



NAUGATUCK VALLEY  
COUNCIL of GOVERNMENTS

# OPEN SPACE REPORT & GUIDE

July 2025



# CREDITS

## Municipalities

City of Ansonia  
Town of Beacon Falls  
Town of Bethlehem  
City of Bristol  
Town of Cheshire  
City of Derby  
Town of Middlebury  
Borough of Naugatuck  
Town of Oxford  
Town of Plymouth  
Town of Prospect  
Town of Seymour  
City of Shelton  
Town of Southbury  
Town of Thomaston  
City of Waterbury  
Town of Watertown  
Town of Wolcott  
Town of Woodbury

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CT Land Conservation Council  
Regional Water Authority  
Shelton Land Trust  
Flanders Land Trust  
Northwest CT Land Conservancy  
Roxbury Land Trust  
Aquarion Water Company  
Bristol Water Department  
Steep Rock Association  
Watertown Land Trust  
Seymour Land Trust  
Middlebury Land Trust  
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Southbury Land Trust  
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*All photos taken by NVCOG staff.*





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## EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The Open Space Report & Guide is designed to support officials, policymakers, and conservationists in understanding the current state of open space in the Naugatuck Valley region so that they can better plan for protecting, managing, and expanding open space in the future. It details the methods and processes used by staff at the Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments (NVCOG) to research and inventory open space parcels across the region in 2024 and 2025, and should be used as a companion to the open space Geographic Information Systems (GIS) data layer.

NVCOG serves nineteen municipalities in west-central Connecticut, providing a regional framework within which municipalities can jointly address common interests and receive support for community, transportation, and environmental planning. For years, NVCOG has developed and maintained data about open space, providing it to municipal officials and the public through paper maps and online viewers. The information was collected through a variety of methods including reviews of municipal parcel data and consultation with municipal staff, land trusts, and other open space partners, but never with a consistent way to obtain, review, and verify the information. A 2022 congressionally directed spending grant through the U.S. Forest Service funded this much-needed update to the regional open space database and the development of a new GIS-based open space viewer. The project team determined that an accompanying report would familiarize users with open space basics and the methods used to collect information during the update, establishing a stronger foundation for planning efforts.

The Naugatuck Valley Region contains the communities of Ansonia, Beacon Falls, Bethlehem, Bristol, Cheshire, Derby, Middlebury, Naugatuck, Oxford, Plymouth, Prospect, Seymour, Shelton, Southbury, Thomaston, Waterbury, Watertown, Wolcott and Woodbury. The following table summarizes open space statistics for each municipality and for the region as a whole.

NVCOG's project team made every effort to collect up-to-date and accurate data during

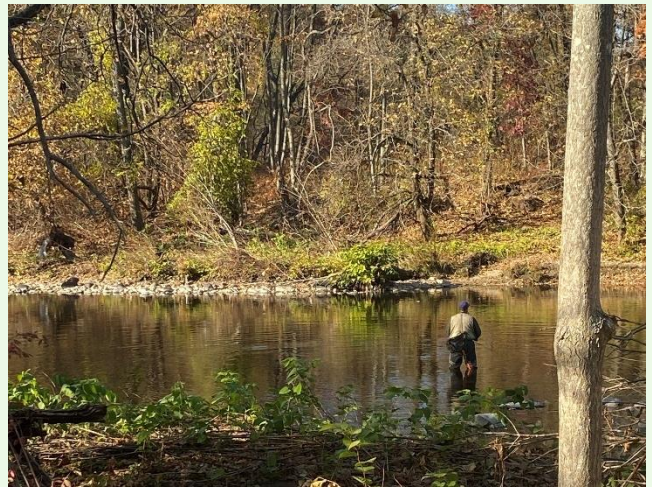


Figure 1: Angler at Riverbend Park, Beacon Falls

research. Municipal officials and staff were invited to verify data after preliminary inventories were drafted for their town, and the project team is grateful to those who helped address errors and oversights. Similarly, municipal clerks and land use staff proved to be wells of knowledge who generously helped NVCOG staff navigate their records. Despite the project team's best efforts, this data should not be viewed as complete. NVCOG recommends verifying information in the municipality's land records for the most up-to-date information on a given parcel.

Throughout the research process, the project team developed the following key regional findings, which are discussed later in the report in more detail:

1. Delineating what constitutes "protected open space" is nuanced and complex.
2. Municipalities would benefit from a uniform open space reporting, tracking, and mapping protocol - but there are challenges.
3. Many open space properties that are considered important cultural or community amenities are not legally protected.
4. Not all open space uses or parcels provide equal benefits.

Although this report is static, the map viewer and underlying data will be a "living document" that will be updated whenever municipalities inform NVCOG of new open space information. NVCOG staff intend to solicit municipalities for open space updates on a regular basis.



Statistics for All Naugatuck Valley Open Space (regardless of protection status)				
Municipality	Open Space Acreage	Percentage of Land that is Open Space	Total Number of Open Space Properties	Open Space Acres per Capita
Ansonia	1,062.67	27%	53	0.06
Beacon Falls	1,908.15	30%	37	0.31
Bethlehem	1,753.29	14%	73	0.52
Bristol	2,971.36	17%	259	0.05
Cheshire	4,517.25	21%	179	0.16
Derby	771.53	22%	32	0.06
Middlebury	2,697.76	23%	206	0.35
Naugatuck	2,254.73	21%	90	0.07
Oxford	3,138.86	15%	113	0.24
Plymouth	2,764.70	19%	136	0.24
Prospect	2,835.65	31%	76	0.30
Seymour	2,146.39	22%	254	0.13
Shelton	4,974.86	24%	650	0.12
Southbury	6,094.04	24%	405	0.31
Thomaston	2,040.54	26%	76	0.27
Waterbury	2,608.22	14%	113	0.02
Watertown	4,652.72	25%	187	0.21
Wolcott	3,124.08	23%	59	0.19
Woodbury	4,948.01	21%	425	0.51
<b>Naugatuck Valley Region</b>	<b>57,264.81</b>	<b>22% (average)</b>	<b>3,423</b>	<b>0.22 (average)</b>



Figure 2: Field trip to Platt Park, Waterbury





Figure 3: Plymouth Reservoir, Plymouth

<b>Statistics for Protected Naugatuck Valley Open Space</b> <i>For more information on what is deemed “protected,” see the Methodology section</i>				
<b>Municipality</b>	<b>Protected Open Space Acreage</b>	<b>Percentage of Land that is Protected Open Space</b>	<b>Total Number of Protected Open Space Properties</b>	<b>Protected Open Space Acres per Capita</b>
Ansonia	886.52	22%	30	0.05
Beacon Falls	1,795.52	28%	33	0.29
Bethlehem	683.11	5%	36	0.20
Bristol	2,385.67	14%	225	0.04
Cheshire	4,037.06	19%	105	0.14
Derby	682.55	20%	23	0.06
Middlebury	1,933.88	16%	148	0.25
Naugatuck	1,992.65	19%	62	0.06
Oxford	2,750.75	13%	73	0.21
Plymouth	2,154.08	15%	47	0.18
Prospect	2,743.00	30%	61	0.29
Seymour	1,863.28	19%	153	0.11
Shelton	4,410.43	22%	583	0.11
Southbury	5,174.43	20%	318	0.26
Thomaston	1,903.65	25%	67	0.25
Waterbury	1,823.24	10%	88	0.02
Watertown	3,977.43	21%	155	0.18
Wolcott	2,396.58	18%	33	0.15
Woodbury	3,672.94	16%	260	0.38
<b>Naugatuck Valley Region</b>	<b>47,266.77</b>	<b>19% (average)</b>	<b>2,500</b>	<b>0.17 (average)</b>



## UNDERSTANDING OPEN SPACE

### Definition

Defining open space is not a straightforward exercise, as there are multiple nuanced definitions in use across state and federal agencies. With the inability to turn to a legal definition for guidance, NVCOG municipalities and land trusts have made their own interpretations resulting in regional inconsistencies. For context, some of the more common definitions are discussed here.

There is no uniform definition for open space in the Connecticut General Statutes (CGS). The most used statutory definition comes from Public Act 490,<sup>1</sup> a program established in 1963 to tax farm, forest, and open space land at a lower assessment in an attempt to preserve these land types. CGS Section 12-107(b)(3)<sup>2</sup> reads, “The term “open space land” means any area of 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 (A) maintain and enhance the conservation of natural or scenic resources, (B) protect natural streams or water supply, (C) promote conservation of soils, wetlands, beaches or tidal marshes, (D) enhance the value to the public of abutting or neighboring parks, forests, wildlife preserves, nature reservations or sanctuaries or other open spaces, (E) enhance public recreation

opportunities, (F) preserve historic sites, or (G) promote orderly urban or suburban development.” Note that this definition falls within the taxation section of the statutes, and does not represent the most complete or useful definition of open space.

CGS Section 23-8(a-b)<sup>3</sup> is where the legislature codifies its goal of preserving 21% of Connecticut land as open space by 2023. Under this statute, what qualifies towards the target percentage are “Lands and rights in land and personal estate for public open spaces [...] for the purposes of public recreation, or for the preservation of natural beauty or historical association.” While this definition is a bit wieldier than that of the PA 490 section, it appears to exclude non-public open space.

Another common interpretation comes from the Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection (CT DEEP), in their 2016-2020 Comprehensive Open Space Acquisition Plan, better known as the Green Plan.<sup>4</sup> Although the document does not contain a one-sentence definition, it lists the following categories: natural waters and drinking water resources, significant coastal areas, natural heritage resources, outdoor recreational trails, and other recreational and natural resource lands held by CT DEEP.

One of the broadest definitions is the U.S. Forest Service’s,<sup>5</sup> which says that “Open space includes all unbuilt areas, whether publicly or privately owned, protected or unprotected.”

The discrepancies among these definitions can lead to differences in the way communities track, preserve, and understand open space. Even if a single definition were to be adopted statewide, questions would remain due to the ambiguity of the term.

NVCOG’s role in compiling this report is not to elevate any definition over another, but to create a robust resource that will be useful to municipal officials, planners, and open space advocates for multiple applications. The Methodology section covers which land uses needed to be present for the project team to consider a property open space.



Figure 4: Naugatuck State Forest, Naugatuck



## Benefits of Open Space

Communities are healthier, greener, and stronger when development is balanced with preservation of open space.

The most obvious benefits are **environmental**. While certain native wildlife have adapted to life in suburbs or cities, many plants and animals require undisturbed forests, waterways, or successional habitat to thrive. Development and industry have already decimated populations of species that once called this state home, like wolves<sup>6</sup> and fishers,<sup>7</sup> and continue to threaten Connecticut's wildlife. Open spaces allow animals to find the resources they need within their native ranges and reduce the likelihood of human-animal conflicts. Connectivity is also an important consideration, to maintain wildlife corridors for animals to carry out different phases of their life cycles. Dynamic and expansive habitats are critical to preserving the biodiversity and environmental integrity of the Naugatuck Valley.

Land's natural functions of supporting clean air, soil, and water provide healthier ecosystems for life to thrive, minimizing the impact of the built environment. These functions are called **ecosystem services**. Ecosystem services can mitigate flooding, filter pollutants from air and water, and create products like timber and drinking water, along with many other benefits. Utilizing natural resources sustainably builds resilience for wildlife and our communities alike.

Open space also provides opportunities for **recreation**. The 2016-2020 Connecticut Green Plan<sup>8</sup> explains how Connecticut's landscape provides a spectrum of outdoor recreation ranging "from bird watching to hiking, kayaking to hunting, and camping to horseback riding." And open space is more than just forests - sports fields, playgrounds, and multiuse trails fall into this broad category as well.

Furthermore, human **health** is well-served by open space. Access to areas that allow exercise, recreation, or cultural practices can improve mental and physical health. Contact with open spaces is also known to have other medical benefits, including lower blood pressure, lower cholesterol, and lower stress levels.<sup>9</sup>



Figure 5: Hooded mergansers at Bent of the River Audubon, Southbury



Visitors to open spaces often spend money on food, equipment, or even overnight stays, bolstering the **local economy**. A 2017 study published by NVCOG assessing economic impacts of the Naugatuck River Greenway Trail<sup>10</sup> found that each visit to a walking trail generates \$14.03 of spending, a number that is greatly amplified when considering the tens of thousands of annual trail users.

Incorporating **open space in urban settings** can mitigate common public health and infrastructure issues associated with cities. Vegetated land in developed areas “removes pollutants from the air, promotes rainwater infiltration, and lowers air temperatures, thereby reducing asthma rates, surface water runoff, and rising energy costs.”<sup>11</sup> Trees play an important role in mitigating the urban heat island effect by shading sidewalks, vehicles, and buildings, reducing the need to expend electricity on air conditioning. In heavily developed areas, open space can serve as a “third place”<sup>12</sup> for community gatherings, like a city plaza or pocket-park with benches.

### Municipal Benefits

Open space brings about municipal benefits as well as individual. Studies cited by the CT Department of Agriculture show that the cost of servicing farmland, forest, and open space properties would exceed potential tax revenue should they be developed.<sup>13</sup> Preserving open space, especially in areas where utilities, roads, and other amenities could be expensive or difficult to supply, can help limit unwanted growth and the associated need for increased services.

In 2011, the Connecticut Center for Economic Analysis<sup>14</sup> published a report looking at the economic impacts of state-owned open space. Among benefits provided by state parks, forests, and managed natural resources, the report found that the value of residential properties near them were higher than similar properties not near these resources. And that makes sense: people want to live near open spaces.

## Types of Open Space

The broad moniker of “open space” comprises many land uses, ranging from flood control to farmland to football fields. This dictates the need for different approaches when planning for or managing open space depending on the land’s characteristics.

### Agricultural



Figure 6: Cattle at Gustafson Farm, Watertown

Although working agricultural land has diminished greatly over the last century in Connecticut,<sup>15</sup> it is still prevalent in the Naugatuck Valley. It provides a local source of food and is seen in rural towns as essential to community character. The current lack of development on farmland does not mean it will remain that way forever - in fact, since farmland is cleared and often level, it is attractive to developers for all types of land uses.

Agriculture can be an intensive land use with adverse environmental impacts. Clearing natural vegetation releases carbon and increases runoff. Pesticides and fertilizer can severely impair water quality. Irrigation can siphon flow from local waterways to the detriment of those ecosystems. Implementing sustainable farming practices, however, can greatly reduce the environmental impacts of agriculture. For instance, integrated pest management minimizes the use of pesticides while reduced- or no-till farming can limit runoff and sequester carbon in soil.

Preserving sustainable agricultural land is important for future food security, local economies, and to current and future generations of farmers. It is also important to suburban and



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rural communities that value pastoral viewsheds. Municipalities should work with landowners to identify and protect important farmland (and potential future farmland), utilizing resources like mapping of prime farmland soils.<sup>16</sup> Use Value Assessment programs like PA 490 can limit the pressure to sell or develop land by lowering tax obligations. Municipalities should also work with the State and nonprofit partners to protect important farmland by purchasing future development rights.<sup>17</sup> This allows land to be protected from development while keeping it available for agricultural uses.

### Recreational

Recreational space is key for physical and social well-being of residents. State and municipal parks often provide space for both passive and active recreation. Passive recreation includes walking, hiking, birdwatching, kayaking or similar activities that do not require dedicated facilities. These activities are permissible in most open spaces with public access, even those preserved for reasons other than recreation. For instance, hiking and birdwatching can be allowed on protected drinking water watershed land or conservation land with little or no environmental impact. It is not uncommon for several passive recreation activities to be undertaken on a given property.

Active recreation, on the other hand, typically requires special equipment or dedicated facilities like fields, courts, or playgrounds. Baseball, basketball, and soccer are examples of active recreation, as are camping or boating which require dedicated campgrounds or boat launches.



Figure 7: Splash Pad at Nolan Park, Ansonia

Municipal parks with active recreation infrastructure, while considered open space, may present many of the same environmental impacts as developed areas. Runoff from impervious surfaces like courts, paved paths, or parking lots can have negative impacts on surface water. Irrigation for turf grasses can impact waterways and unnecessarily deplete public water stores. Pesticides can impact wildlife, waterways, and neighboring properties. Artificial turf fields, though popular and durable, may introduce additional impacts such as off-gassing and leaching of chemicals from artificial grass and infill materials, and increased temperatures not associated with natural turf. Recreational facilities should be developed with the goal of minimizing environmental impacts, using low impact development practices whenever possible.

Hunting and fishing clubs are an interesting case that fall between active and passive recreation - although hunting does not require a property to be developed or the use of permanent equipment installations, it can impact populations and ecosystems in the same way that other active recreation might.

Both types of recreation provide space for residents to exercise, which positively impacts both physical and mental health.

### Cemetery

Cemeteries are any area used for the permanent storage of human remains or to honor the deceased. Since most cemeteries are open to the public, and can be used for passive recreation like walking, bike-riding, or bird watching, many municipalities consider them open space. These properties tend to have some of the oldest land records, often making it difficult to determine whether legal protection exists; regardless, few developers are interested in converting burial grounds. When properly managed, they can also provide wildlife habitat and help retain natural site hydrology. Limiting impervious surfaces and soil compaction can help reduce runoff while planting native vegetation along edges and in unused plots can maximize wildlife benefits. Cemeteries are also records of the historic inhabitants of a place and should be managed to preserve and interpret that history for the benefit of current and future generations.



### Golf Courses

More than half the municipalities in our region contain a country club or golf course. At first glance, golf courses are lush, green fields that provide recreational opportunities without sacrificing a natural aesthetic. In reality, they are large, developed landscapes that typically require intensive maintenance, irrigation, and pesticides to keep up their lush appearance. All of these can have negative environmental impacts.

