



MEETING MINUTES

Town of Stratham Open Space & Connectivity Plan
Steering Committee Meeting #3
Stratham Municipal Center, 10 Bunker Hill Avenue, Stratham NH
Date: May 31, 2023
Time: 3-4:30PM

The following members were in attendance at the third steering committee meeting from 3 to 4:30 PM on May 31, 2023. Additional committee members were present for the field tour, held immediately prior to the meeting.

Table 1 lists each attendee.

LAST NAME	FIRST NAME	AFFILIATION
Dardinski	Kate	Recreation Commission, Trail Management Advisory Committee
Connors	Mark	Planning Director, Open Space Plan Lead
Hickey	Seth	Parks & Recreation Director
Hyland	Jeff	Heritage Commission, Landscape Architect
Kelly	Liz	Resilience Planning & Design
Mills	Margaret	Consultant at FBE, Project Manager
Saltonstall	Kyle	Conservation Commission
Large	Sarah	Consultant at FBE, Project Manager
Kunowski	John	Planning Board Member

Committee Members Absent:

- Allison Knab, Select Board, Conservation Commission, State Representative (present for the afternoon site tours)
- Bill McCarthy, Trail Management Advisory Committee
- Chris Zaremba, Citizen Representative
- Dan Crow, Stratham Hill Park Association
- Kate Davis, Citizen Representative, Pedestrian & Cycling Advocacy Committee (present for the afternoon site tours)
- Mike Houghton, Select Board, Planning Board, Heritage Commission
- Tim Roache, Citizen Representative, Director of Rockingham Planning Commission (present for the afternoon site tours)

Interactive Map Activity

Maggie Mills introduced the interactive map activity. The members present split into two groups to complete the activity. Results from the activity and scanned maps are available on the attached pages.

Presentation by Liz Kelly, RP&D

Liz Kelly gave a PowerPoint presentation on land use regulations in Stratham. Questions and discussions included:

1. How will the recent Supreme Court decisions on wetlands influence Stratham?
Sarah Large answered that there will still be state and local protections but the federal protections have been limited for wetlands that do not connect to navigable waters.
2. The residential clustering tool has been a challenge because of the lack of water and sewer infrastructure. (Lack of infrastructure limits ability to cluster.) There is good vision for clustering but it is not supported by the infrastructure.
3. The Town needs more leniency and support for farmers to achieve the outlined agrarian vision. This could include establishing an Agricultural Commission and allowing farmers to diversify their markets through agritourism. (Currently, agritourism in the Town refers to the state statute which is appropriately lenient.)
4. Common land set asides need language around responsibility of management. Public access is currently not required for common land set asides.
5. Enforcement of trails needs to be included in Site Plans. Could require a Trail Management Plan.
6. Could the Town own and manage the Common Lands?
7. Currently, sidewalks have standards. Could we implement this same practice for trail networks associated with Common Lands?

Meetings of the Stratham Open Space & Connectivity Plan Steering Committee are open to the public.

Interactive Map Activity #1: Agriculture

Introduction

The 2019 Master Plan for the Town of Stratham identifies a strong need for protection of agricultural lands within the Town. Both the agrarian heritage and the active farms shape the culture and landscape of the community. However, as noted in the Plan, a strengthening regional housing market is putting increasing pressures on the agricultural landscape. Increased costs such as property tax assessments, permit fees and building code requirements, intensive stewardship of the property, and start-up costs is threatening the financial sustainability of the farming community. Without the stewardship from farmers, not only is important agricultural land at risk for development, but the scenic views and agrarian landscape that are the underpinnings of the town's visual heritage are threatened. Existing development in Stratham is characteristic of suburban sprawl and is distributed fairly evenly across the entirety of the town. This rich agrarian heritage is in most part due to the underlying soils, with 26% of the total town acreage considered Prime Farmland Soil. An additional 19% is listed as Soils of Statewide Importance and 27% as Farmland of Local Importance.

Definitions (from UNH Cooperative Extension)

Agricultural Land was identified through high resolution (1-foot), true color aerial photography, collected in the spring of 2015. Data development was completed by Rockingham Planning Commission (27 communities) and Strafford Regional Planning Commission (18 communities).

Prime Farmland Soils are those soils best suited to food, feed, forage, fiber, and oilseed crops. The soils are of the highest quality and can economically produce sustained high yields of crops when treated and managed according to acceptable farming methods.

