water Department

A description of these parcels appears below.

#### **Centennial Grove/Field of Dreams**

Description/Condition: Centennial Grove is a 41-acre recreational area on Chebacco Lake, which includes the Town's only fresh water beach. It also includes 2 baseball diamonds and soccer fields, two recreational structures, and a nature trail.

Managing Agency: Board of Selectmen

Current Use: Heavy use for seasonal baseball and soccer, as well as the Essex Youth Commission's summer day camp. Boat landing adjacent to beach allows limited boat access.

Recreation Potential: Great recreation potential for activities including hiking, bird watching and nature study.

Public Access/Access for People with Disabilities: No special access. Stairs to beach/steep hill limit accessibility.

#### **Chebacco Lake**

Description/Condition: 209 acre Great Pond shared by the Towns of Essex and Hamilton.

Managing Agency: Commonwealth of Massachusetts.

Current Use: Swimming, canoeing, water-skiing, kayaking, fishing, picnicking, and boating. Two town landings

Recreation Potential: Bird watching; Hiking; Nature study; Scenic Vistas

Public Access/Access for People with Disabilities: No special access.

Degree of Protection: This is a watershed and part of the recharge area for the town's three wells (two permanent and one seasonal). Jet Skis are currently prohibited. A wellhead protection bylaw restricts development around the wells. The lake is also one of the most productive North Shore Alewife habitats, and is considered by the Department of Marine Fisheries to be in good condition. Current beaver damming problems may affect capacity of Alewives to reach the lake, and are being monitored by Chebacco Lake Watershed Association and the state.

### **Conomo Point**

Description/Condition: There are two beaches on Conomo Point, a privately owned dock, a town landing, panoramic vistas and offshore anchorage. This land area was sold to the town by John Proctor in the 1800s for \$4,600. The town has since leased parcels to individuals, who have built houses on the leased property. The leases are due to expire in 2011, and in 1997 the town voted not to renew them. It is vital that the town focus its immediate attention on a long-range plan for this area. Several groups have been working on suggested uses for the site, and a consensus should be reached long before the leases expire in 2011.

Managing Agency: The Board of Selectmen, in their role as the Conomo Point Commissioners.

Current Use: Since most of the land is currently leased, its use is presently limited to the leaseholders, with the exception of two rocky beaches with limited parking accessible only to those with town resident stickers.

Recreation Potential: Bird watching, hiking, nature study, scenic vistas, water sports.

Public Access/Access for people with Disabilities: no special access

Degree of Protection: Currently unprotected. Conomo Point's natural beauty and recreation potential make it an important area for the town to focus on in its planning efforts, so that options for both preservation and access can be explored.

### **Essex Elementary & Middle School**

Description/Condition: The school occupies ten acres off Story Street. It includes the Eagle's Nest (an extensive playground built in 1987), a retaining pond, playing fields and outdoor basketball hoops.

Managing Agency: The Manchester-Essex Regional School Committee manages the school building and the surrounding grounds. The Essex PTO maintains the playground.

Current Use: Within the school are an indoor gymnasium and a cafeteria. The school grounds have a playground area and basketball courts. These facilities are used by the school during school hours and are available to the public after hours. The school building is currently used regularly for meeting of Town Boards, youth basketball, adult basketball, volleyball, karate, and adult exercise classes.

Recreation Potential: Use of the gymnasium and cafeteria for sports and classes. The Eagle's Nest playground, designed by noted playground architect Robert Leathers and constructed entirely by town residents, includes creative play areas constructed of natural materials. It is highly regarded throughout the region, and is frequently used by residents and non-residents alike.

Public Access/Access for People with Disabilities: The school provides adequate public parking and handicapped access.

### **Memorial Park**

Description/Condition: Memorial Park is located on a 16-acre multiple-use town parcel, which also houses Essex Town Hall, the Police & Fire Station, and a new public parking facility. Dedicated in 1949 in memory of Herbert S. Goodhue, a young Essex man killed in World War II, this park features two tennis courts, three baseball diamonds, basketball facilities, and a playground re-constructed in 2003.

Current Use: The playground and playing fields are widely used by the public. Public parking was expanded in 2003. The Park is the site of numerous town-wide events, such as the Easter Egg Hunt, Clamfest, Essex Pride Week, the Holiday Parade in winter, and the Chowder Festival.

The regional school committee has recently contemplated the use of this land for the school district's athletic fields. This may present problems, as the fields are often wet since they are immediately adjacent to salt marsh and are prone to flooding. It should also be noted that the fields and courts are located in the salt marsh buffer zone, making it imperative that the use of chemical fertilizers and pesticides be prohibited or strictly limited, and that runoff from the courts be properly directed to appropriate drainage areas. Additionally, it is important to note that the Town Hall, a historic building, is in severe need of repair and renovation.

Recreation Potential: Organized and recreational sports.