New golf courses can be designed (and existing courses retrofitted) to minimize irrigation needs and runoff, maximize wildlife habitat, and protect sensitive areas. Maintenance regimes that use fewer pesticides and reduce greenhouse gas emissions can be implemented. Audubon International has developed the Audubon Cooperative Sanctuary Program<sup>18</sup> to minimize environmental impacts and enhance natural areas and wildlife habitat at golf facilities.

### Parks



Figure 8: Silas Bronson Library Park, Waterbury

Parks - whether hundreds of acres of forested land, or a quarter acre in a city - are critical to the well-being of residents. They offer a place to gather, walk a pet, or play on a playground. Urban green spaces can mitigate the heat-island effect, filter polluted air, and reduce urban runoff. Well cared for public parks also increase the value of nearby property, and “greening” vacant properties has been shown to reduce crime.<sup>19</sup> Revitalizing vacant properties for use as community gardens can also help provide a source of local food to residents. Municipalities should ensure that all residents in urban areas have

access to green space, preferably within walking distance of their home or workplace. Cities should also incorporate climate resiliency with park development and maintenance where possible. Properly designed parks can help mitigate flooding and infiltrate or store stormwater.<sup>20</sup> These areas also serve an aesthetic purpose, giving the eyes a break from concrete, bricks, and asphalt.

### Forestry

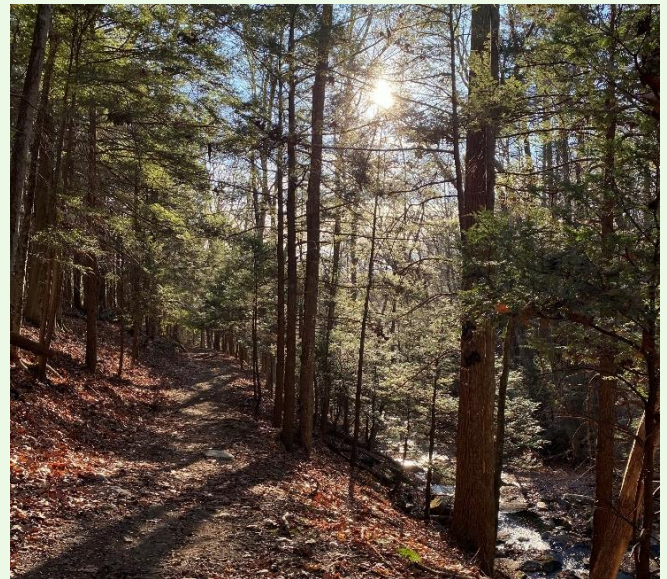


Figure 9: Keith Mitchell Forest, Seymour

According to a 2020 USDA report,<sup>21</sup> Connecticut boasts over 1.7 million acres of forest - more than half of its area. Nearly 30% of that land belongs to municipal, state, or federal governments.<sup>22</sup> Forests represent a hallmark of the New England landscape, and feature prominently in the Naugatuck Valley’s history and identity.

Some of the largest open spaces in our region are State Forests. These State-owned lands are managed in a way to sustainably produce forest products like lumber and are also open to the public for passive recreation. Preserving core forests aids wildlife, while active management can increase biodiversity and keep invasive species at bay. Not all forests are managed or protected, though. A significant amount of forested land in the region is privately owned, and at risk for future development. Municipalities should work with landowners, the State, and nonprofits to identify and protect key forestland from future development. For purposes of this inventory, a “forestry” use denotes a State Forest - not simply a property with woodlands.



## Historic and Cultural Preservation



Figure 10: 1906 Veterans Monument, Prospect

Protecting historically or culturally significant properties can help preserve important landscapes and contribute to the public's understanding of the past and present. While the National Register of Historic Places (NRHP) or the State register may confer recognition of historical features, those distinctions do not necessarily protect

them from being altered or destroyed.<sup>23</sup> The Connecticut Environmental Protection Act<sup>24</sup> does provide a legal avenue to prevent the destruction of historic buildings in certain cases, but structures may be demolished before legal action can be taken if an owner is so inclined.

A lot of historic preservation is reactionary: a historic building is offered for sale, or it comes to light that there are plans for demolition, and historical societies, municipalities, and residents rush in to try to save it, often finding it is too late. Similarly, an area that may be sacred to a local Indigenous community may face the risk of being desecrated, altered, or developed if not protected or preserved. Proactively researching and inventorying historic or cultural assets locally, and working with property owners to preserve them as open space while also registering them on the State or National register as appropriate, can help prevent the loss of local heritage.

## Source (Drinking) Water Protection

Drinking water reservoirs and aquifers provide the majority of the region's public drinking water, with the remainder served by major public drinking water wells. The quality of the water held in those reservoirs and served through wells is dependent upon the health of the land surrounding them. As a natural part of the hydrological cycle, vegetation and soil filter rainwater as it flows and infiltrates. When watersheds and well recharge areas are largely

forested and undeveloped, the result is clean water that requires less filtration and treatment before delivery to customers. Developed land, on the other hand, can threaten water quality by introducing impervious surfaces, unfiltered runoff, contaminants, and excessive nutrients from fertilizers or failing septic systems. To protect from these vectors, water companies typically own portions of watersheds surrounding their reservoirs. The properties fall into three categories per CGS Section 25-37c:<sup>25</sup>

- Class I: Any land owned by a water company immediately around reservoirs, tributaries, or supply wells.
- Class II: Any land owned by a water company within a drinking water watershed that is not Class I land.
- Class III: Any land owned by a water company that is not within a drinking water watershed.

Class I and II lands are protected from being sold or developed. Water companies must go through a review process by CT Department of Public Health before Class III land can be sold. In addition, Aquifer Protection Areas (APA) have been established around major public drinking water wells, and municipalities are required to adopt local land use regulations aimed at protecting water quality. Municipalities should work with water companies to identify properties critical to the protection of drinking water sources and permanently protect them from development. Properly siting and regulating development within APAs or drinking water watersheds can minimize the risk to drinking water quality. When development is inevitable in these areas, municipalities should ensure that notification



Figure 11: Bristol Reservoir #7, Bristol



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requirements to the Water Company and Department of Public Health are followed, so that they may have an opportunity to identify issues that may impact water quality, and help guide development to minimize impacts.

Water company owned Class I and Class II lands are some of the most expansive types of open space in Connecticut, and they offer benefits in addition to drinking water protection. These lands are typically large, intact, and forested. They offer wildlife habitat, passive recreation opportunities, and act as carbon sinks. Such land is only protected for as long as the drinking water source is active, however. Water systems can be decommissioned, leading water companies to sell their excess land that was previously protected. Municipalities should work with water companies to ensure that the other benefits of these “excess” lands be permanently protected through legal means.

### Flood Control/Hazard Mitigation



Figure 12: Thomaston Dam, Thomaston

The Naugatuck Valley region has some great examples of open space with a primary function of flood control. Following the historic “Flood of ‘55”<sup>26</sup> which devastated communities along the Naugatuck River, the US Army Corps of Engineers implemented a plan to protect the Valley from similar events. A series of flood control dams and local protection projects were constructed on the Naugatuck and its tributaries. The dams in the region (Thomaston Dam, Black Rock Dam, Northfield Brook Dam, Hancock Brook Dam, and Hop Brook Dam) were designed to withhold floodwater in reservoirs during heavy rain events, then release it once river levels receded, keeping

flows within the banks of the river. These dams are typically dry, meaning no water (other than a small conservation pool in some cases) is stored behind the dam normally. Those dry reservoirs are sometimes maintained for active and passive recreation, as some contain picnic areas, ballfields, trails, and other recreational amenities.

Open space can also help mitigate natural hazards locally. Removing at-risk structures or infrastructure from flood prone areas, for example, eliminates future damage to them from flooding. A challenging but effective mitigation strategy is purchasing “repetitive loss properties”<sup>27</sup> or those on which multiple natural hazard related insurance claims have been made. Removing or moving structures away from hazard-prone areas eliminates future claims, and the property can be used for recreation or other public uses.

### Conservation

Many of the previously discussed open space types were contextualized by their benefit to human residents. While preservation of critical habitat or ecologically sensitive areas may not always provide such an obvious human benefit, that does not take away from their fundamental value to ensure health and resilience to all. Efforts should be made to preserve important habitat or unique landscapes for the sake of conservation itself. CT DEEP tracks critical habitats of greatest conservation need as identified in the state’s Wildlife Action Plan (currently undergoing its 2025 revision),<sup>28</sup> and has mapped more than 25 rare and specialized wildlife habitat types statewide. DEEP also publishes the approximate locations of endangered, threatened, and special concern species across the state. Municipalities and open space partners can use the Natural Diversity Database (NDDb)<sup>29</sup> and critical habitats to proactively identify important land for protection, and to screen for potential impacts to these assets during development. While passive recreation can sometimes occur without impacting ecological health, certain ecosystems may benefit from limited, intentional human access.



## Types of Protection

From a sustainability standpoint, it is important to ensure that key open spaces are protected from alteration or development, and that the services they provide are available for future generations to enjoy. This requires that some type of documented protection be placed on these properties.

The most straightforward legal protection is a **deed restriction**. A deed is a document on file in the municipal land records that transfers ownership of the described property. The language in a deed restriction might look like: “Said premises shall be preserved in its natural state and the use of said premises shall be limited to appropriate conservation, open space, and recreational purposes.” This legally binding restriction prohibits any land use that would be contrary to the stated purpose of environmental conservation. Deed restrictions usually protect the property in perpetuity; unless a time period is set, the property is encumbered with the restriction forever. Find more information in Appendix D.

A **conservation easement** is a legally binding voluntary agreement between a landowner and a third party (typically a municipality, land trust, or nonprofit) where the landowner retains certain private property rights, but permanently limits land uses in favor of environmental conservation. The third-party easement holder ensures that restrictions are enforced. Landowners can receive tax benefits by donating the easement as a charitable gift to the municipality or a nonprofit. Easements may cover an entire property or only a portion, such as the forested backyard of a single-family home.



Figure 13: Riverbound Farm Sanctuary, Cheshire

### CT DEEP's Green Plan

In the 2016-2020 CT Green Plan, CT DEEP distinguishes between “preserved Open Space” and “protected Open Space.”

On one hand, **preserved** Open Space is defined as “any area of land that has been acquired and is used for Open Space purposes.” Examples of this include CT DEEP’s State Parks, State Forests, Wildlife Areas, and Class I and II watershed lands.

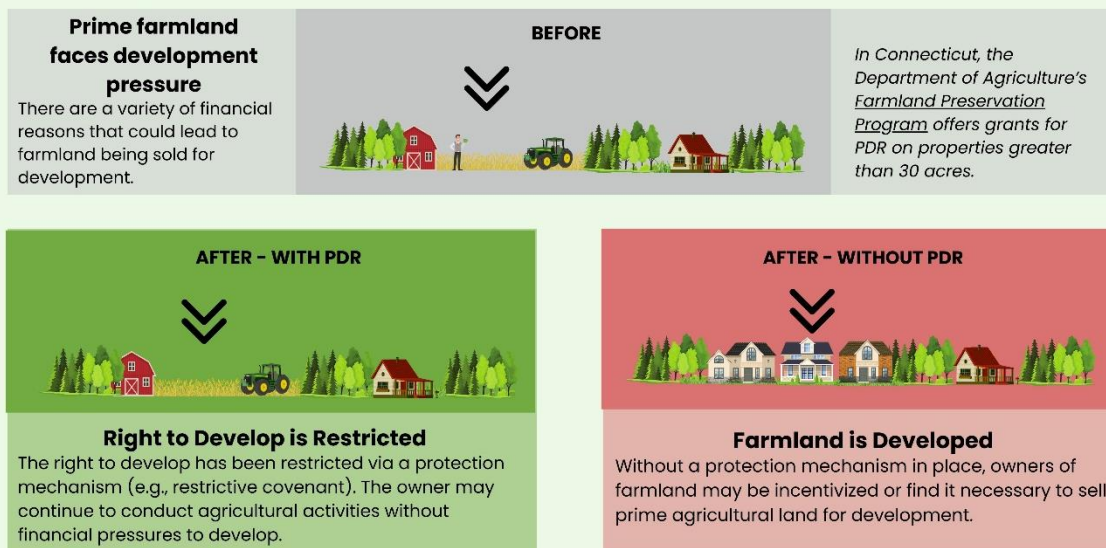
Within that category, **protected** Open Space is defined as “any area of land with a restriction that would limit its use to Open Space.” Examples of this include lands subject to conservation restrictions, deed restrictions, or certain reserved rights. The State’s goal was to protect 21% of Connecticut’s land base by 2023 for public Open Space purposes; however, by the end of 2022 the Department reported having only reached 16%, or 76.6% of their target.<sup>30</sup>

Municipalities can require **open space to be set aside as part of a subdivision or development**. In those cases, homeowner associations may retain ownership and manage the property with a deed restriction or easement in place, or the land can be donated to a municipality or conservation entity. When developers choose where to position the required open space, they might simply choose the least buildable areas, resulting in land with little environmental or recreational value. In some cases, developers may label land as “proposed open space” on a map but fail to file easements on the land records (the project team encountered this many times during research), which does not constitute legal protection. Alternatively, municipalities can allow a fee in lieu of an open space set aside. Rather than setting aside a portion of the developable land as open space, developers pay a fee to the municipality, which accumulates in a special fund for open space land acquisition. This gives municipalities the flexibility to preserve high conservation or recreation value properties.



**Purchase of Development Rights,<sup>31</sup> or PDR,** allows a landowner to sell the development rights of their parcel to another entity, such as a land trust or the State of Connecticut. A deed restriction is recorded on the land records that prevents the owner from developing the parcel; however, PDRs often allow the owner to continue farm related activities and construction, such as building barns, ponds for irrigation, roadside stands, dirt roads, or farm housing with approval from the CT Department of Agriculture. In our region, eighty acres of farmland were protected in Shelton through a PDR program in 1996, and three hundred acres in Watertown in 2020.<sup>32</sup>

### Purchase of Development Rights (PDR)



**Transfer of Development Rights,<sup>33</sup> or TDR,** is more rarely used but another valuable tool in land conservation. This model relies on a sending zone (where the right to develop originates) and a receiving zone (where the right to develop ends up). Through TDR, the owner of a property threatened by development can decouple the development rights from the land itself, transferring those rights to an area more suitable for development, such as lots already served by infrastructure or targeted for redevelopment. The receiving zone generally acquires some sort of bonus along with the transfer, like increased density.

### Transfer of Development Rights (TDR)

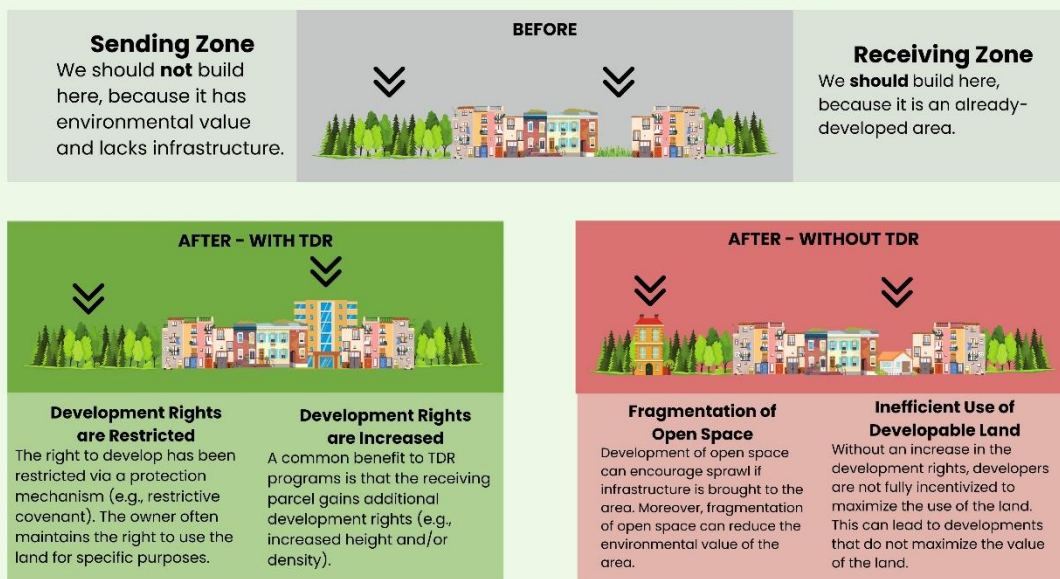


Figure 14: PDR and TDR explanatory graphics, created by NVCOG



## OPEN SPACE REPORT & GUIDE

For purposes of this Inventory, we have created another category of protection called “**Municipal Intent.**” Executing protections like deed restrictions or easements can be costly and time-consuming, often involving expensive legal work. In cases where a municipality has identified land as open space their Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD), this Inventory lists it as protected by municipal intent. Because these properties are still technically at risk of being used for a non-open space purpose by the municipality or sold to a developer in the future, municipal intent is not considered to be as strong a protection as the methods discussed above.

### Other Considerations

**Connecticut’s Public Act 490**<sup>34</sup> (PA 490) program allows open space, forest, and agricultural land to be assessed at its use-value. Since this use-value is usually much lower than market value, the program helps protect land from development by reducing the tax burden on landowners and preventing the need for owners to sell properties for financial reasons. However, for purposes of this Inventory, PA 490 land is not considered protected, as it can be removed from the program after a given time period with no penalty, or before that time period with a tax penalty. Property also loses its PA 490 status if it is transferred or sold. For those reasons, this designation does not truly prevent open space from being developed.

Although certain parties may consider **State Historic Preservation Office (SHPO)** designated

properties open space, the fact that some of these are developed with buildings felt like too much of a stretch for this project’s purpose. Consequently, the project team decided that SHPO designations should not be automatically considered open space, though properties included in the inventory may possess that designation.