Soils of Statewide Importance are soils that are not prime or unique but are of statewide importance for the production of food, feed, fiber, forage and oilseed crops. Criteria for defining farmland of statewide importance are determined by a state committee, chaired by the Commissioner of the NH Dept. of Agriculture, Markets and Foods.

Farmland of Local Importance is farmland that is not prime, unique or statewide importance, but has local significance for production of food, feed, fiber and forage. Identifying these farmlands is determined on a county-wide basis by the individual County Conservation District Boards.

Activity Directions:

Your small group has a large map displaying information related to the existing conditions of agriculture in Stratham. This includes land area identified as agricultural land through aerial imagery and areas identified as prime farmland, farmland of statewide importance, and farmland of local importance. Known active farms are symbolized with the orange circle and the barn pictogram. These do not include hobby farms.

Each group also has a series of supplemental maps to support you as you think about agriculture in Stratham.

With your group, please take the next 15-minutes to mark-up your map with the following:

- (1) Mark any errors or omissions with a **red** sticky dot. Number the dot and provide a description of the error/omission on the attached sheet.
- (2) Do you see any existing unprotected agricultural land or active farms that you think should be prioritized for future protection? If so, please mark these areas with a **yellow** sticky dot. Number and provide a description on the attached sheet.
- (3) Do you see any existing high-value agricultural land (e.g., prime, statewide, or local importance) that you think should be protected/conserved and set aside for future agricultural use? If so, please mark these areas with a **green** sticky dot.

Agriculture		
Dot Color	Dot Number	Description
Group 1		
Red	1	Evergreen Farm – Stratham Heights Road. (McDonald Family)
Red	2	Kate Davis’s Farm – Agricultural Easement. (Question if it is actively farmed.)
Yellow	1	Evergreen Farm – Not Protected.
Green	1	Majestic Meadows – Frying Pan Lane.
Green	2	Georgina Law House/Farm – Frying Pan Lane.
Green	3	Law Land – Frying Pan Lane.
Green	4	Stuart Farm – College Road. (Land around fields not protected.)
Highlighted	NA	Pump House – Portsmouth Avenue/Chase Lane.
Group 2		
Green	1	Evergreen Farm – Not under conservation or currently farmed.
Yellow	2	Scamman Land.
Other Comments	NA	Current restrictions in town policy and regulations limit opportunities and access for farmers including: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • New sign law • Parking issues and allowances for agritourism • Noise ordinances
Other Comments	NA	Need Agricultural Commission (currently reference the state RSA) <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Establish funding mechanism for agriculture through commission • Commission could help streamline permitting and accessibility for farmers Farm stand regulations were relaxed a few years ago

Agriculture		
Dot Color	Dot Number	Description
Other Comments	NA	<ul style="list-style-type: none">• Young farmers are leasing land (do not own)• Conservation can maybe lower the barrier to entry for cost• What percent of conserved farm land is actively being used for farming?

Interactive Map Activity #2: Recreation

Introduction

The 108-acre Stratham Hill Park (SHP) and the neighboring Gordon Barker Town Forest represent the primary trail network in Stratham and is considered by the Town to be the 'centerpiece of the Town's recreational assets'. Trails continue south onto land held in conservation easement by the Southeast Land Trust (SELT). This trail network is regionally popular and recognized. Trail uses at this park include hiking, dog walking, and mountain biking in the summer season and snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and fat biking in the winter. The trail system is managed by the Parks and Recreation department, Stratham Conservation Commission, and the Stratham Park Association. Trails at Stratham Hill Park were recently part of an assessment completed by SnowHawk LLC in 2020.

In addition to the extensive network at Stratham Hill Park and the adjacent properties, documented public trails mapped by the State are located on State-owned land along the Squamscott River. Two are public facilities, Chapman Boat Landing and the Great Bay Community Wildlife Garden. Common areas associated with residential cluster development often allow some kind of public access, although there are frequently no public access points. In addition to SHP, Town Parks include Dorothy Clemons Park, Smyk Park, Municipal Center Park, and Stevens Park. Also put a park on 75 River Road, named Dorothy Clemons Park.

Regional trail networks include the Rockingham Recreation Trail which ends in Newfield at Ash Swamp Road off of Route 108, the Exeter Town Forest Lands, and the Portsmouth Greenbelt Trail which connects Greenland towards Portsmouth and then links to the East Coast Greenway.