Public Access/Access for People with Disabilities: The site has handicapped parking, and the new playground features some equipment for children with disabilities.

Degree of Protection: The land is on the marsh and has some wetland restrictions due to its location in the salt marsh buffer zone. The pump station is also located there.

### **Town Hall**

Description/Condition: Built in 1894 out of stone and wood in the Queen Anne style of architecture. Because of the age of the building, it is in continual need of repair and currently is in fairly severe need of repair.

Managing Agency: The Board of Selectmen.

Current Use: Town offices/meeting rooms and the town library (which is also used for community classes and gatherings).

Recreation Potential: Limited to use of the library.

Deed Restrictions: The T.O.H.P. Burnham Trust, which funds repairs to the building, specifies that it will house town offices and a library.

Public Access/Access for People with Disabilities: The building has a handicapped-access ramp, as well as handicapped parking. There is no handicapped access beyond the first floor of the building, but a sign on the first floor informs the public that the Town Clerk's office will summon whoever is needed from second floor offices.

### **Town Landings**

Description/Condition: Assessors' maps show 17 town landings on the Essex River, and two on Chebacco Lake. However, narrow roads, lack of parking facilities, and river landings that were established when people still walked their dories on dollies to the river render many of them unsuitable for modern use. Please refer to the chart below regarding problems with Town Landings.

**TABLE F. PROBLEMS WITH TOWN LANDINGS AS THEY  
APPEAR ON ASSESSORS' MAPS OR ARE OTHERWISE  
DOCUMENTED**

	<i>Narrow</i>	<i>Access Blocked</i>	<i>Marsh</i>	<i>Certain Tides Only</i>
<b><i>TOWN LANDINGS</i></b>				
Apple Street Bridge	X			
Mill/Apple Street	X	X		
Landing Road			X	
Behind Town Hall			X	X

Behind Ballpark		X	X	
West of Bridge			X	X
“Shipbuilding Acre”				
“Woodman’s Beach”				
Water Street	X			
Billy’s Point	X			
Boyd’s Landing	X	X		
Island Road	X		X	
Robbins Island	X	X	X	X
Robbins Island (II?)	X		X	X
Conomo Lane	X		X	X
Clammer’s Beach			X	
Front Beach				
<b>CHEBACCO LAKE LANDINGS</b>				
Red Gate Road	X	X		
Centennial Grove				

Managing Agency: The Town Harbormaster oversees the use of the Town Landings and enforces parking regulations.

Current Use: The principal seven-acre town landing on the causeway sees heavy summer use from recreational boaters, and year-round use from local clammers. Swimming is not permitted at the site. The other landings see use consistent with their accessibility.

Recreation Potential: Primarily for summer water sports.

Public Access/Access for People with Disabilities: A resident sticker is needed to park at the landings. The main town landing site has handicapped parking. A parking lot constructed in 2003 behind the Police/Fire Station on Martin Street provides additional parking for residents and non-residents wishing to use the main town landing site. Most of the other town-landings have limited access and parking.

### **Transfer Station**

Description/Condition: A 21-acre parcel located off of Martin Street, this multi-use site houses DPW barns, as well as a transfer and recycling station. A significant portion of the acreage is marshland, including an active stream.

Current Use: The transfer station is equipped for the disposal of trash and various recyclable items, including glass, metal, plastic, paper, clothing (via donation boxes). Scrap metal and large appliances, such as refrigerators, stoves, and computers, are also recyclable here.

Recreation Potential: No recreational uses are applicable to this site.

Public Access/Access for People with Disabilities: Essex residents who pay a yearly fee of \$100 (\$50 for senior citizens over age 65) are eligible to use the transfer station for their trash and recyclable materials. The trash compactor has drive-up access and an operator is available to assist people with disabilities, but the recycling stations are not readily handicapped-accessible (some stairs, etc.) and staffing is limited.

Degree of Protection: None

### **Water Department Parcels (Wellfields/Water Tank/Filtration Plant)**

Description/Condition: The Water Department manages three wellfields in town (one is seasonal only), the water tank on Craft Hill and the filtration plant.

Recreation Potential: No recreation activities are recommended for these sites, which are in the Water Resource District and subject to DPW regulations. Building allowed through special permit process only.

Public Access/Access for People with Disabilities: To protect the Town's water supply, public access to the well fields is discouraged.

### **Miscellaneous Town-owned Parcels**

Description/Condition: The town owns additional miscellaneous, scattered parcels that range from forest on the south side of Town to open marshland on the east side of Town. In the early days of Essex, landowners were deeded woodlots to supply them with firewood and marsh lots to supply them with hay. Over the years, subsequent generations of family members ceased to use many of these lots and knowledge of their existence, much less the necessity to pay taxes on them, subsided. The Town has since claimed some of these parcels as tax title land. Since a number of these parcels are less than one acre and some see compound usage, they have proven difficult to completely quantify in town records. According to research conducted by the Manchester-Essex Conservation Trust, over 120 acres of tax-title land is owned by the Town within the Woods, and can be voted into conservation at any time.<sup>1</sup>

There are two cemeteries: the 12-acre Spring Street Cemetery and the Old Burial Grounds on Main Street.