**Class I and Class II water company land** is protected by state law;<sup>35</sup> however, the decommissioning of a water system results in automatic conversion to Class III. Class III land can be sold and developed unless another protection mechanism is in place, such as a deed restriction. Public water supply decommissioning is a rare enough process that, for purposes of this inventory, the project team considered all Class I and Class II land protected.

**State and Federal** open space land has been assumed protected, by virtue of the unlikelihood that a Federal Dam or State Forest would be sold or converted to a non-open space use. However, fragmentation of this land is not impossible, even if it would have to go through a legislative process. In a recent case, Connecticut attempted to sell 2.7 acres of Lamentation State Forest in Berlin to resolve an encroachment.<sup>36</sup>

Finally, per the **Connecticut’s Marketable Title Act** (CGS Sec. 47-33b through 47-33l)<sup>37</sup>, re-recording your easement or restriction at least once every forty years will ensure that the open space interest is preserved from claims to extinguish it.



Figure 15: Municipal land records at Plymouth Town Hall



## INVENTORYING THE NAUGATUCK VALLEY

### Project Scope

In August of 2023, NVCOG entered into a contract with the U.S. Forest Service to complete a Regional Open Space Inventory. The Inventory is comprised of two parts:

- (1) An updated regional open space database including information on every open space parcel in the region, including ownership, acreage, primary and other uses, whether it is protected, protection instrument, protection extent, and a land records citation. This data will be made available to the public in an interactive GIS viewer, and will have utility for planning analyses and for future POCDs.
- (2) An accompanying report with a narrative summary of research findings. This report contains information on types of open space, methods of legal protection, reporting guidance, and municipal profiles that capture the unique open space character of each town.

NVCOG maintained an open space viewer for years before the start of this grant. The data, however, came from a patchwork of sources and was in

need of a comprehensive update. Staff had also never researched legal protections for each parcel, instead importing data (if available) from the various sources without verifying it.

Narrowing the scope of the project to something that COG staff could undertake in-house was an ongoing challenge. Each of the 19 municipalities contained anywhere from a few dozen to a few hundred parcels that could be considered open space. The project team made scoping decisions to limit the amount of time researching each parcel.

This report is not intended to be a Regional Open Space Plan. Whereas a Plan makes strategic recommendations to achieve future desired conditions, this document and dataset seek only to provide background information and

characterize existing conditions. It can serve as a basis for municipal planning efforts or as a precursor to a Regional Plan.

Municipalities and land trusts should avail themselves of Connecticut's numerous resources for open space acquisition and planning, listed in Appendix B. NVCOG staff may be available to provide technical assistance for open space planning or grant writing as well.

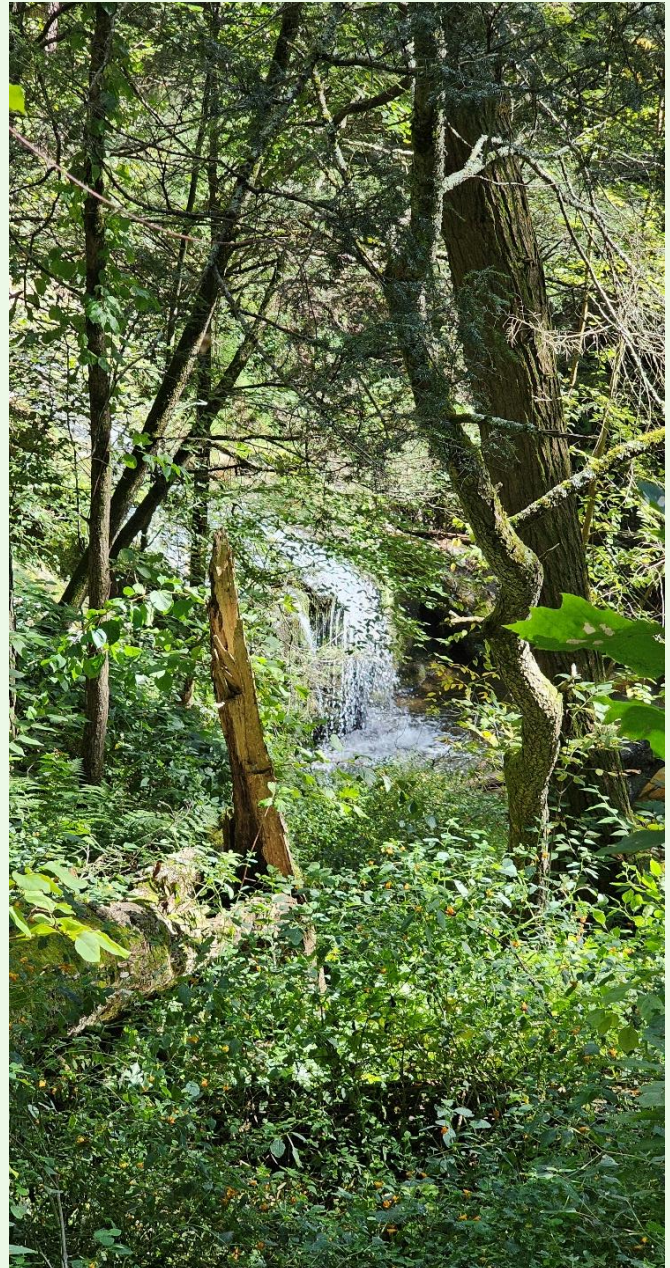


Figure 16: Nonnewaug Falls, Woodbury



## Methodology

The methodology for this research-heavy project is complex. Achieving the most useful final product within NVCOG's funding and capacity constraints required prioritization, given that deeds and maps for all 10,000+ parcels in our region could not be checked, and ongoing coordination was needed with municipal and community stakeholders.

The first step was to acquire a list of all parcels that each municipality considered to be open space, regardless of protection status or ownership. In many cases, NVCOG's GIS staff started with the open space map from municipality's most recent Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD). Certain POCDs had been updated very recently, while others were further along in their 10-year cycle - for the latter cases, municipal staff were asked for lists of new open space that had been acquired since the last update. In a handful of communities, conservation commissions, planners, or other municipal staff had been tasked with tracking open space and provided us with their information, usually in the form of spreadsheets. The project team then



removed any parcels from those inventories that did not support an open space use as listed in the "Land Use/Function" section, such as rights-of-way or substations.

In addition to working directly with municipalities for parcel listings, staff reached out to land trusts and water companies to access their inventories. Although some of these organizations held land in multiple towns, NVCOG staff still organized the research process on a municipality-by-municipality basis.

Inventory Information from all municipalities, land trusts, and water companies were deemed reliable and incorporated without additional research, as long as they used the same methodologies to obtain their information (highlighted in the "Protection" section below). If the inventories only included partial information (for instance, acreage and owners but not legal protection status), additional research was conducted.

Throughout the development of the inventory, stakeholders had three opportunities to contribute information: at the beginning of the process, when they were asked to provide their own inventories or documentation; after the municipal draft data was prepared and sent directly to them for review; and during the one-month public comment period when the draft report and map were made available online.

Once the open space parcels had been identified and uploaded to a GIS viewer, NVCOG staff identified the categories that required research:

1. Owner
2. Protection
3. Protected Area
4. Land Use/Function

The following sections explain the methodology for each key research category.

### Owner

Staff researched property cards, POCD and property maps, deeds, stakeholder-provided inventories, and water company, state, and federal maps to determine ownership.

Figure 17: Municipal land records at Shelton City Hall



## Protection

Determinations on protection status for each parcel were made according to the methodology explained below; they do not constitute legal advice and do not replace the judgment of an attorney.

The project team checked owner types, POCD open space maps, and land records in order to determine protection. Only the most recent version of each document, such as deeds, were checked. Land records were challenging to assess, as many of them referenced other documents such as maps and commission approvals that were not searchable within the digital database. The only cases in which the project team investigated maps were 1) if the deed or easement indicated partial protection, but did not specify the acreage, or 2) if the deed said that the property was subject to the notations on a given map. Researchers did not attempt to hunt down board or commission approvals referenced in deeds. Although this decision sacrificed a degree of accuracy, it saved considerable time for the researchers and avoided spending multiple hours on a single parcel.

In order to be considered protected, a parcel had to meet one of three criteria:

(1) Had one of the following owner types:

- Federal
- State
- Water Company (and fell within a drinking water watershed, rendering it Class I or Class II)

-OR-

(2) Had one of the following protection mechanisms in the municipal land records:

- Clear language in the property's deed (warranty, quit claim, etc.) requiring an open space conservation, recreation, or agricultural use. This could include references to other documents, such as a grant of conservation restriction or a map.
- An easement requiring an open space, conservation, recreation, or

agricultural use. Partial easements were expressed as partial protection in the inventory.

- A certificate of devise requiring an open space, conservation, recreation, or agricultural use.

-OR-

(3) Appeared on a municipality's Plan of Conservation and Development open space map and was municipally owned. These parcels were deemed "protected by municipal intent," which is not a legally recognized form of protection.

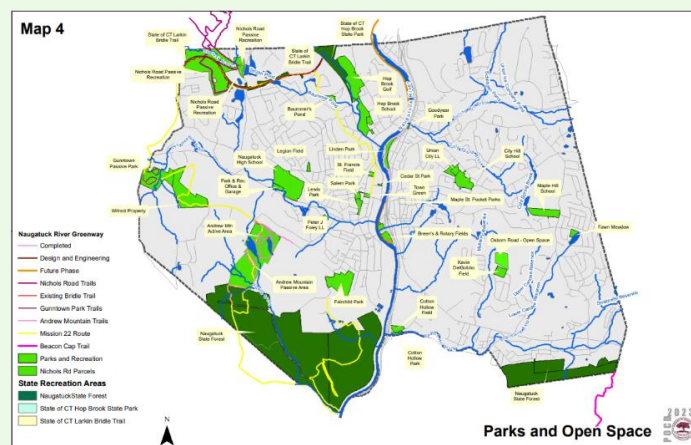


Figure 18: POCD Open Space Map from Naugatuck

The list below provides a more detailed look at the protection delineation methods used for each owner type:

**Federal Properties:** These properties were assumed protected.

**State Properties:** These properties were assumed protected. Any state properties that were clearly not open space were omitted from the inventory, such as transportation rights-of-way.

**Municipal Properties:** Municipally owned property was deemed protected by municipal intent if it was on the municipality's POCD open space map. If it was not on the map, the property deed was checked for conservation language and/or a restriction on development. If found, it was deemed legally protected.

**Water Company Class I, II, and III:** These properties were assumed protected if they were Class I or II (within a drinking water watershed or aquifer protection area). They were assumed



unprotected if they were Class III (at least 150 ft. from a distribution water supply or tributary that flows into it), which does not have the same statutory protection. Classifications are codified in CGS Section 25-37c.<sup>38</sup> As discussed above, it is important to note that a Class I or II property reverts to Class III if a public water system is decommissioned.

**Land Trust Property:** Ownership by a land trust alone was not enough to render a property

protected. If the land trust's open space inventory did not state whether a property was legally protected, the property deed was checked for conservation language and/or a restriction on development. If found, it was deemed legally protected.

**Privately Owned Property:** The property deed was checked for conservation language and/or a restriction on development. If found, it was deemed legally protected.

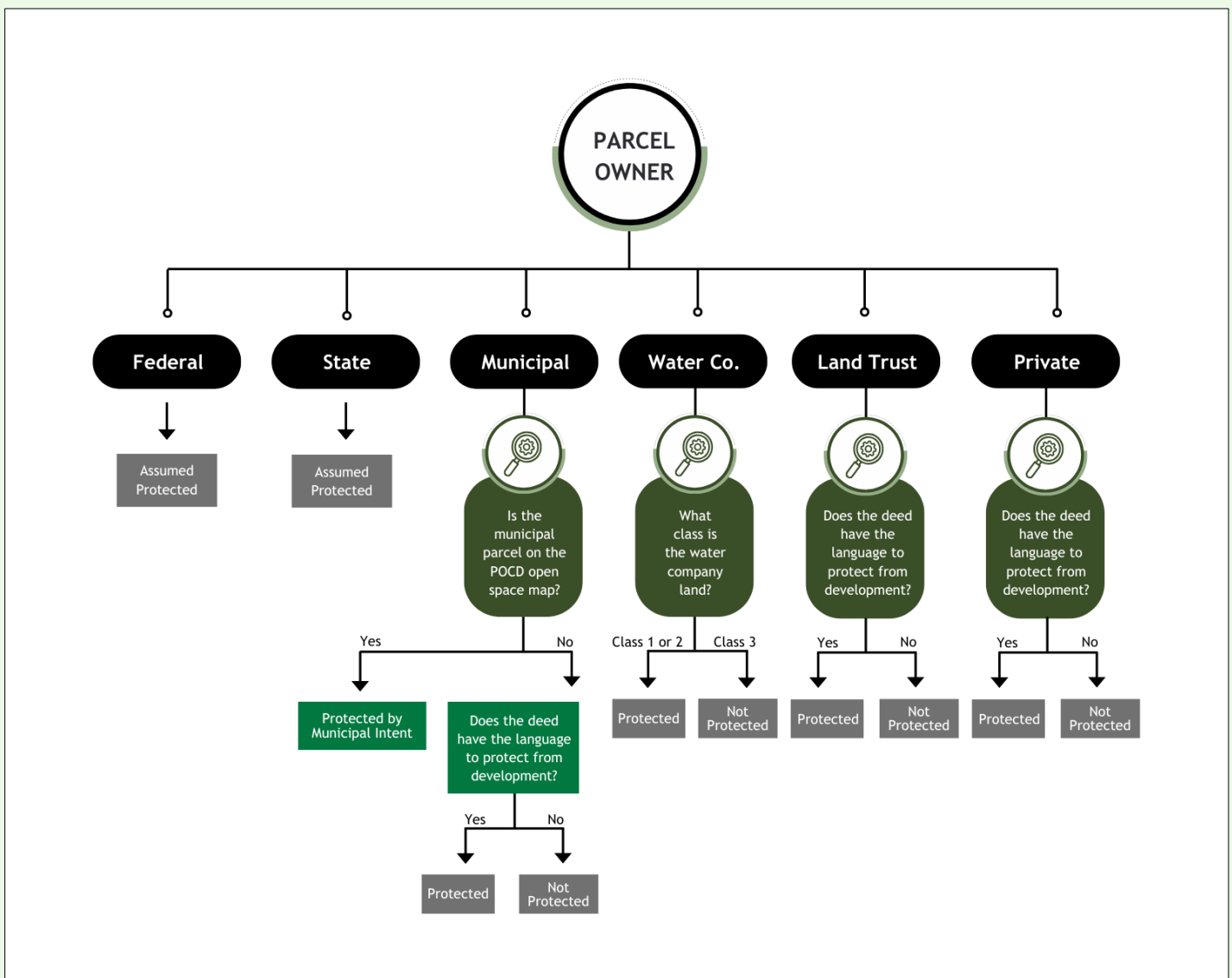


Figure 19: Determining Legal Protection Chart



### Protected Area

The protected area refers to how many protected acres are within an open space parcel and where they are situated. This is important to verify, because not every type of protection applies to an entire parcel. For instance, a homeowner with a large piece of land may have arranged a conservation easement on the forested part of the property, held by a land trust or the town - but they are still able to develop in unprotected areas.

To determine the size of a partially protected area, the project team digitally mapped the shape of the protected portion of the land (the polygon) and calculated the area. A more precise, but less uniform, methodology would have been to check the acreage in each easement - but not all partially protected parcels have easements (like a school's sports field), and not all easements list acreages.

For parcels that were fully protected without an easement, the protected acreage was imported from the property card data.

If a parcel was fully protected but had an easement for purposes other than open space conservation, the entire parcel acreage was still recorded. For example, if an open space property is fully protected for conservation purposes and has a utility or right-of-way easement within it that does not guarantee conservation protection, the whole parcel was still identified as protected open space.

### Land Use/Function

To determine what a certain open space parcel was used for, project members decided to separate use into two different categories - "Primary Use" and "Other Uses." Primary Use indicates the most dominant open space use on the property, determined by investigating deeds/easements, websites related to the parcel or its owner, and aerial imagery. The Other Uses category includes additional uses for properties with multiple functions. During the research process, it was found that many open space properties were used for multiple purposes aside from their primary and even secondary uses. An example might be a land trust property that

contains a trail, a historical site, and leased farmland.

The full list of Primary and Other Uses includes: Agriculture; Cemetery; Conservation; Flood Control; Forestry; Golf Course; Historic; Recreation; Park; Water Co. Class I or II (primary use only); Water Co. Class III



Figure 20: Mad River at Peterson Park, Wolcott

### Considerations for Planning

The primary purpose of this Inventory is to capture existing conditions for municipalities, land trusts, or other open space advocates to incorporate into future planning. Related NVCOG projects may be of interest to these stakeholders as additional planning resources. Access to open space should remain a central consideration when strategizing for land acquisition and management.

### Related Projects

#### Naugatuck River Greenway<sup>39</sup>

The Naugatuck River Greenway (NRG) Trail is a non-motorized multiuse trail that, when complete, will follow the river for forty-four miles through the communities of Litchfield, Harwinton, Thomaston, Watertown, Waterbury, Naugatuck, Beacon Falls, Seymour, Ansonia, and Derby. It is an officially designated Connecticut State Greenway. About nine miles of the trail have already been completed, with several miles



## OPEN SPACE REPORT & GUIDE

designed or in design. NVCOG recently received a federal RAISE grant to design all gap sections between Naugatuck and Thomaston, which will occur over the coming years.<sup>40</sup>

The Naugatuck River is lined with old factories and infrastructure from its days as an industrial center for ammunition, clocks, rubber, buttons, and more. This legacy has left brownfield properties all along the river, preventing public access to the region's premier natural and recreational resource. The NRG trail is a long-term effort to restore that access through acquiring open space, improving it with trails, and adding amenities like rain gardens, pavilions, ADA-accessible facilities, and more. It is a model of how open space can not only revitalize a community, but connect a region.