Definitions

Common areas are any parcel or area of land and/or area of water set aside as a result of a residential open space cluster plan. The common area is designed for the benefit and enjoyment of the residents of a residential open space cluster development. These areas may contain accessory structures and improvements necessary and appropriate for the educational, recreational, cultural, social or other noncommercial/ nonresidential / nonindustrial uses, plus any utility services utilized by the owners of the common area. (Zoning Ordinance, page 122).

Activity Directions:

Your small group has a large map displaying information related to the existing conditions of recreation in Stratham, including Town parks, trails, and boat launches. Each group also has a series of supplemental maps to support you as you think about recreation in Stratham, including a combined open space map.

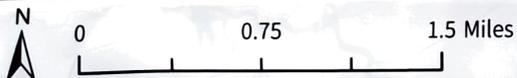
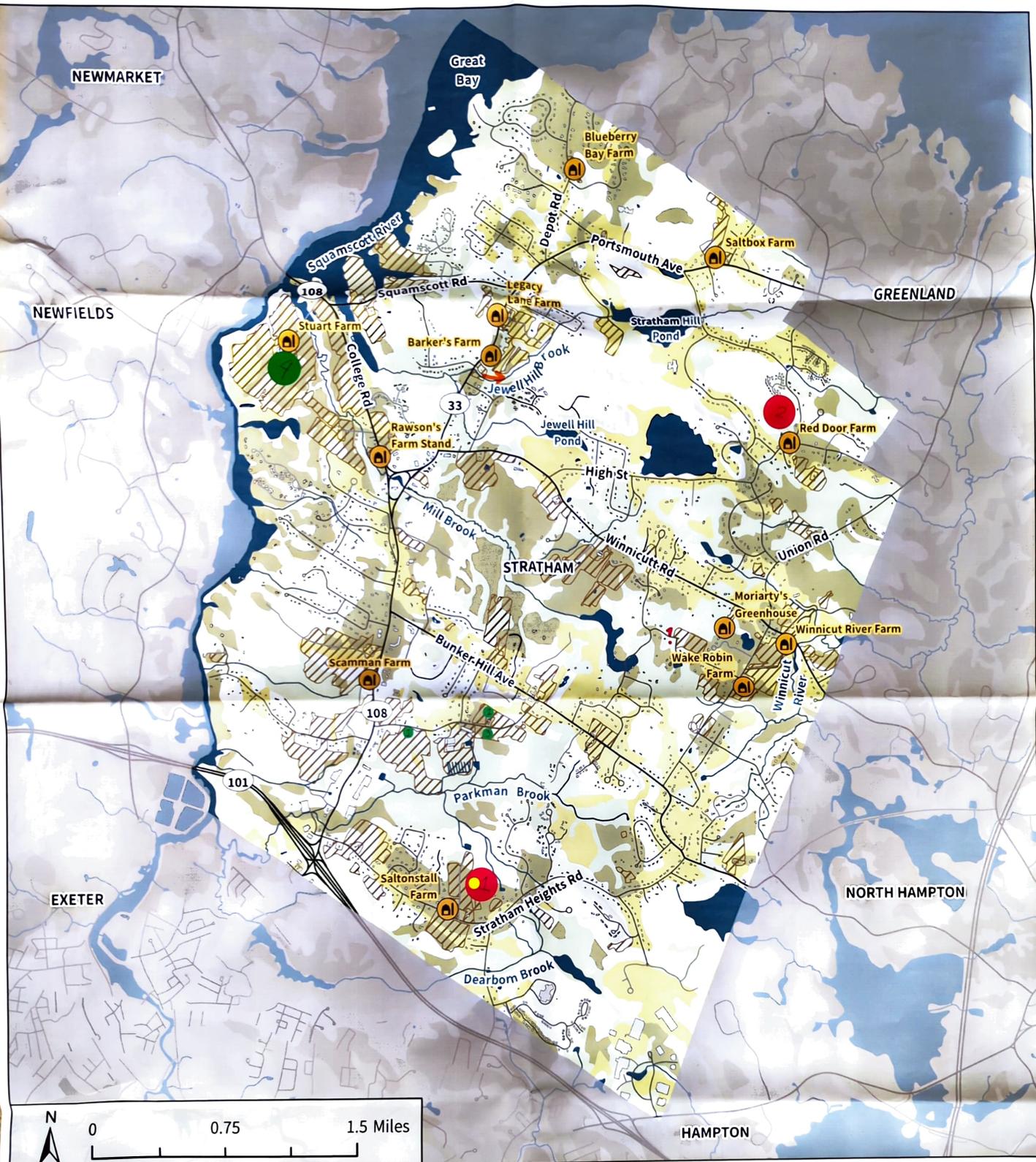
With your group, please take the next 15-minutes to mark-up your map with the following:

- (1) Mark any errors or omissions with a **red** sticky dot. Number the dot and provide a description of the error/omission on the attached sheet.

- (2) Do you know of any existing trail or park systems that are underutilized and/or require better maintenance or wayfinding? If so, please mark these areas with a **yellow** sticky dot. Number and provide a description on the attached sheet.
- (3) Do you see any opportunities for expanded recreation and/or areas with limited access to recreation? If so, please mark these areas with a **green** sticky dot. Number and provide a description on the attached sheet. Please include details of the type of recreation.
- (4) Are there opportunities for trail connectivity within Stratham and/or across the Town boundary to connect with other communities? Please do not feel constrained by existing conserved land but aim to be realistic with your suggestions. Consider both off and on-road connectivity options (e.g., sidewalks, pedestrian bridges, etc). If so, please mark these areas with the **pink highlighter**, number them, and identify them in the attached table.

Recreation		
Dot or Marker Color	Dot Number	Description
Group 1		
Green	1	Trail system under utility easement is an opportunity.
Green	2	Trail connection to Stratham Heights via Bunker Hill Road.
Green	3	18 Jana Lane – need for Trailhead/Parking to access Salt River & NH Fish & Game land.
Green	4	Rail trail access to Rockingham Rail Trail/Depot.
Green	5	Crockett Hill HOA trail to access Stratham Hill Park network.
Green	6	Squamscott River Trail (big idea/may not be realistic in the short-term).
Green	7	Portsmouth Ave crossing at Stratham Hill Park.
Green	8	Portsmouth Ave crossing at Bunker Hill Avenue.
Group 2		
Red	1	Saltonstall Farm – would love to share trail if more Town support was available. No GIS file available.
Red	2	Strathorne Tract trails.
Blue	3	Pedestrian connection over 101 to access trails in Exeter.
Other Comments	NA	Historical Markers & Placards would help. (Jeff Hyland noted that the Heritage Commission has the funding and initiative to do this in a few places.) Winnicut River Mill & Dam is a possible pocket park. Include speed bumps/bike lanes/traffic calming on Town Roads (e.g., Stratham Heights Road, Bunker Hill Road) to encourage through-traffic to use major roads.

GROUP 1



- | | |
|-------------|----------------------------------|
| Building | Active Farm |
| Waterbody | Agricultural Land |
| Watercourse | Prime Farmland |
| | Farmland of Statewide Importance |
| | Farmland of Local Importance |