There is also the Coolidge Trust land off Southern Ave., to be held forever as a public forest or woods park. This land was preserved well ahead of public recognition of the value of conservation lands. It consists of eight acres in two strips, one on each side of Southern Avenue.

### **Parcels Owned by the State**

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<sup>1</sup> Helen Bethell, Executive Director, MECT, personal communication, January 21, 2007.

The Commonwealth of Massachusetts owns five parcels totaling 61 acres, 40 of which are marsh, the others of which abut state roadways.

### **Parcels Owned by Government and Nonprofit Groups**

The following government and nonprofit groups own protected parcels in Essex:

- Essex County Greenbelt Association
- Manchester-Essex Conservation Trust
- The Society for The Preservation of New England Antiquities
- The Trustees of Reservations
- Commonwealth of Massachusetts, Division of Fisheries and Wildlife

A description of these parcels is below.

### **Essex County Greenbelt Association**

Greenbelt, a not-for-profit land trust, owns ten properties totaling 255.5 acres of open space in town, including the following:

- Choate Marshes, two parcels (17 acres)
- Cox Reservation, Eastern Avenue, three parcels (31 acres)
- Corbett Property adjacent to Cox (26 acres)
- Essex Marsh (17.5 acres)
- Hopkins Property (5 acres)
- Kelleher Property (5 acres)
- Reinert Property, John Wise Avenue (36 acres)
- Weld Reservation, Apple Street/Rocky Hill Rd. (106 acres)
- Warren Memorial Reservation, Andrews Street (12 acres)

Description: Open fields, wooded lots and marshland.

Current Use: These parcels are used for hiking and wildlife observation.

Recreation Potential: See current use.

Public Access: Open to the public, with some off street parking

Degree of Protection: Permanently protected

### **Manchester-Essex Conservation Trust**

MECT, a not-for-profit land trust, protects 213 separate parcels totaling 586 acres of open space in town.

Description/Condition: Primarily wooded lots.

Current Use: Hiking, nature study

Recreation Potential: See current use.

Public Access: Foot trails available to the public.

Degree of Protection: Permanently protected.

### **The Society for the Preservation of New England Antiquities**

Description/Condition: Cogswell's Grant, 60 Spring Street (126 acres)

Current Use: Farm, with house displaying the Little family's American Decorative Arts Collection

Recreation Potential: Hiking, bird-watching, tours.

Public Access: Open to the public seasonally.

Degree of Protection: Historic preservation only.

### **The Trustees of Reservations**

TTOR, another not-for-profit land trust, owns 15 parcels protecting 593 acres of open space in town, including:

- **Stavros Reservation (68 acres)**

Description: The Stavros Reservation protects more than fifty acres of salt marsh and White's Hill, a coastal drumlin offering panoramic views of Crane Beach, the Crane Wildlife Refuge (Choate/Hog Island), and Halibut Point. Also known as Lamont's Hill, the 19-acre White's Hill is owned by the Trustees, but is a ECGA C.R (conservation restriction).

Current Use: Hiking and wildlife observation.

Recreation Potential: Bird watching, hiking, nature study, picnicking, and scenic vistas.

Public Access: Open year-round, daily, sunrise to sunset. There is limited roadside parking only on Island Road adjacent to the reservation.

Degree of Protection: Permanently protected.



- **Crane Wildlife Refuge (approximately 650 acres -- comprising Choate (Hog), Dean, Low, and Dilly Islands)**

Description: The Refuge is a patchwork of coastal and island habitats that includes a portion of Castle Neck (in Ipswich) and several islands in the Essex River Estuary. Surrounding the Crane Wildlife Refuge is the Great Marsh, the largest contiguous salt marsh in New England, covering more than 25,000 acres from Hampton Harbor, NH to Gloucester. The largest of the Refuge's islands is the 135-acre Choate/Hog Island, supporting wildlife and containing historically interesting buildings: the c.1778 Proctor Barn, the c.1725-40 Choate family homestead, and a more recent cottage.

Current Use: Hiking, bird watching and tours.

Recreation Potential: Bird watching, boating/sailing, canoeing/kayaking, fishing, hiking, historic buildings, nature study, picnicking, scenic vistas, and tours.

Public Access: Open year-round, daily, 8 am to 4 pm. Access is by private boat/sea kayak or on guided tours offered seasonally by TTOR. Boat dock on Long Island offers limited public access; private boats may not tie up on the front side of the dock as TTOR's tour boat docks there.

Degree of Protection: Permanently protected.