### Kinneytown Dam Removal<sup>41</sup>

For nearly two centuries, migratory fish have been blocked from most of the Naugatuck River by the Kinneytown Dam in Seymour. That continues today, with the facility no longer producing electricity and serving no useful purpose. NVCOG is leading a project in partnership with Save the Sound to remove Kinneytown Dam. Removal will open miles of restored habitat to shad, alewife, lamprey, river herring and other diadromous fish, while reducing flood risk and removing a safety concern. The post-restoration plan for the property is to create permanent open space in both Ansonia and Seymour, reconnecting residents and visitors to the river, with a portion of the Naugatuck River Greenway trail running the length of the property.



Figure 21: Kinneytown Dam, Seymour



## “Open Space: Seven Major Action Areas”

Published in 1967 by the Central Naugatuck Valley Regional Planning Agency

This document provides a fascinating perspective on open space planning in this 1960s, while also demonstrating the kind of work that this Inventory can inform.

The Central Naugatuck Valley Regional Planning Agency - one of the three organizations that predated NVCOG - contained the communities of Beacon Falls, Bethlehem, Cheshire, Middlebury, Naugatuck, Oxford, Prospect, Southbury, Thomaston, Waterbury, Watertown, Wolcott, and Woodbury. In 1967, the Agency identified seven areas of regional importance that it recommended for open space protection. Below is an analysis of each site and whether, 58 years later, those open space goals have been achieved.



Site	Location	Acres	Still Undeveloped? Protected?
Lake Quassapaug	Woodbury, Middlebury	2,825	Mostly undeveloped; western portion owned by Flanders (Whittemore Sanctuary), northern portion owned by Highfield Country Club and Middlebury Land Trust. Some areas that were marked for future public swimming are now residential.
Hop Brook	Middlebury, Naugatuck, Waterbury	1,710	Federal flood control area and Whittemore State Park remain; recommendations to gain easements on two golf courses, which remain today, have not been fulfilled.
I-84 Conn. Route 70	Cheshire, Prospect, Southington, Wolcott	1,549	While the Town of Cheshire owns about 480 acres in this area, the rest has either been subdivided for single family homes or is held by private LLCs.
Peck Mountain	Cheshire, Prospect	3,600	A pastiche of owner types - municipality, land trust, water company, State, and private - steward open space in this area. Mostly water company. Much of the northern portion, however, is developed.
Straits Turnpike	Waterbury, Middlebury, Watertown	785	Although the southern portion remains a golf course and undeveloped municipal land, the rest of this area has become very dense residential development.
Boundline Road	Wolcott	1,037	None of this land appears to be open space (though the central portions are undeveloped). Several sections support medium density residential.
Nonnewaug Falls	Bethlehem, Watertown, and Woodbury	2,105	Mostly undeveloped, except a residential subdivision in Watertown off Platt Rd. The western half of this area, especially in the south, is very well protected through water company land, private agriculture, and municipal land. The Falls themselves remain a well-loved hiking destination.

*In 2026, NVCOG plans to release its first **Regional Plan of Conservation and Development**. This will become the new guiding document for the region and will incorporate mapping and data from the Inventory.*

## Planning for Access to Open Space

Access to open space is essential for the well-being of communities. As stated in the benefits section of this report, open spaces such as parks, recreational areas, and preserves provide essential benefits, including outdoor recreation, physical and mental health improvements, ecosystem services, and even social interaction. Achieving fairness in access to open space goes beyond simply providing parks; it requires understanding who can use these spaces, how they are maintained, and whether they meet the needs of all community members. Addressing these disparities is crucial for strengthening communities, improving public health, and ensuring fair access to resources.<sup>42</sup>

While proximity to open space is important, it does not automatically translate to access for all or meaningful use. Physical barriers such as busy roads, lack of safe pedestrian pathways, or inadequate public transportation can make it difficult for residents, especially those without personal vehicles, to reach these spaces. Moreover, spaces that are technically open to the public but are controlled by private entities or contain restricted areas may not offer true accessibility to the community, limiting their utility as a community resource. Such barriers disproportionately affect marginalized groups, including low-income residents, the elderly, and people with disabilities.<sup>43</sup>

The quality of open space is also essential. Even when open spaces are accessible, inadequate infrastructure can limit their use. A park that is poorly maintained, lacks essential amenities, or is perceived as unsafe may go unused, even if it is located near a population center. Investing in infrastructure improvements is necessary to make open spaces more usable and inviting. Accessibility features such as ramps, ADA-compliant pathways, and signage should also be considered to accommodate individuals with disabilities.

Indigenous groups have cared for the lands of the NVCOG region for generations. Planners should consider the ancestral connections of Indigenous peoples to the area. Ensuring access to land for Indigenous communities is critical for maintaining and restoring cultural and spiritual practices as



Figure 22: Jones Family Farm, Shelton

well as promoting health and well-being for Indigenous residents. Building relationships with Indigenous communities who have ancestral ties to a given open space area may lead to important partnerships for both municipalities and tribes.

To improve access to open spaces, planners and policymakers should align their efforts with broader land use goals and adopt targeted strategies in guiding documents such as their local POCD. These strategies include prioritizing investments in underserved areas, improving the quality and safety of existing parks, and ensuring that acquisitions or investments are distributed fairly. Policies should also focus on removing barriers to access, such as improving transportation linkages to parks and ensuring that spaces are physically accessible to people of all abilities. The NVCOG GIS viewer, which integrates community data with spatial information on parks, green spaces, and other open spaces, is a valuable tool for identifying gaps in access and improving open space planning. GIS analysis can also help planners understand the relationship between open space availability and environmental hazards, such as heat islands, which often disproportionately impact vulnerable communities. Ensuring accessible and well-used open spaces is fundamental to creating healthy communities.



## KEY REGIONAL FINDINGS

### #1: Delineating what constitutes “protected open space” is nuanced and complex.

Throughout this two-year process, NVCOG’s project team continually revisited the criteria for placing a parcel on the open space map, and further determining whether it was protected.

What does “open space” mean for this project? As described above, neither the legislature nor state regulatory agencies provide a single, consistent definition for the term. Staff strove to choose criteria that would be as broadly applicable and useful as possible, while excluding land that was clearly not open space. This was easier said than done. Lack of development couldn’t be the determinant, because playgrounds and flood

control dams are clearly developed yet are also clearly open space. Nor could we simply combine all municipal POCD open space maps without further refining the parcels, given that some towns marked all land owned by the municipality, water companies, or utilities as open space even when they contained significant infrastructure or buildings.

Protection was also a subject of much debate. Language in a property’s deed restricting development or requiring open space uses was relatively straightforward. Easements, water company Class I and II land, and certificates of devise (bequests) were also clear legal instruments of protection. Yet there were other situations where it seemed certain that land was not at risk of development. For instance, federal and state parks, forests, and flood control areas are quite obviously not going to be sold to developers, even in the absence of legal paperwork to that effect. Due to the thousands of properties requiring research, the assumption was made that they were protected without confirming via land records. Furthermore, the project team deemed municipally owned land that appeared on a POCD open space map as protected due to a “municipal intent” to preserve that open space use (at minimum for the next 10 years). Finally, the project team contemplated the role of PA490 land. The designation does not work as a primary protection instrument, but rather, generates a lower taxation assessment to encourage the protection of open space, forest, and agricultural land for the time of the reduced assessment. The status is not permanent and can be revoked when the use or ownership changes.<sup>44</sup> PA490 designations are important indicators for municipalities to keep track of, especially in relation to the POCD open space map; but the team ultimately agreed that they did not have a role in determining whether a property was protected.

All scoping decisions for the purposes of this regional inventory have been documented in the Methodology section. NVCOG staff encourages municipal departments or commissions charged with managing open space to be intentional and thorough in defining what they consider to be protected open space.



Figure 23: Swamp at Prokop Rd, Oxford



## #2: Municipalities would benefit from a uniform open space reporting, tracking, and mapping protocol - but there are challenges.

Although conservation commissions are required by CGS Section 7-131a(b)<sup>45</sup> to keep an index of open space within their community, commissioners often lack the capacity for such a task unless staff is willing to undertake it. Some Naugatuck Valley municipalities have as few as 30 open space parcels; others have over 600. Tracking down information on these properties requires the ability to navigate GIS maps, property cards, and municipal land records. Digitization of records varies quite widely, with some municipalities having only in-person records and others with their full suite of maps and deeds in an online database.

Once an inventory is in place, updating it can be challenging. Municipalities may first become aware of open space through multiple channels: a filing with the tax assessor, a Planning Commission approval for a subdivision, or a land records submission with the town clerk, to name a few. These departments do not always communicate with each other nor have a mechanism in place to filter open space parcels in their respective records. Turnover and departmental restructuring can disrupt whatever processes are in place for tracking open space, if tracking even existed. GIS staff, where available, should also be looped in to update municipal mapping, including parcel merges and splits, that impact open space. While a handful of municipalities do have dedicated GIS specialists, others designate this work to existing employees or rely on NVCOG.

All these complexities make it difficult to recommend a uniform protocol to report, track, and map open space in the region.

Despite the many obstacles associated with inventorying municipal open space, the benefits are significant. When a municipality updates its POCD every ten years, an inventory will make it much easier to accurately redo the open space map. Moreover, CGS Section 12-107e<sup>46</sup> has established a process in which the open space map



Figure 24: March Farm, Bethlehem

in the POCD, if ratified by the legislative body, becomes the guiding policy document for PA 490 Open Space Assessments.<sup>47</sup> Additionally, an open space inventory will earn a community 10 points towards Sustainable CT certification.<sup>48</sup> Finally, planning for the acquisition of strategic parcels in the future is best served by taking a comprehensive look at existing conditions. A regularly updated municipal inventory lays a strong foundation for open space planning.

NVCOG's Open Space Inventory is an excellent resource, but will only serve as a snapshot in time if municipalities do not share regular updates. Appendix B provides a recommended protocol to track new municipal open space. Although each municipality is structured differently, NVCOG communities are encouraged to review the appendix and implement some sort of process for tracking open space.



### #3: Many open space properties that are considered important cultural or community amenities are not legally protected.

The regional open space map associated with this report contains a layer that shows protected and unprotected open space in the region. Given how critical open space is to quality of life, it may be surprising how many parcels are unprotected. The larger properties, which tend to be federal, state, and water company land, are almost always protected; however, hundreds of other parcels that represent important community amenities remain devoid of legal protection.

Some of the unprotected open space in this region includes golf courses, local parks, land trust conservation areas, community hiking trails, rod & gun clubs, and recreational fields. Many of these properties have become part of the fabric of our communities - used for family gatherings, mentioned as landmarks when giving directions, and hosting cultural events like concerts or festivals. Does the lack of legal protection mean they will be sold to a developer tomorrow? Certainly not, especially in the case of government-held properties. But as the adage goes: “once gone, lost forever.”

Municipalities and land trusts are strongly encouraged to use the viewer to identify parcels that could benefit from legal protection. They should also ensure that future acquisitions include appropriately worded conservation restrictions reviewed by an attorney. Appendix D introduces the basic components of a deed restriction using an example from the region.



Figure 25: Middlebury Green, Middlebury



Figure 26: O’Sullivan’s Island, Derby

### #4: Not all open space uses or parcels provide equal benefits.

Two acres of open space is twice as beneficial as one acre - right? Not necessarily. The quality of open space depends on a number of factors and cannot be determined simply by looking at acreage or even aerial imagery.

Although NVCOG’s primary area of research for this project was legal protection, staff also looked into the function of each property and, when the information was available, whether public access was permitted. Hunting clubs and golf courses, for instance, tend to allow only paying members on the premises. Agricultural areas sometimes count towards open space totals, but may be off limits to visitors. Yet exclusivity is not inherently bad. A nature sanctuary with endangered species is better off closed to the public, even if that comes at the cost of reducing access. Water company land often has sensitive infrastructure and natural resources that risk impacts to the public water supply if tampered with or contaminated.

NVCOG hopes to paint a nuanced and accurate portrait of open space in the region with the information in the inventory. While the total number of acres provides an interesting touchstone, it does not directly correlate with public access, recreational amenities, or conservation value.

## AREAS FOR FURTHER RESEARCH

This project was intended to gather data that will form the basis for future study and planning projects, although staff capacity and funding constraints necessitated limitations on the inventory's scope. Further research to refine and expand the data that was collected will be considered in the future, including, but not limited to the following.



Figure 27: Municipal land records at Plymouth Town Hall

1. Look up deeds for properties that were assumed protected, including land owned by:

- a. Federal agencies
- b. State agencies
- c. Municipal governments (and were present on the POCD open space map)
- d. Water company (to determine whether, in the case of decommissioning, the land would remain protected)

2. Look up and record maps and minutes for all properties to further examine open space protections.

- a. Research subdivision maps and minutes for additional open space properties.
- b. Research online land records for “open space” key words.

3. Conduct a walkability analysis to determine gaps where residential households are not within walking distance from publicly accessible open space.

4. Build relationships with Indigenous communities who have ancestral connections to the area.

- a. Utilize resources to help identify the Tribal Nations to reach out to.<sup>49</sup>
- b. Discuss with tribal leadership their interests in arrangements to restore tribal access to open space, in partnership with municipalities.<sup>50</sup>
- c. Consider with tribal leadership possible partnerships for educational and/or environmental restoration purposes.<sup>51</sup>

5. Overlay all municipal POCD maps, PA 490 designations, and SHPO designations as separate layers.

6. Verify and research public accessibility for all open space parcels.

**Thank you for reading!  
Visit the Viewer here:**



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## ACRONYMS

**ADA:** Americans with Disabilities Act  
**CGS:** Connecticut General Statutes  
**DEEP / CT DEEP:** Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection  
**GIS:** Geographic Information Systems  
**NRG:** Naugatuck River Greenway  
**NVCOG:** Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments  
**PA 490:** Public Act 490  
**POCD:** Plan of Conservation and Development  
**SHPO:** State Historic Preservation Office

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## Appendix A: Municipal Profiles

Each community in the Naugatuck Valley has a unique pastiche of open space that is worthy of attention. The following profiles summarize municipal-specific data and provide detail on three featured parcels that were selected by the project team. The top three were chosen for a variety of reasons, such as recognizability, interesting protection mechanism, unique environmental features, or regional importance. Each profile has been designed to function as a standalone two-pager, or to be read together to form a regional portrait.

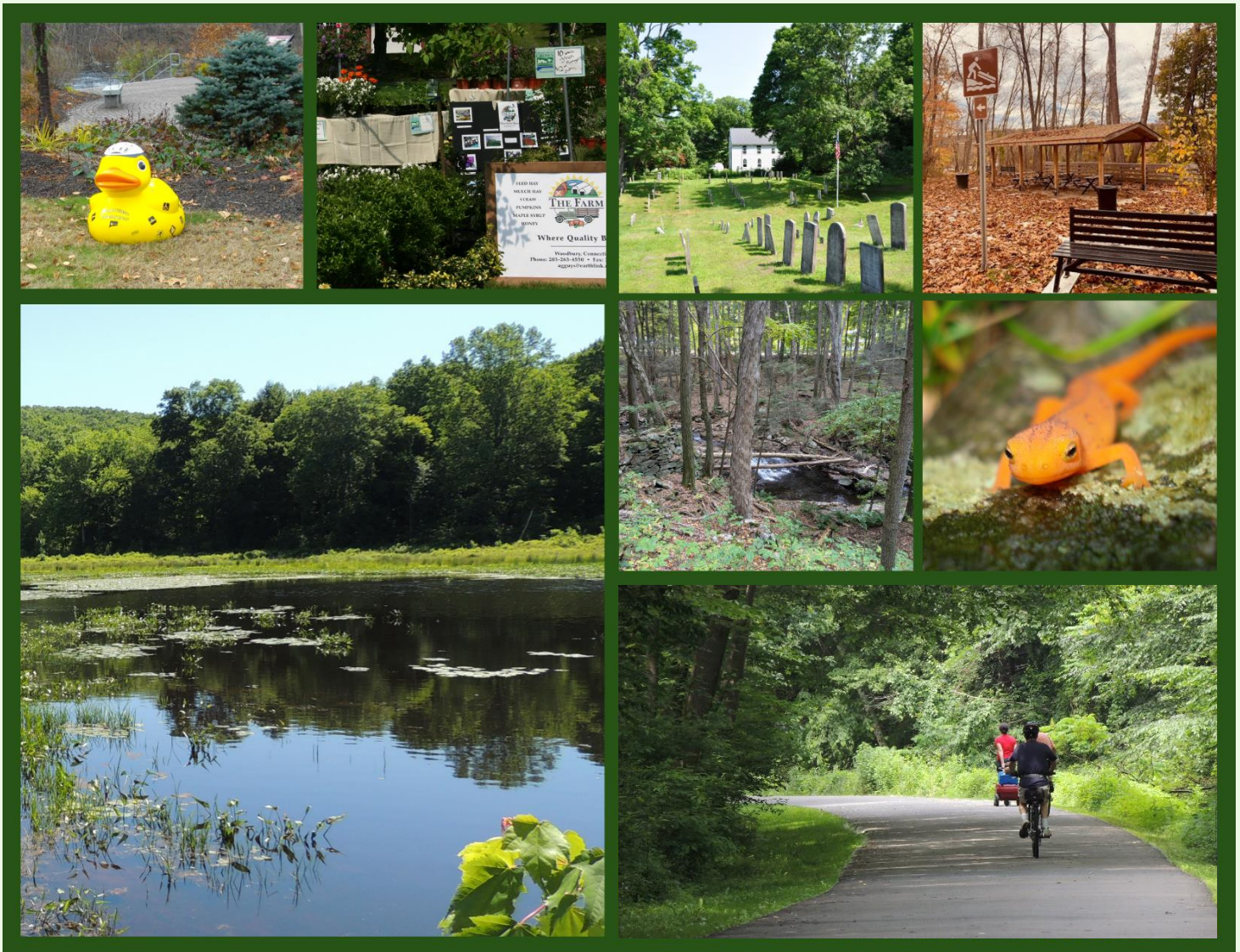


Figure 28: Collage of Photos Across the Naugatuck Valley



# OPEN SPACE IN ANSONIA, CT

## QUICK STATS

### OPEN SPACE

- Total Open Space Acreage: 1062.67 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Open Space: 27%
- Total Number of Open Space Properties: 53
- Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.06