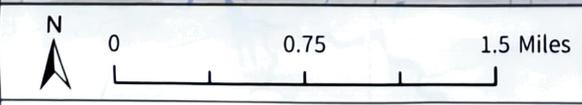
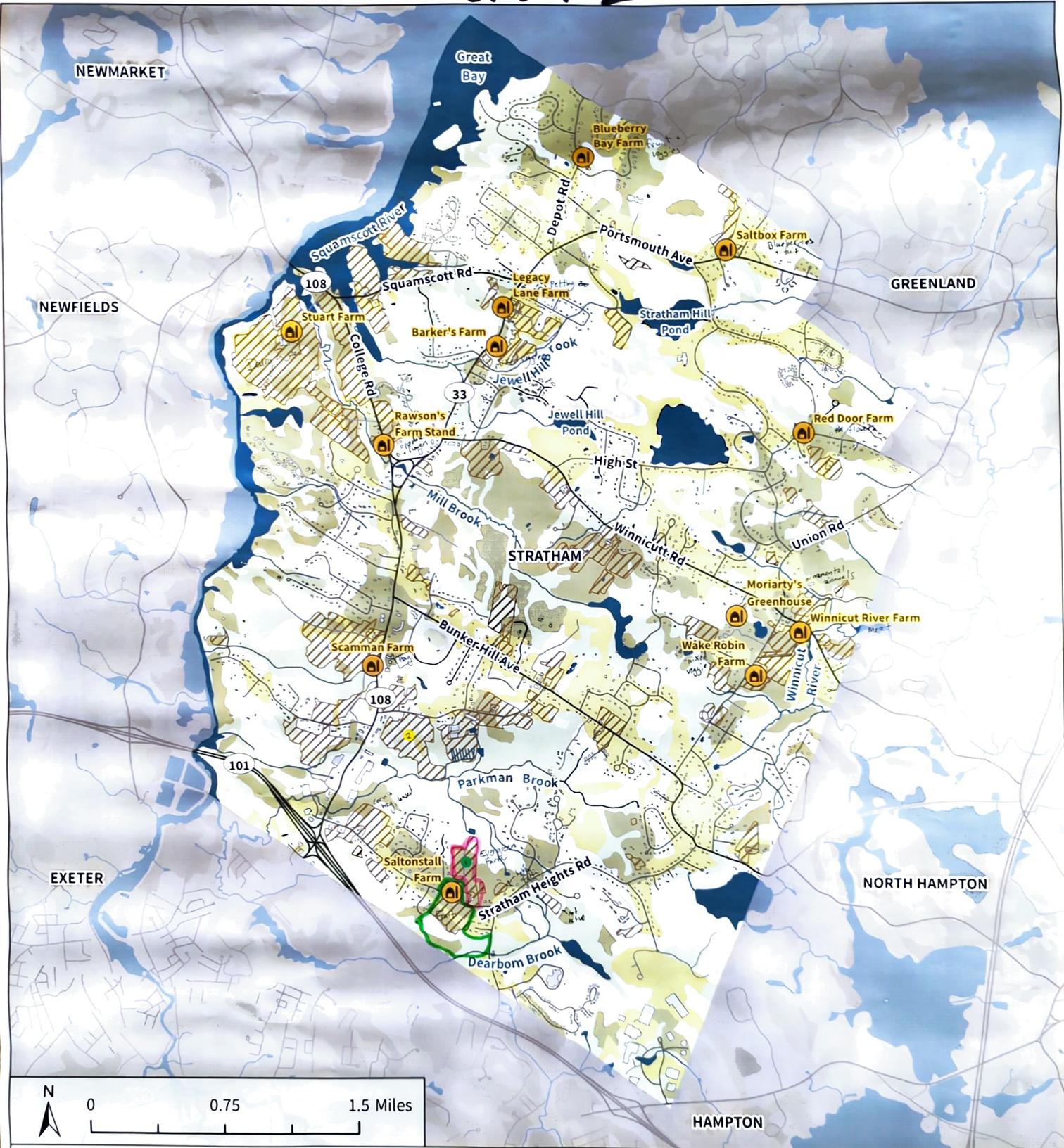
Stratham Open Space & Connectivity Plan Agricultural Land Use Stratham, NH



*Hobby and backyard farms are not included in this map but are recognized as an important component of the town character. Agricultural land data was obtained from 2015 land use data.

Data Sources: NH Granit, Town of Stratham, WSS
Projection: NAD 1983 State Plane New Hampshire FIPS 2800 (US Feet)
Created by: Elliott Boardman, FBE