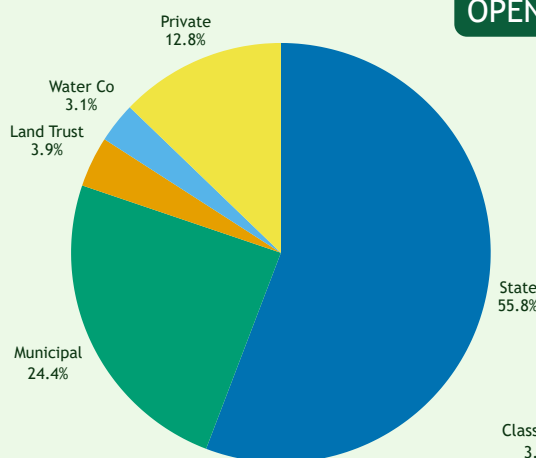
### PROTECTED OPEN SPACE

- Total Protected Open Space Acreage: 886.52 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Protected Open Space: 22%
- Total Number of Protected Open Space Properties: 30
- Protected Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.05

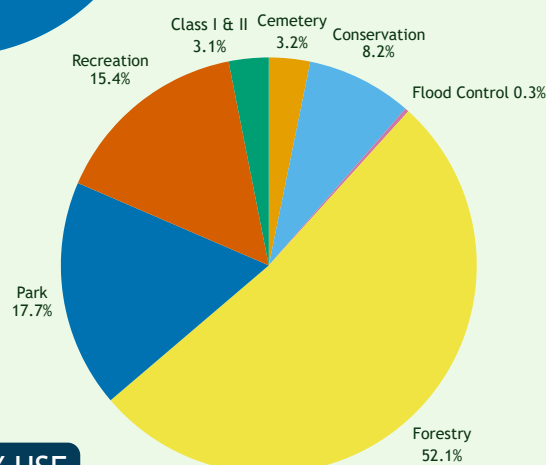
### PARCEL SIZE

- Avg. Size: 20.05 acres
- Min: 0.2 acres
- Max: 534.78 acres

## OPEN SPACE BY OWNER TYPE



## OPEN SPACE BY PRIMARY USE



## NARRATIVE OVERVIEW

Ansonia boasts a number of municipally owned parks, greens, and fields scattered throughout residential and commercial areas. The largest open space properties reside in the northeastern corner, consisting of the Naugatuck State Forest, Regional Water Authority land, Schriber Park, and the Ansonia Rod & Gun Club. One of the most beloved and well-trafficked pieces of open space is the 2-mile Ansonia Riverwalk trail that runs atop flood control levees and crosses over railroad tracks that hint at the city's post-industrial comeback.

Ansonia is also home to future open space: the privately-owned property that hosts Coe Pond and a canal reservoir associated with Kinneytown Dam. It is slated to be transferred to the City for open space use once the dam is removed. The future use of this parcel is yet to be determined, but the titanic effort by Ansonia, NVCOG, and their partners will result in increased community access to the Naugatuck River.

Ansonia's 2018 Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) puts major emphasis on open space. It lists preservation of open space as a conservation policy goal and identifies open space as an important element of land use plan review. The 2018 POCD dedicates several pages to a deep dive on the ways regulatory measures, funding, and public-private partnerships can be leveraged for acquisition.



# ANSONIA FEATURED OPEN SPACE

## Ansonia Nature Center

This 150-acre property features an educational center, hosts activities (like guided hikes), events (like the Ansonia Earth Day fair), and programs (like Junior Rangers), all designed to foster love and understanding of the natural world. The Nature Center is also home to “Ambassador Animals,” including several owls, a python, and a tarantula for educational engagement. The grounds themselves contain multiple trails, a pond, a swamp, organic community gardens, sports fields, and a playground.



## Nolan Field

Located alongside Route 8 in a largely residential neighborhood, Nolan Field provides space for baseball, tennis, basketball, a walking track, football, and a playground. The playground includes a recently installed splashpad - an important amenity for keeping children cool during the hot summer months. The athletic field has been used to host town-wide events like “Rock the Valley,” a family-friendly music festival organized by the Ansonia Cultural Commission since 2015. The event features vendors, food trucks, a designated kids' zone, a petting zoo, and live bands throughout the day for the community to enjoy.



## Warsaw Park

Warsaw Park is a popular tourist attraction that offers visitors lush greenery, scenic walking trails, and recreational facilities. It is one of the few examples of a publicly accessible park that is owned by a private entity - St. Joseph Church. Warsaw Park hosts multiple events including the Midsummer Fantasy Renaissance Faire and features an auditorium for indoor events. It is bounded on the eastern side by Twomile Brook, a tributary of the Housatonic River.





# OPEN SPACE IN BEACON FALLS, CT

## QUICK STATS

### OPEN SPACE

- Total Open Space Acreage: 1908.15 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Open Space: 30%
- Total Number of Open Space Properties: 37
- Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.31

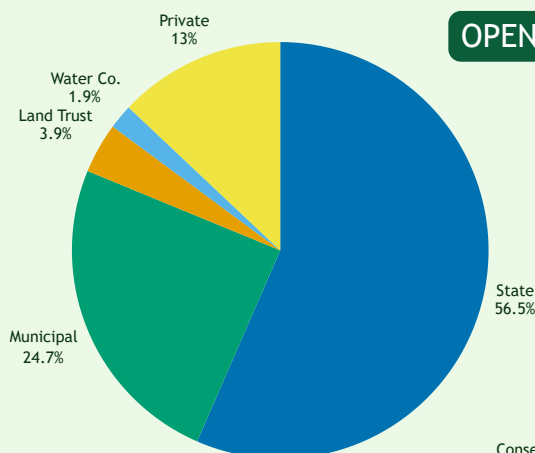
### PROTECTED OPEN SPACE

- Total Protected Open Space Acreage: 1795.52 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Protected Open Space: 28%
- Total Number of Protected Open Space Properties: 33
- Protected Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.29

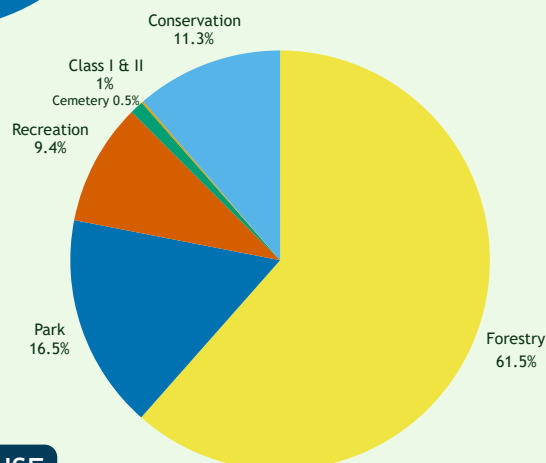
### PARCEL SIZE

- Avg. Size: 51.57 acres
- Min: 0.22 acres
- Max: 614.04 acres

## OPEN SPACE BY OWNER TYPE



## OPEN SPACE BY PRIMARY USE



## NARRATIVE OVERVIEW

Beacon Falls is committed to promoting open space in their community, maintaining a webpage with maps of a dozen key properties with public access. Most open space decision making occurs through the Planning Commission.

The northern portion of the municipality is dominated by several parcels, each in the hundreds of acres, comprising Naugatuck State Forest. Forestry lands make up nearly two thirds of the open space within the town. The majority of other open spaces around Beacon Falls are municipally held and range anywhere from a quarter acre (like Veterans Park) to over 100 acres (like Lantern's Ridge). A few other privately held pieces of open space complete the picture, like the Pines Bridge Cemetery and the Naugatuck Valley Beagle Club.



# BEACON FALLS FEATURED OPEN SPACE

## Riverbend Park

After over a decade of collaboration between Trout Unlimited, CT DEP, O&G Industries (which donated the land), and the Town of Beacon Falls, Riverbend Park was established along the Naugatuck River in May of 2009. Environmental stewards and planning professionals dedicated many volunteer hours to design this community amenity by preserving the tree cover in the low-lying riverine buffer to double as a flood mitigation area for the neighborhood. Benches, landscaping, and direct access to the river for launching boats makes Riverbend Park a small but mighty piece of open space.



## Matthies Park

This residents-only park spans 300 acres and was once the summer home of Bernard H. Matthies, who donated it to the Town so that it could be enjoyed in perpetuity. The property boasts eight hiking trails, beautiful Carrington Pond (which is open for kayaking, swimming, and ice-skating), a playground, and a pavilion that can be rented for special events. It is situated next to Woodland Regional High School, and spills over the Oxford town line where it abuts a fish & game club.

## Naugatuck State Forest

Over 1,000 acres of the Naugatuck State Forest grace the northern woodlands of Beacon Falls. The Forest totals 5,000 acres, with properties in Naugatuck, Beacon Falls, Oxford, Bethany, Hamden, Cheshire, Ansonia, and Seymour. Those who drive down Route 8 will enjoy the stunning forested cliffs on either side of the Naugatuck River. Multiuse trails galore spread throughout the area, which can be used for hiking, biking, snowmobiling, or cross-country skiing.





# OPEN SPACE IN BETHLEHEM, CT

## QUICK STATS

### OPEN SPACE

- Total Open Space Acreage: 1753.29 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Open Space: 14%
- Total Number of Open Space Properties: 73
- Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.52

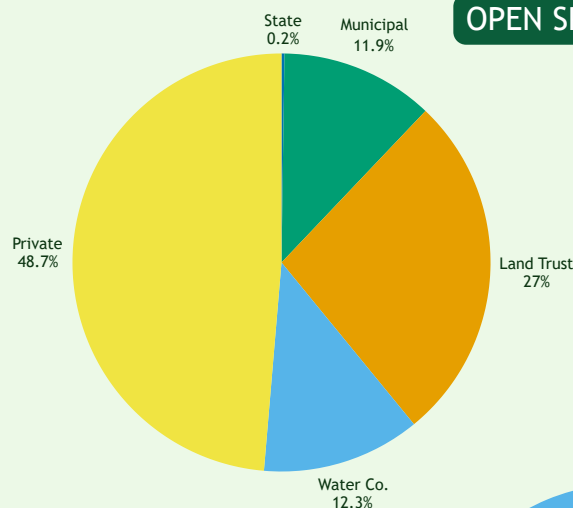
### PROTECTED OPEN SPACE

- Total Protected Open Space Acreage: 683.11 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Protected Open Space: 5%
- Total Number of Protected Open Space Properties: 36
- Protected Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.20

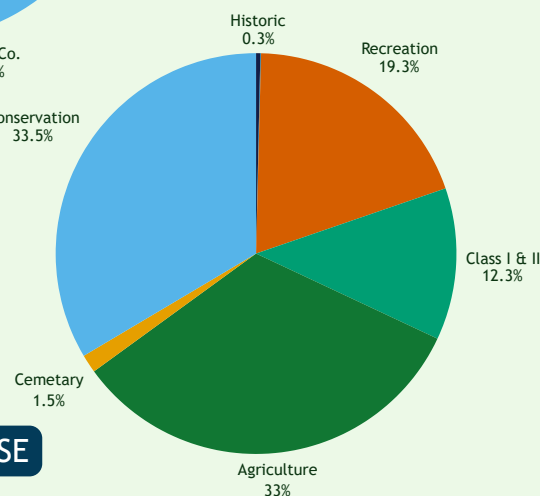
### PARCEL SIZE

- Avg. Size: 24.02 acres
- Min: 0.14 acres
- Max: 201.07 acres

## OPEN SPACE BY OWNER TYPE



## OPEN SPACE BY PRIMARY USE



## NARRATIVE OVERVIEW

Bethlehem is the smallest municipality by population in the region, which is reflected in its low density and large undeveloped tracts of land. Most properties are owned by private parties with no mechanism to prevent development, and therefore do not constitute open space for purposes of this inventory. In keeping with its identity as a farming community, Bethlehem's landscape is dappled with agricultural fields and pastures, some of which are beneficiaries of legal protections like the CT Farmland Preservation Program.

Interestingly, Bethlehem is one of only two jurisdictions in Connecticut that have not adopted zoning. They have a planning commission as well as a conservation commission which maintains an open space policy, a national resources inventory, and a residential land use guide. They also engage in educational programming and host the town's community gardens. The Bethlehem Land Trust is another significant open space partner, holding 20 properties ranging from a single acre to nearly 100.



# BETHLEHEM FEATURED OPEN SPACE

## Bellamy-Ferriday House and Garden

A blend of history and nature, visiting the Bellamy-Ferriday House and Garden is a great way to spend a spring or summer afternoon. Reverend Joseph Bellamy originally built the house in 1754, making it older than America itself. He was a well-known revival preacher, a Yale graduate, and an author of 22 books. A century and a half later, Eliza Ferriday purchased the house and designed colorful, manicured gardens that remain an attraction today. Her daughter Caroline was a human rights activist who advocated for France during World War II and ultimately relocated 35 Polish concentration camp survivors to Bethlehem. Today the property is split into a 7-acre lot containing the house and garden, and a forested 80-acre property that was deeded to the Bethlehem Land Trust.



## Bethlehem Fairgrounds

The Fairgrounds host beloved community events like the iconic Garlic Festival, car and truck shows, tag sales, and of course the Bethlehem Fair. It is overseen by a private organization that provides over \$20,000 in scholarships annually to high schoolers majoring in agri-business or home economics. The 50-acre parcel contains large, mowed fields and nearly a dozen outbuildings designed to house livestock and vendors. They are scheduled to celebrate their 100th country fair in 2025.



## Swendsen Farm Preserve

This lovely community amenity, owned by the Town, hosts over 100 acres of crop fields and a 4-acre pond. The Swendsen family donated the land to Bethlehem in 2006, and since then the Town has erected community gardens for the public to enjoy. The gardens are upkeep by volunteers and local high schoolers; their website states that they produce up to 1,500 pounds of fruit and vegetables annually. The Swendsen family continues to farm the land and runs an active social media account.



# OPEN SPACE IN BRISTOL, CT

## QUICK STATS

### OPEN SPACE

- Total Open Space Acreage: 2971.36 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Open Space: 17%
- Total Number of Open Space Properties: 259
- Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.05

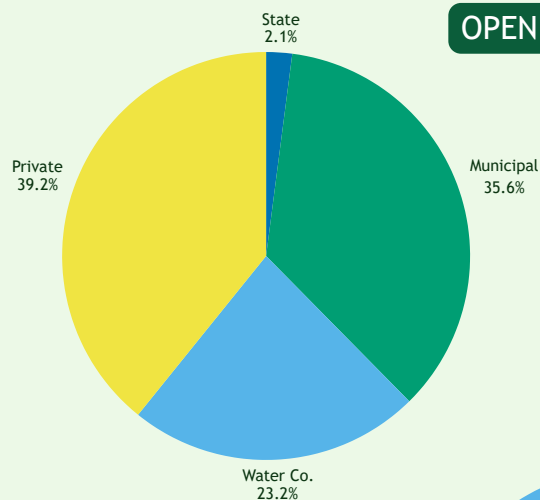
### PROTECTED OPEN SPACE

- Total Protected Open Space Acreage: 2385.67 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Protected Open Space: 14%
- Total Number of Protected Open Space Properties: 225
- Protected Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.04

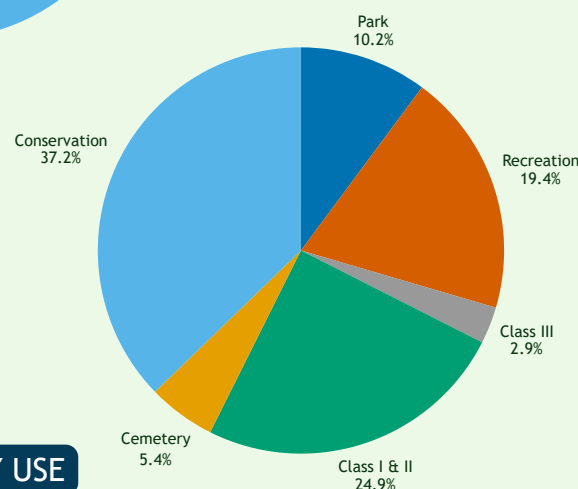
### PARCEL SIZE

- Avg. Size: 11.47 acres
- Min: 0.06 acres
- Max: 130.73 acres

## OPEN SPACE BY OWNER TYPE



## OPEN SPACE BY PRIMARY USE



## NARRATIVE OVERVIEW

The City of Bristol's commitment to open space is clear by the roughly 160 parcels it owns, from a tenth of an acre to over one hundred acres. The majority of its municipal open space is concentrated around the center of the city, in the form of parks, community greens, sports fields, and even cemeteries. Water companies, including the City itself, take advantage of Bristol's rich water resources by holding roughly 700 acres around reservoirs and watershed land. The city also boasts two sizeable hunting clubs: Bristol Fish & Game and Jacklin Rod & Gun Club.

A nonprofit called the Environmental Learning Centers of Connecticut, sharing a similar organizational structure to a land trust, manages over twenty parcels of open space. While most of these preserves are kept in natural states, some contain walking trails and educational buildings, with several even housing ambassador animals to teach children about environmental stewardship.

Interestingly, Bristol contains only one state-owned piece of open space (Nelon's Field along Route 69) and no federal land; a stark contrast to its neighbors Plymouth and Thomaston.



# BRISTOL FEATURED OPEN SPACE

## Wallace Barnes Nature Trail

Wallace Barnes Nature Trail is the paragon of an ADA-compliant outdoor amenity. This one-mile loop is fully accessible to people using wheelchairs, strollers, walkers, and other mobility devices. Boardwalks also minimize disruption to the thriving wetlands and their inhabitants, avoiding the need for a salamander or turtle to cross a walkway. The trail is located at the Harry C. Barnes Memorial Nature Center, owned by the Environmental Learning Centers of Connecticut, which holds another eight properties in Bristol. The trail features benches, pull-off sheltered areas, and signage as it leads visitors through various habitats.



## Hopper Birge Pond Nature Preserve

The stunning 270-acre Hopper Birge Pond Nature Preserve was acquired by the City from Bristol Savings Bank in 1973. Seven distinct trails and a number of other connectors web through the property, linking Robert's Dog Park in the northwestern corner to Birge Pond along the eastern border. Glacial formations such as kettles and eskers pepper the land along with historical landmarks, like an old icehouse and charcoal pit. This well-loved park supports hiking, fishing, and non-motorized boating. It is bordered by several dense residential neighborhoods that benefit from their proximity to green and blue space.



## Rockwell Park

Rockwell Park, Bristol's first public park, earned its way onto the National Register of Historic Places in 1987. The municipal property of roughly 100 acres features swimming pools, playgrounds, baseball diamonds, a volleyball court, a soccer field, a skatepark, and an amphitheater. The northern stretch of the property is home to forests, ponds, and hiking trails, while the entire lot is bisected by the Pequabuck River. Rockwell also contains Muzzy Field Park, where Babe Ruth played during his barnstorming days. This marriage of conservation and recreation makes the destination extremely popular for the City's residents; best of all, it is within walking distance of residences, schools, and several churches/temples.



# OPEN SPACE IN CHESHIRE, CT

## QUICK STATS

### OPEN SPACE

- Total Open Space Acreage: 4517.25 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Open Space: 21%
- Total Number of Open Space Properties: 179
- Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.16

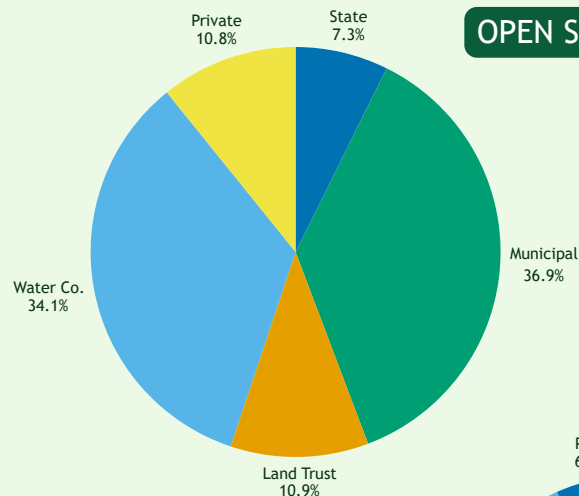
### PROTECTED OPEN SPACE

- Total Protected Open Space Acreage: 4037.06 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Protected Open Space: 19%
- Total Number of Protected Open Space Properties: 105
- Protected Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.14

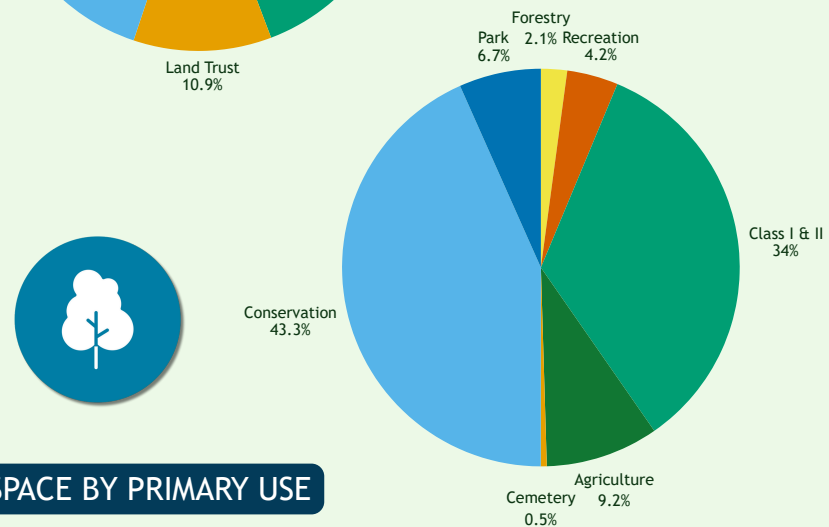
### PARCEL SIZE

- Avg. Size: 25.23 acres
- Min: 0.27 acres
- Max: 475.66 acres

## OPEN SPACE BY OWNER TYPE



## OPEN SPACE BY PRIMARY USE



## NARRATIVE OVERVIEW

Cheshire enjoys a blend of open space belonging to the State, the municipality, Cheshire Land Trust, water companies, and several private owners. Many of these parcels connect with each other to create conservation corridors, like the chain of Thomas Pool Memorial (land trust), Bens Homestead (State), the Puchalski property (municipal), the Mountain Road tract (water company), and the Roaring Brook Estates open space (homeowners' association). On the opposite side of Cheshire, over 1,000 acres of watershed land belong to the City of Meriden's Water Division, hosting large reservoirs. Another striking open space feature is the State-owned Farmington Canal Heritage Trail, which runs the full length of Cheshire from north to south and bisects the Town.

The Town maintains a number of parks, including Bartlem, Mixville, historic Lock 12, Cheshire Park, and Quinnipiac Recreation Area. Bartlem in particular is well-loved for its accessibility and sports fields, playgrounds, community garden, indoor recreation center with a swimming pool, and skate park. The Town, however, also manages some of its open space as conservation land, like Dime Savings and as agricultural land, like Boulder Knoll.



# CHESHIRE FEATURED OPEN SPACE

## Farmington Canal Heritage Trail

Abandoned railroad tracks have found new life in the form of the Farmington Canal Heritage Trail. One of the most impressive trails in Connecticut, the strip of State property runs for 80 miles starting in New Haven and ending well into Massachusetts. The paved, multiuse trail snakes through the center of Cheshire and intersects significant roads like West Main, spurring economic development in the form of trailside services. It also connects to Lock 12 Historic Park, a restored lock from the original Farmington Canal, which contains a picnic area, a helicoidal bridge, and a small museum.



## Tenmile Lowlands

A haven for wildlife, this nearly 150-acre property is rife with wetlands, streams, and vernal pools. The Tenmile River runs along the western border and serves as habitat for amphibious life, including salamanders, frogs, and turtles. Visitors are welcome to hike on the unblazed trail and enjoy stunning views of the watercourses. The lowlands are situated within a largely residential area and connect to other land trust- and privately-held open space.

## Ives Farm

Ives Farm spans three properties and approximately 150 acres in northeast Cheshire near the Quinnipiac River. The Cheshire Land Trust leases the fields to local farmers in keeping with the community's agricultural heritage, and even produces some of the fresh food served in Meriden's public schools. Behind the fields are woods that include public hiking trails. Cheshire Land Trust holds events throughout the year to engage the public, many of which take place at the red barn on the Ives property - bike races, a waterfowl presentation with live animals, farm equipment shows, tag sales, guided hikes, historical tours, fish releases, birding excursions, horseback rides, and even a Regional Land Trust Summit.



# OPEN SPACE IN DERBY, CT

## QUICK STATS

### OPEN SPACE

- Total Open Space Acreage: 771.53 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Open Space: 22%
- Total Number of Open Space Properties: 32
- Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.06

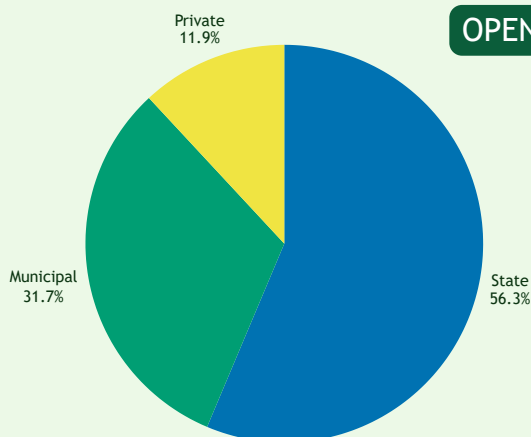
### PROTECTED OPEN SPACE

- Total Protected Open Space Acreage: 682.55 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Protected Open Space: 20%
- Total Number of Protected Open Space Properties: 23
- Protected Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.06

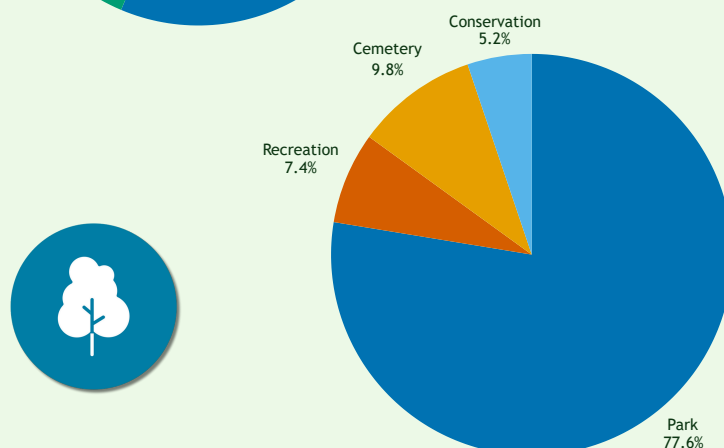
### PARCEL SIZE

- Avg. Size: 24.11 acres
- Min: 0.88 acres
- Max: 358.93 acres

## OPEN SPACE BY OWNER TYPE



## OPEN SPACE BY PRIMARY USE



## NARRATIVE OVERVIEW

The City of Derby has one of the region's most homogenous open space profiles, with nearly all open space land being municipally owned or private cemeteries. The one very sizeable exception is Osbornedale State Park, situated between the denser downtown and the northern section's light density residential lots. Derby's municipal parks are scattered throughout the city, such as Witek, Coon Hollow, and Bradley Field. Two blocks from Main Street sits the Derby Green, providing benches, walking paths, an urban tree canopy, and a historic war monument with cannons. These well-planned areas of green space and amenities in the city serve residents and visitors alike.

The confluence of the Housatonic and Naugatuck Rivers creates abundant blue space within Derby. The Derby Greenway runs along the entire length of the Naugatuck River within the city, while several key parcels along the Housatonic also ensure waterfront access. Derby's 2016 Plan of Conservation and Development profiles these important open space properties and contains action items such as "Maximize Derby's location on two rivers through better use and management" and "Preserve the waterfront."



# DERBY FEATURED OPEN SPACE

## Kellogg Environmental Center

Operated by CT DEEP, Kellogg's main building features several classrooms, display cases with art and artifacts, and a small pond with native turtles. The Center organizes nature-centric programming such as outdoor workshops, exhibits, guided hikes, and lectures open to the public. Facilities like Kellogg that are geared towards environmental education cannot be overstated in terms of importance to childhood development and inspiring love of the outdoors. The Kellogg Environmental Center is located within Derby's largest open space property: Osbornedale State Park. Osbornedale is managed for forestry, agriculture, conservation, and recreation efforts, offsetting the dense development in Derby's urban center.



## Witek Park

This municipal park is 144 acres and was once part of a reservoir. The Birmingham Water Company used the reservoir to feed the "Borough of Derby" (currently the west side of the city) from 1859 until 1997, when it was sold to the City. It was then repurposed as a park and named after World War II veteran PFC Frank P. Witek, who saved his platoon while safeguarding his severely wounded comrade. The park features two ponds, a soccer field, and multiple trails that run throughout the forested area of the property.



## The Derby Greenway

The Naugatuck River Greenway Trail (NRG) is a non-motorized multiuse trail that will follow the river for 44 miles through all 11 Naugatuck River communities when complete. Derby's two-mile section was one of the first complete legs of the NRG, restoring connection between downtown and the River. According to the Connecticut Trail Census, the Derby Greenway saw 262,500 uses in 2023 with an average daily use of 719. This incredibly popular recreational amenity boasts several fishing areas, historic features (like a giant tub wheel from a former manufacturing operation), and even loops around to follow the Housatonic River for a short distance. The NRG also connects to O'Sullivan's Island, which hosts an ADA-compliant fishing and viewing platform and park.





# OPEN SPACE IN MIDDLEBURY, CT

## QUICK STATS

### OPEN SPACE

- Total Open Space Acreage: 2697.76 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Open Space: 23%
- Total Number of Open Space Properties: 206
- Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.35

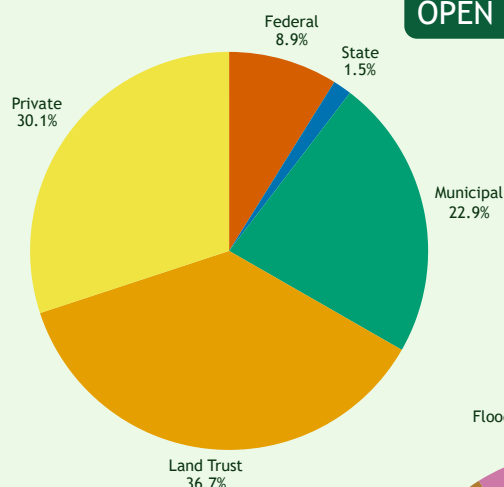
### PROTECTED OPEN SPACE

- Total Protected Open Space Acreage: 1933.88 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Protected Open Space: 16%
- Total Number of Protected Open Space Properties: 148
- Protected Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.25

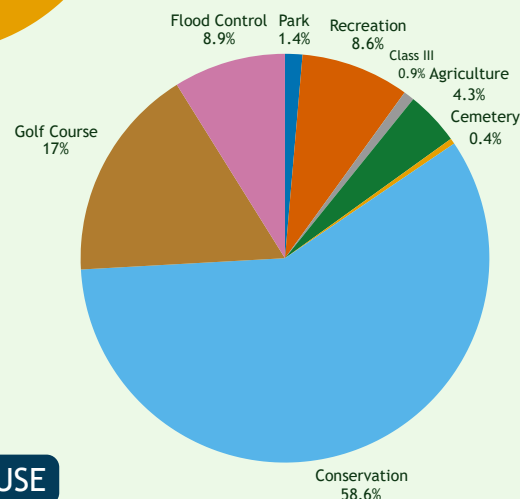
### PARCEL SIZE

- Avg. Size: 13.1 acres
- Min: 0.05 acres
- Max: 458.01 acres

## OPEN SPACE BY OWNER TYPE



## OPEN SPACE BY PRIMARY USE



## NARRATIVE OVERVIEW

Middlebury demonstrates how a patchwork of municipal, land trust, and private parcels can create a beautiful open space quilt. The parcels are well dispersed among those three dominant owner types throughout the town, with Hop Brook Dam as the single bastion of federal land in the southeastern corner. Middlebury's largest bodies of water - Lake Quassapaug, Long Meadow Pond, and Lake Elise - each have portions of their shores conserved through open space.

Connections among open space parcels in Middlebury create strong wildlife corridors through the community. For instance, a "column" of six parcels running southward from Park Rd Extension form a nearly mile-long stretch of protected forest.

Other similar networks exist throughout the town, some incorporating farmland as well as woodlands. Middlebury even has connectivity of open space across town borders, sharing open space with Woodbury, Waterbury, Naugatuck, and Oxford.



# MIDDLEBURY FEATURED OPEN SPACE

## Tranquility Farm

Originally founded in 1892, Tranquility Farm comprises 123 acres of protected agricultural land bordered by Route 64 and Lake Quassapaug. An easement in favor of the American Farmland Trust from 1986 requires that the land be used for farming and prohibits the construction of new buildings. The easement states, “Approximately 78 acres of the premises are rolling croplands, pasturelands and hayfields, with the remainder being forested or open spaces associated with handsome dwellings and other buildings, and the entire premises are surrounded by historic stone fences.” Today, the property is a vineyard, winery, and event venue that holds an iconic spot in Middlebury’s landscape.



## Hop Brook Lake and Dam

Hop Brook Dam is owned and maintained by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers as flood control facility built in response to the historic Flood of 1955. Although the Dam itself is situated in Waterbury and Naugatuck, a portion of the lake and more than 200 acres of surrounding property are in Middlebury. These parcels contain several tributaries feeding a recreation pool, Hop Brook Lake, wetlands, and important habitat for native wildlife such as waterfowl and beaver. The area also contains several pavilions and trails for passive recreation users.



## Highfield Country Club

This deluxe campus contains not only a golf course, outdoor pool, playground, and pickleball courts for recreation, but hundreds of acres of untouched forest in the northwestern corner of Middlebury. The country club was founded in 1953 and hosts activities including summer camp, weddings, and golf instruction. Highfield is one of the largest open space parcels in the 19-town region that does not have a protection mechanism such as a deed restriction or an easement.