GROUP 2



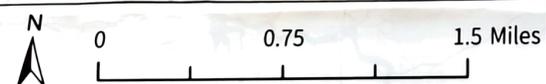
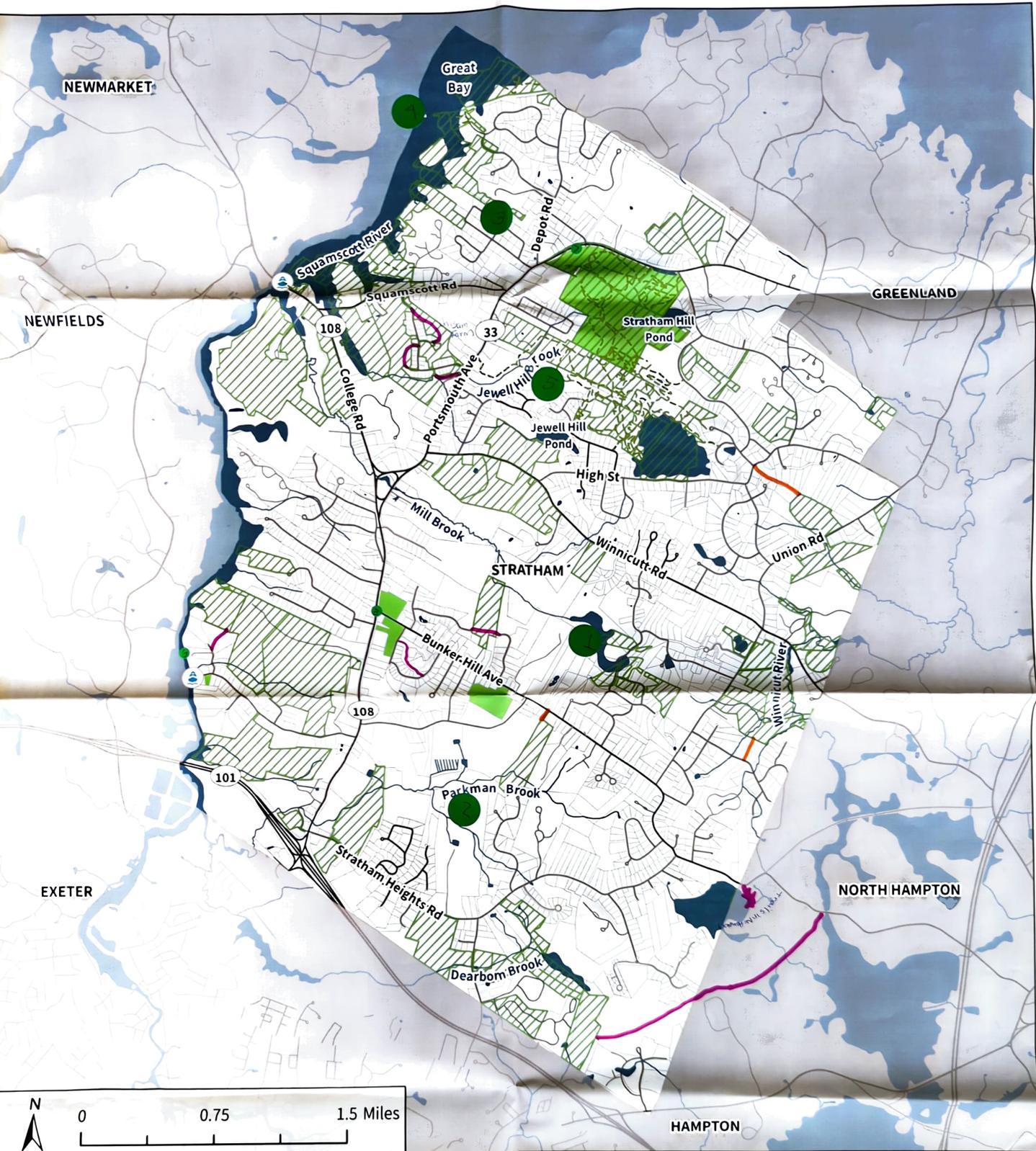
	Building		Active Farm
	Waterbody		Agricultural Land
	Watercourse		Prime Farmland
			Farmland of Statewide Importance
			Farmland of Local Importance

Stratham Open Space & Connectivity Plan
Agricultural Land Use
Stratham, NH

*Hobby and backyard farms are not included in this map but are recognized as an important component of the town character. Agricultural land data was obtained from 2015 land use data.

Data Sources: NH Granit, Town of Stratham, WS
 Projection: NAD 1983 State Plane New Hampshire FIPS 2800 (US Feet)
 Created by: Elliott Boardman, FB

GROUP 1



- Parcel Boundary
- Conserved Land
- Park
- Trail
- Waterbody
- Watercourse
- Boat Launch
- Other Water Access