# OPEN SPACE IN NAUGATUCK, CT

## QUICK STATS

### OPEN SPACE

- Total Open Space Acreage: 2254.73 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Open Space: 21%
- Total Number of Open Space Properties: 90
- Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.07

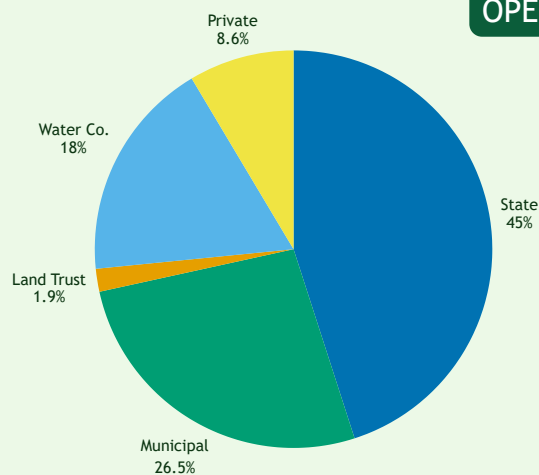
### PROTECTED OPEN SPACE

- Total Protected Open Space Acreage: 1992.65 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Protected Open Space: 19%
- Total Number of Protected Open Space Properties: 62
- Protected Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.06

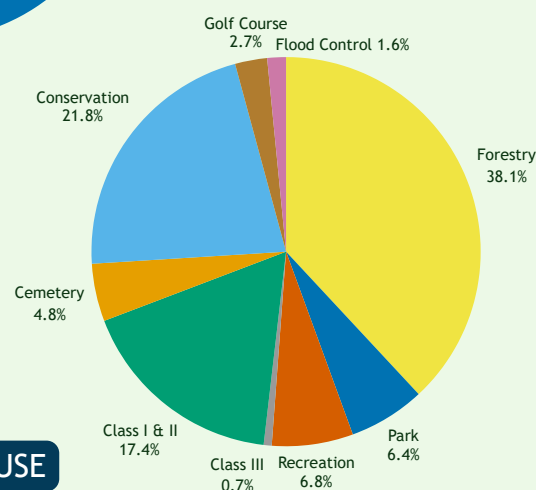
### PARCEL SIZE

- Avg. Size: 25.05 acres
- Min: 0.05 acres
- Max: 724.01 acres

## OPEN SPACE BY OWNER TYPE



## OPEN SPACE BY PRIMARY USE



## NARRATIVE OVERVIEW

With State properties to the north and south, and water company land to the east, Naugatuck is rich in open space. The most dominant property on the map is, of course, the Naugatuck State Forest. It takes up nearly 1,000 acres along the southern border and connects to an additional 1,000+ acres in Beacon Falls and Oxford.

The Borough prides itself on its impressive network of multiuse trails. In addition to the well-known Naugatuck River Greenway and Larkin Bridle Trail, hidden gems include the Baummer's Pond loop and the Andrew Mountain loops behind the dog park. Each year, Naugatuck holds a Mission 22 hike for Veterans Suicide Prevention starting in the Naugatuck State Forest and ending on the Town Green.

Naugatuck's Conservation Commission stewards municipal open space properties and occasionally collaborates with other environmental groups like the Sierra Club. The Borough promotes recreational open spaces on its Naugy Now website and via social media.



# NAUGATUCK FEATURED OPEN SPACE

## Gunntown Passive Park & Nature Preserve

Gunntown is a municipally owned nature preserve that fosters at least six distinct habitats within its 40 acres: wetlands, meadows, hardwood swamp, mixed hardwood forest, shrub swamp flood plains, and successional forest. Naugatuck's dedicated Parks Department manages a mowed area and butterfly garden, while maintaining two loop trails for visitors to enjoy. Bisected by Long Meadow Brook, the property is rife with wetlands and waterfalls that provide aquatic and amphibious wildlife with the resources to thrive. High elevations throughout the Preserve also provide breathtaking views of the valley. The property is adjacent to the historic Gunn house and Gunntown Cemetery.



## Linden Park

Linden Park features tennis/pickleball courts, a playground, soccer fields, a basketball court, and a skate park. There is direct access to the Naugatuck River. A section of the Naugatuck River Greenway runs along the west side of this property, overlooking the scenic river. Owned by the State, this 13-acre strip has easy regional access from Routes 8, 68, and 63.

## Andrew Mountain Park

A premier active and passive recreation destination in Naugatuck, Andrew Mountain consists of two parcels totaling 130 acres with fields, forests, ponds, and wetlands. The area is home to the Borough's beloved dog park as well as the community gardens, which are rented to Naugatuck residents for a nominal fee and a promise to donate a portion of the harvest to a food bank or community organization. Four loop trails run throughout the property plus a dynamic disc golf course. The parcel connects to the Naugatuck State Forest to create an enormous contiguous network of open space.





# OPEN SPACE IN OXFORD, CT

## QUICK STATS

### OPEN SPACE

- Total Open Space Acreage: 3138.86 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Open Space: 15%
- Total Number of Open Space Properties: 113
- Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.24

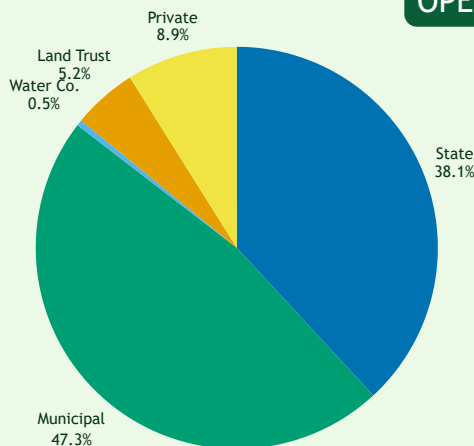
### PROTECTED OPEN SPACE

- Total Protected Open Space Acreage: 2750.75 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Protected Open Space: 13%
- Total Number of Protected Open Space Properties: 73
- Protected Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.21

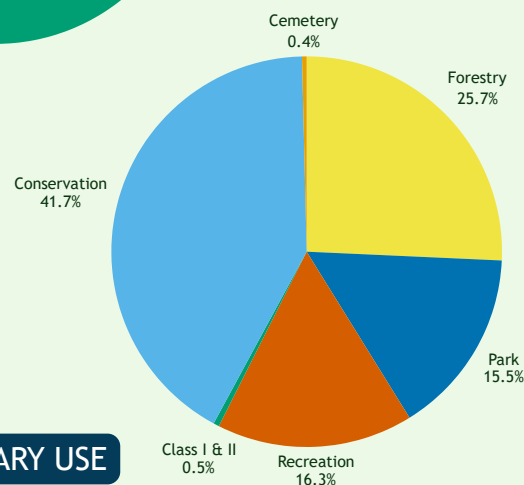
### PARCEL SIZE

- Avg. Size: 27.78 acres
- Min: 0.09 acres
- Max: 369.96 acres

## OPEN SPACE BY OWNER TYPE



## OPEN SPACE BY PRIMARY USE



## NARRATIVE OVERVIEW

Oxford's largest open space parcels are concentrated along its borders. The Naugatuck State Forest extends into Naugatuck and Beacon Falls, Kettletown and Southford Falls State Parks both cross into Southbury, and hundreds of acres of municipal and land trust open space pass into Seymour. These regional open space networks represent the importance of working across municipal boundaries to preserve land.

Aside from its borders, most of the open space in Oxford is spread out on relatively small parcels. Likely due to an emphasis on low density residential zoning, Oxford has plenty of undeveloped land on private parcels that do not fit the criteria of open space for this project. Of note, Oxford's 2018 Plan of Conservation and Development shows roughly the same proportion of undeveloped tracts as it does low density residential - about 33% each. Until these lots are developed, they likely provide many of the same conservation benefits as true open space: wildlife habitat, carbon sequestration, and air and water pollution filtration. These pieces of land represent powerful opportunities to grow Oxford's open space portfolio, especially if they connect existing parcels.



# OXFORD FEATURED OPEN SPACE

## Rockhouse Hill Sanctuary

Owned by the Town of Oxford, Rockhouse Hill Sanctuary is a 600-acre forested preserve that forms a significant open space corridor with the adjacent parcels of Keith Mitchell Forest and Naugatuck State Forest. The land falls within the watershed of Four Mile Brook and the Housatonic River. Roughly 15 miles of trails have been installed and upgraded by the Oxford High School Youth Conservation Corps, Boy Scout Eagle projects, and the Oxford Land Trust. Native American artifacts have been found along the Housatonic River banks and in rock caves on the property.



## Larkin Bridle Trail

Winding through Southbury, Oxford, Middlebury, and Naugatuck, the 10-mile State trail follows an old railroad bed across the center of the region. The stretch in Oxford affords excellent birdwatching opportunities, stunning fall foliage, and views of swamps and wetlands. As a bridle trail, horseback riders are welcome, though the path is also enjoyed by pedestrians, cyclists, cross-country skiers, and dogs. According to CT Trail Census, the trail saw nearly 23,000 trips in 2024.

## The Oxford Greens

The Oxford Greens are a mixed-use development that includes residences, an 18-hole golf course, a recreation center with a pool and tennis courts, and of course open space. Twenty-six separate conservation easements protect swathes of forested land. The Greens demonstrate how medium-density residential development pairs well with conservation, as opposed to suburban sprawl which can fracture forests and wildlife corridors.





# OPEN SPACE IN PLYMOUTH, CT

## QUICK STATS

### OPEN SPACE

- Total Open Space Acreage: 2764.7 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Open Space: 19%
- Total Number of Open Space Properties: 136
- Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.24

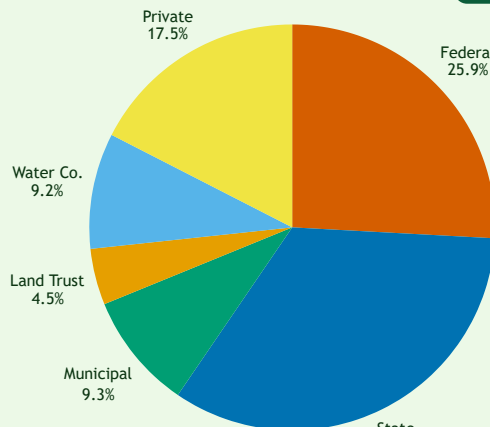
### PROTECTED OPEN SPACE

- Total Protected Open Space Acreage: 2154.08 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Protected Open Space: 15%
- Total Number of Protected Open Space Properties: 47
- Protected Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.18

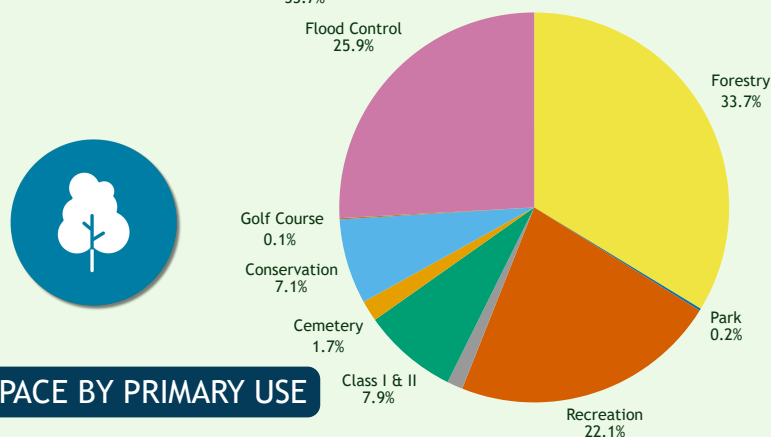
### PARCEL SIZE

- Avg. Size: 20.33 acres
- Min: 0.05 acres
- Max: 359.59 acres

## OPEN SPACE BY OWNER TYPE



## OPEN SPACE BY PRIMARY USE



## NARRATIVE OVERVIEW

Plymouth enjoys an abundance of connected and protected open space in the south, along with more isolated parcels in the north belonging mostly to the municipality and water companies. Hancock Brook Dam in the southern half of the town is surrounded by hundreds of acres of federal, state, and privately-owned open space. This includes the 721 acres of Army Corps land hosting the dam, lake, and reservoir area; the nearly 500 acres of Mattatuck State Forest that abut it to the north; and campgrounds owned by Boy Scouts of America. Several parks, greens, and recreation areas sprinkle the more populated areas like Terryville and the Route 6 corridor.

This town also hosts several waterbodies, such as Thomaston Reservoir, Lake Plymouth, Upper & Middle Pond, and Fall Mountain Lake - all of which have at least some open space waterfront access.



# PLYMOUTH FEATURED OPEN SPACE

## Buttermilk Falls

Although Connecticut may not be known for its waterfalls, Buttermilk Falls boasts a stunning 55-foot cascade that is not to be missed. Hemlocks and rocky outcroppings surround the falls and stream, which are located within the Hancock Brook watershed. The parcel is owned by the Nature Conservancy and is part of the Mattatuck Trail. A wooden footbridge leads through a forest to this roadside attraction.



## Plymouth Reservoir

Plymouth Reservoir is a community gem that attracts both residents and visitors for passive recreation. A dock with ADA tactile warning strips can be used as a boat launch, with rentable kayaks available. This spot is a favorite of local fishers. The hiking trail hugs the reservoir, providing beautiful views of the water to one side and the fern-covered forest to the other. Plymouth Parks and Recreation Department maintains this property.

## Leach Stanton Preserve

This 20-acre parcel is surrounded by several other undeveloped lots, creating a forested buffer between busy Main Street (Route 6) and Plymouth Reservoir. Plymouth Land Trust owns the property and maintains a trail that passes wetlands and a small pond. A unique feature of PLT lands is that residents can pay a nominal fee to cut their own firewood from marked trees. This helps remove dead trees from the property, creates good relations between the land trust and the community, and reduces the need to ship firewood long distances.





# OPEN SPACE IN PROSPECT, CT

## QUICK STATS

### OPEN SPACE

- Total Open Space Acreage: 2835.65 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Open Space: 31%
- Total Number of Open Space Properties: 76
- Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.30

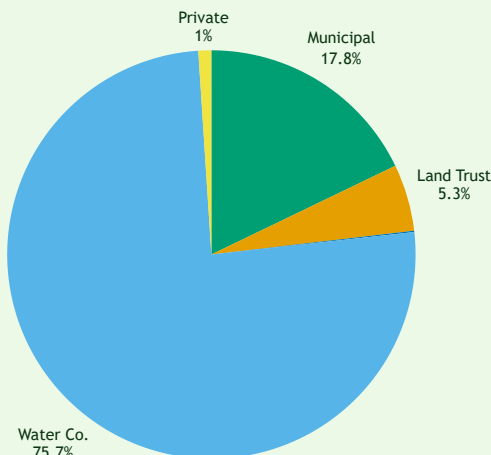
### PROTECTED OPEN SPACE

- Total Protected Open Space Acreage: 2743 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Protected Open Space: 30%
- Total Number of Protected Open Space Properties: 61
- Protected Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.29

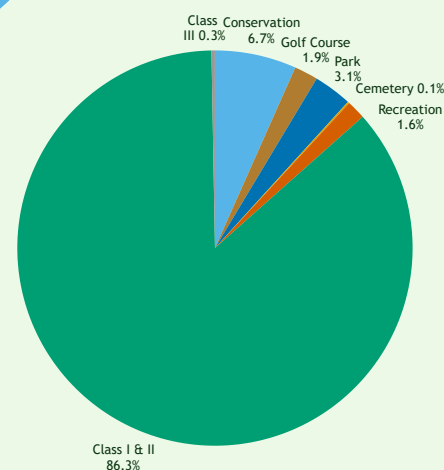
### PARCEL SIZE

- Avg. Size: 37.31 acres
- Min: 0.07 acres
- Max: 499.19 acres

## OPEN SPACE BY OWNER TYPE



## OPEN SPACE BY PRIMARY USE



## NARRATIVE OVERVIEW

Roughly one third of all land in Prospect - 2,454 acres - is owned by water companies. The majority is split among the Connecticut Water Company and the New Haven Water Company, with the City of Waterbury owning 190 acres. These organizations protect the areas around the town's five surface drinking water reservoirs in order to minimize runoff, preserve water quality, and allow undeveloped forests to perform their natural function of water filtration. Both on water company land and beyond, Prospect is home to many ponds, streams, and wetlands.

Municipal open space properties include a community green, sports fields, parks, and some subdivision land. Additionally, the Prospect Land Trust maintains a mix of conservation land and publicly accessible properties with hiking trails. The group hosts outdoors events such as guided autumn hikes and an annual "owl prow" on their properties.



# PROSPECT FEATURED OPEN SPACE

## Kathan Woods

The largest land donation in the Prospect Land Trust's history is Kathan Woods, an 82-acre parcel between Matthews Street and Cheshire Road. Originally two lots, it was donated by a PLT board member. The property abuts large water company properties, amplifying its benefit as a wildlife corridor. These woodlands and wetlands contain a yellow blazed hiking trail along a historic logging road, and a blue blazed trail that connects with the Quinnipiac system.



## Hotchkiss Field

Hotchkiss Field features six soccer fields, a basketball court, a baseball diamond, and a playground. The rest of this 42-acre parcel, aside from the parking area, is undisturbed forest. This recreational facility is situated in a walkable neighborhood with sidewalks extending in both directions along Route 69. Places like Hotchkiss Field are particularly important in a community such as Prospect, where only a fraction of its abundant open space offers public access and recreational opportunities.

## College Farm

Tucked in the southwestern corner of Prospect, College Farm is a 5-acre Prospect Land Trust property protected by a deed restriction. This conservation area contains vernal pools and sensitive forest and ridgeline ecosystems. A loop trail of less than a mile offers a breath-taking view of the New Naugatuck Reservoir in the winter, when the trees are bare. Boy and Girl Scouts have helped maintain the trail over the years and have added a bat box. College Farm is in a residential neighborhood and proves that a relatively small parcel can have big recreational value for nearby landowners.