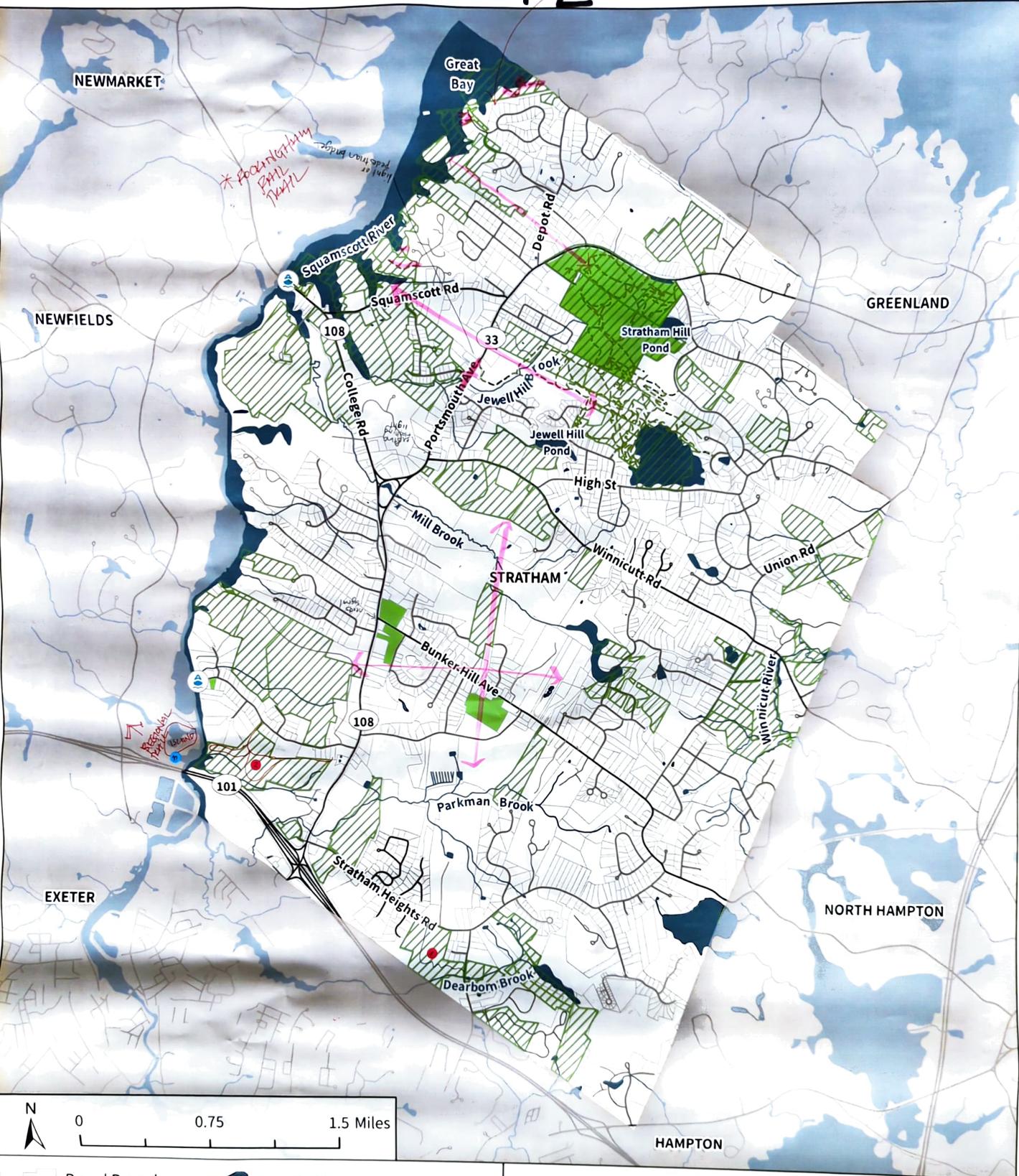
*Land that is permanently held in conservation does not guarantee public access. Public access is site-specific and dependent on each individual conservation agreement.

Stratham Open Space & Connectivity Plan Recreation Map Stratham, NH



Data Sources: NH Granit, Town of Stratham
Projection: NAD 1983 State Plane New Hampshire FIPS 2800 (US Feet)
Created by: Elliott Boardman, FBE

GROUP 2 Trail & TRAIL



-  Parcel Boundary
-  Conserved Land
-  Park
-  Trail
-  Waterbody
-  Watercourse
-  Boat Launch
-  Other Water Access

*Land that is permanently held in conservation does not guarantee public access. Public access is site-specific and dependent on each individual conservation agreement.

Stratham Open Space & Connectivity Plan
Recreation Map
Stratham, NH



Data Sources: NH Grant, Town of Stratham
 Projection: NAD 1983 State Plane New Hampshire FIPS 2800 (US Feet)
 Created by: Elliott Boardman, FBE