# OPEN SPACE IN SEYMOUR, CT

## QUICK STATS

### OPEN SPACE

- Total Open Space Acreage: 2146.39 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Open Space: 22%
- Total Number of Open Space Properties: 254
- Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.13

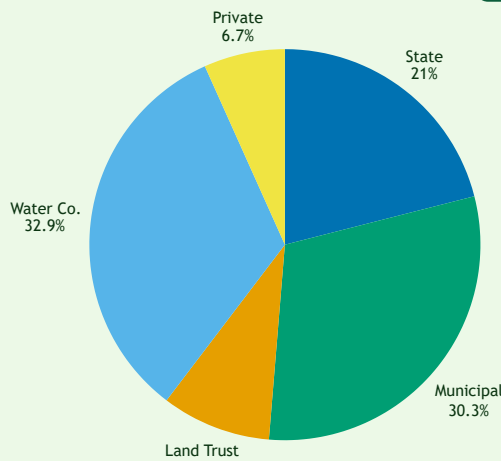
### PROTECTED OPEN SPACE

- Total Protected Open Space Acreage: 1863.28 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Protected Open Space: 19%
- Total Number of Protected Open Space Properties: 153
- Protected Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.11

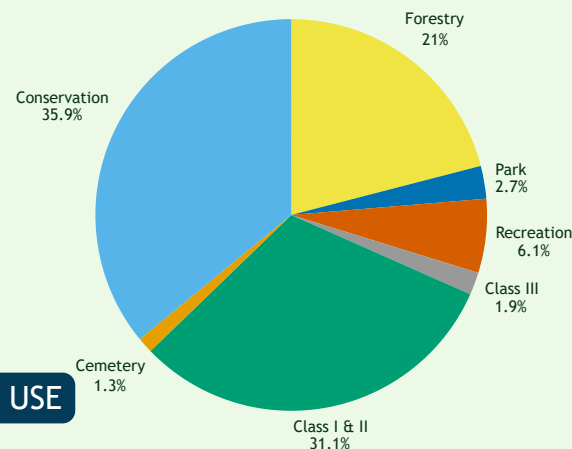
### PARCEL SIZE

- Avg. Size: 8.45 acres
- Min: 0.03 acres
- Max: 428.83 acres

## OPEN SPACE BY OWNER TYPE



## OPEN SPACE BY PRIMARY USE



## NARRATIVE OVERVIEW

The Town of Seymour enjoys a compelling variety of open space. Several parcels contain over 100 acres of land, like the Naugatuck State Forest and water company property to the east; others are less than an acre but provide valuable public space in residential neighborhoods. Other types of open space include school sports fields, community parks, conservation land, and even 50+ undeveloped acres belonging to a homeowners' association.

Seymour's municipal government has a conservation commission, parks commission, a sustainability committee, and a trails manager. The community also enjoys an active land trust, the Seymour Conservation Land Trust, which oversees 100+ acres.

Seymour will soon welcome a new addition to its open space inventory: the Kinneytown Dam property, which straddles the Seymour-Ansonia line. The Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments (NVCOG) is working with a group of committed organizations, including the Town of Seymour, to remove the dam, restore the ecosystem, and establish permanent public access to the Naugatuck River. NVCOG has also secured a grant to design a portion of the Naugatuck River Greenway Trail, which would provide walking and fishing access.



# SEYMOUR FEATURED OPEN SPACE

## Great Hill Reservoir

The 94-acre Great Hill Reservoir parcel sits at the center of a large area of protected open space in Seymour and Oxford. Several other holdings, including a portion of the Naugatuck State Forest, are separated only by roads. The size of this contiguous network is at least 1,029 acres, with several parcels under review potentially contributing as well. The property's position at the relative center renders it a linchpin of the open space corridor. The area has a rich colonial history, with evidence of all trading paths, sawmills, small diversion dams, and charming stone walls throughout the property. Connecticut's Environmental Review Team produced a report for this property in 2025, as the Town considers the future of Great Hill Reservoir.



## Laurel Lime Park

Laurel Lime Park is an excellent example of a multiuse open space: recreational, conservation, and historic uses share this 200+ acre parcel. It is the largest town-owned open space property in Seymour and was acquired in 1977. Pitch pines and chestnut oaks dominate the forests. True to its name, the park also contains an abundance of mountain laurel: Connecticut's state flower. Old mining roads have been transformed into blazed hiking trails containing features of a 19th century limestone kiln - quarries, stone shelters, charcoal mounds, and caves rich with marble that farmers used to lower soil acidity for their crops. Ridgelines and rocky slopes provide stunning views of the Housatonic River and Route 34.



## Pine Hill Recreation Area

The South Central Connecticut Regional Water Authority, which owns land in a number of NVCOG municipalities, holds Pine Hill Park open to the public with a permit. Over 400 acres of this enormous park is situated in Seymour's southeastern corner, with the rest just over the border in Woodbridge. The park welcomes hikers, joggers, and cross-country skiers. Two connected loop trails will take visitors past wetlands and vernal pools, a former Christmas tree farm, interpretive trail signage, and rocky outcroppings. One of the loops runs alongside Peat Swamp Reservoir, a former drinking water reservoir. Activities such as horseback riding, biking, and swimming are prohibited in an effort to maintain the quality of this important watershed.



# OPEN SPACE IN SHELTON, CT

## QUICK STATS

### OPEN SPACE

- Total Open Space Acreage: 4974.86 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Open Space: 24%
- Total Number of Open Space Properties: 650
- Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.12

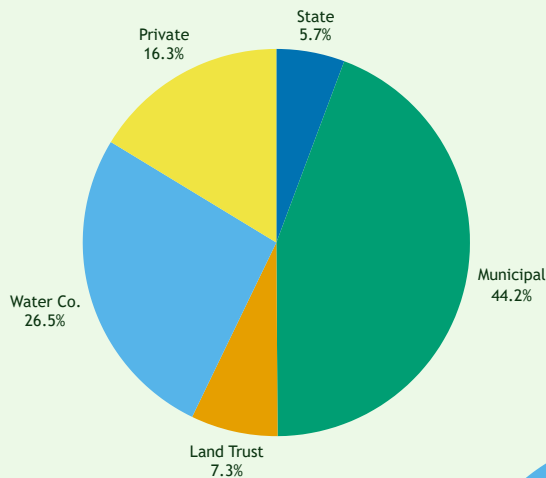
### PROTECTED OPEN SPACE

- Total Protected Open Space Acreage: 4410.43 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Protected Open Space: 22%
- Total Number of Protected Open Space Properties: 583
- Protected Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.11

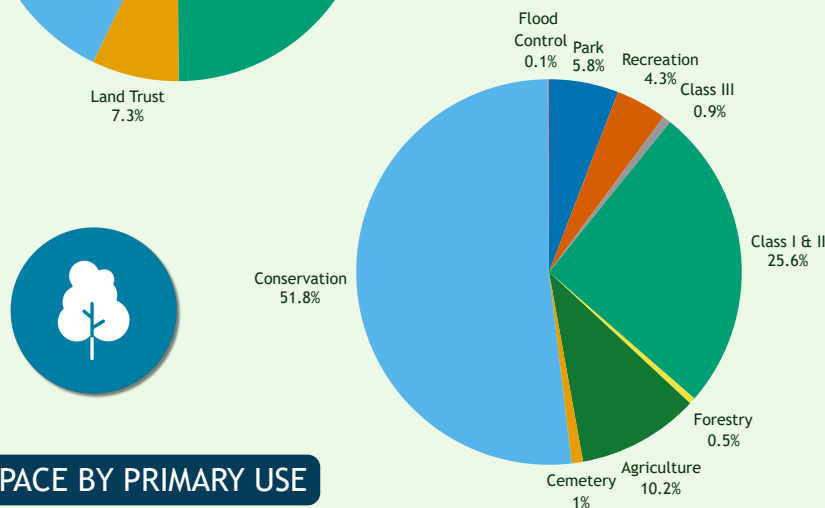
### PARCEL SIZE

- Avg. Size: 7.65 acres
- Min: 0.01 acres
- Max: 592.75 acres

## OPEN SPACE BY OWNER TYPE



## OPEN SPACE BY PRIMARY USE



## NARRATIVE OVERVIEW

Shelton's open space mix is characterized by a broad geographic distribution and variety of functions throughout the city. To the north, Indian Wells State Park and Riverview Park hug the western bank of the Housatonic River and provide green space in the otherwise densely developed downtown. Class I and II water company parcels are scattered in the southern and western portions of the municipality, including the approximately 650-acre Trap Falls Reservoir. Shelton also has its share of agricultural open space, which ranges from agritourism hotspots like Jones Family Farm and Beardsley Orchards, to municipally-owned land that is licensed out for hay harvest, like Tall Farm and French Hill Farm.

The City of Shelton's commitment to conservation is exemplified through their Natural Resource Manager position - an unusual but valuable role for a city of this size. The role is responsible for staffing environmental committees and commissions, interfacing with the public about conservation, and managing open space. The municipal conservation commission also maintains a website with abundant information about open space and other environmental initiatives. This public sector work is complemented by the Shelton Land Conservation Trust, which holds over 370 acres of property.



# SHELTON FEATURED OPEN SPACE

## The Paugussett Trail

The 13-mile, blue-blazed Paugussett Trail is one of the city's recreational highlights. In addition to providing stunning views of waterscapes such as Indian Wells Falls, Hope Lake, and the Housatonic, it connects some of Shelton's most beloved community spaces: downtown, the dog park, the high school, and a variety of other parks. The trail was originally constructed as a Depression-era Civilian Conservation Corps project, but stalled in the 1960s. It was finally restored and built out to Buddington Road in 2013 by the hard work of the Shelton Trails Committee.



## Riverwalk Canal & Locks

Shelton's iconic Riverwalk features historic canals and locks along the semi-tidal Housatonic River. These canals were constructed in the 1800s along with the Derby-Shelton dam. The Riverwalk's location in central downtown renders it an amplifier of economic activity and a non-motorized transportation option for reaching local businesses. Visitors can stroll along the handicap accessible trail, enjoy aesthetic vistas of the river, or take advantage of several fishing areas.

## Protected and Connected

The northwestern corner of Shelton features over 350 acres of connected open space, spanning roughly a dozen separate parcels. A paragon of collaborative open space planning, this area contains a farm, water company land, a land trust preserve, municipal land, and private property. Most of the acreage is protected either through easements, municipal intent, or deed restrictions. Each land use is fortified and amplified by connectivity - for instance, the public water supply at the center of the cluster is likely cleaner and requires less treatment due to the undeveloped status of the land around it, while the native animals on the conservation land benefit from an expanded ecological corridor. By adding the other protected and connected land on the opposite side of Route 110, the total area exceeds 900 acres.



# OPEN SPACE IN SOUTHBURY, CT

## QUICK STATS

### OPEN SPACE

- Total Open Space Acreage: 6094.04 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Open Space: 24%
- Total Number of Open Space Properties: 405
- Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.31

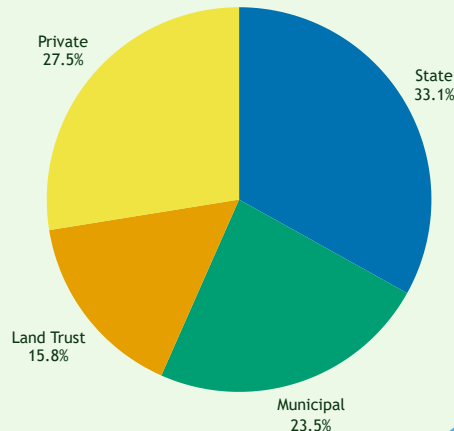
### PROTECTED OPEN SPACE

- Total Protected Open Space Acreage: 5174.43 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Protected Open Space: 20%
- Total Number of Protected Open Space Properties: 318
- Protected Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.26

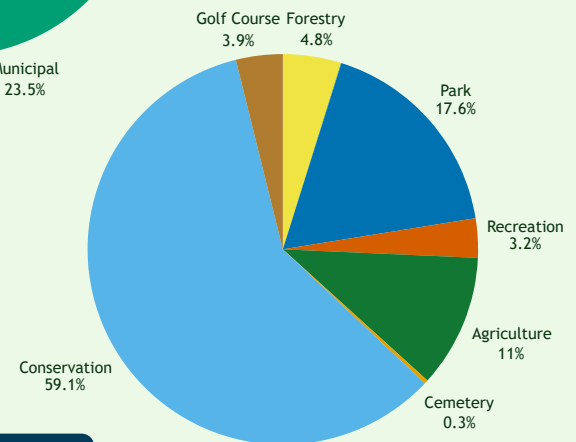
### PARCEL SIZE

- Avg. Size: 15.05 acres
- Min: 0.06 acres
- Max: 450.34 acres

## OPEN SPACE BY OWNER TYPE



## OPEN SPACE BY PRIMARY USE



## NARRATIVE OVERVIEW

Southbury boasts almost 400 open space parcels comprising roughly 6,000 acres. The State is the largest owner of open space in town, due to the expansive Southbury Train School, Kettletown State Park, Larkin Bridle Trail, and forestry parcels along the Housatonic.

Southbury also enjoys an extremely active land trust, which owns 74 properties and 35 easements. They maintain management plans for each of their properties, have hosted dozens of Eagle Scout projects since 2002, and provide an annual scholarship to a graduating high schooler who plans to pursue environmental studies.

A number of smaller, uniquely shaped open space parcels - both municipally and privately owned - are the result of subdivision set-asides. Although these lots have limited conservation value, they are an important planning tool to balance development with green space. They can also serve as wildlife corridors when they connect two existing open spaces.



# SOUTHBURY FEATURED OPEN SPACE

## Southbury Dog Park

Southbury's 14-acre dog park, owned by O&G Industries but open to the public through an arrangement with the Town, is by far the largest dog park in the region. This partially fenced area offers pets and their owners an expansive lawn, forested hiking trails, and direct access to the beautiful Pomperaug River. Every day of the week, dogs of all breeds and sizes can be seen exercising and enjoying the beauty of Southbury's environment. The park is overseen and maintained by the nonprofit Friends of Southbury Dog Park. This public-private-puppy partnership has attracted international attention: it is ranked on several online lists as one of the country's best dog parks, and in 2018, delegates from a large city in South Korea toured the park to learn how to build their own!



## Bent of the River Audubon Center

Southbury's largest private parcel is the Bent of the River Audubon Center: a 700-acre nature sanctuary that welcomes passive recreation in the form of hiking and birdwatching. Pets and motorized vehicles are prohibited, to minimize disruption to the ecosystem. The grounds contain wildlife viewing platforms, art installations, and several historic buildings from the 1800s. The Audubon Center holds educational nature programs and conservation-themed events throughout the year.



## Community House Park

This municipal park features tennis courts, basketball courts, baseball diamonds, and soccer fields. It is well positioned for regional recreational use, as it is located minutes from Interstate-84. The Pomperaug River Watershed Coalition installed a demonstration rain garden there in 2018 that can accommodate up to 7,500 gallons of stormwater. Unfortunately, portions of Community House Park were devastated by the August 2024 rainstorm, but dedicated public works staff are hard at work reconstructing the amenities.





# OPEN SPACE IN THOMASTON, CT

## QUICK STATS

### OPEN SPACE

- Total Open Space Acreage: 2040.54 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Open Space: 26%
- Total Number of Open Space Properties: 76
- Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.27

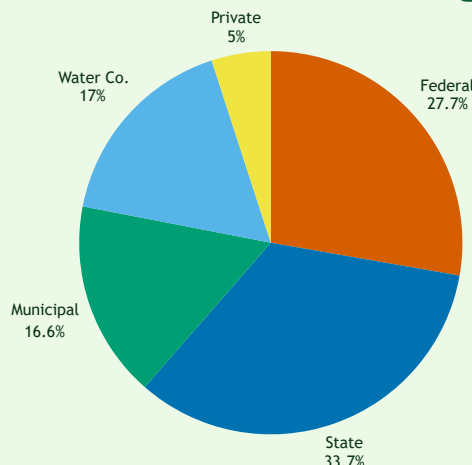
### PROTECTED OPEN SPACE

- Total Protected Open Space Acreage: 1903.65 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Protected Open Space: 25%
- Total Number of Protected Open Space Properties: 67
- Protected Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.25

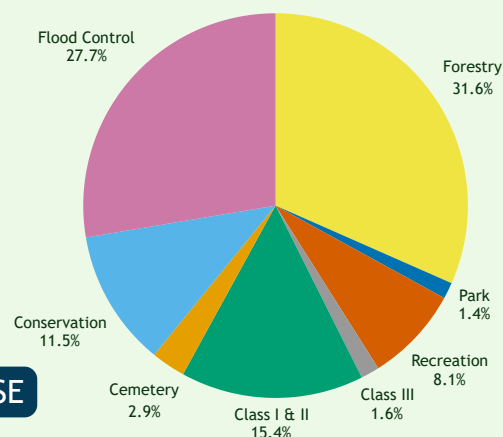
### PARCEL SIZE

- Avg. Size: 26.85 acres
- Min: 0.11 acres
- Max: 262.03 acres

## OPEN SPACE BY OWNER TYPE



## OPEN SPACE BY PRIMARY USE



## NARRATIVE OVERVIEW

Thomaston is rich in open space, with the largest strip of protected land being the Mattatuck State Forest that extends across much of the southern half of town. Comprised of two parcels, these 500 acres run alongside the Naugatuck River and provide scenic backdrop to the Route 262 corridor. Further north, a variety of owners maintain open space: Waterbury Water Company, the Army Corps of Engineers, Thomaston Fish & Game Club, and of course the Town itself.

The Town of Thomaston has demonstrated ongoing commitment to acquiring and improving open space through CT DEEP grants. In 2019, it was awarded an Open Space & Watershed Land Acquisition (OSWA) grant for the 24-acre Cummings property to provide new access to the Naugatuck River. In 2023, Thomaston secured Recreational Trails grants to plan and design a stretch of the Naugatuck River Greenway. In 2024, Thomaston was awarded funds from the Urban Green and Community Garden (UGCG) program to transform a grassy lot near the historic Seth Thomas Clock Factory into an amphitheater with utilities and amenities.



# THOMASTON FEATURED OPEN SPACE

## Mattatuck State Forest

This CT DEEP managed forest spans the municipalities of Harwinton, Litchfield, Plymouth, Waterbury, Watertown, and of course Thomaston. After many decades of supplying cordwood for the furnaces that powered the Naugatuck Valley's brass industry, the once-healthy landscape was a victim of frequent forest fires by the 1930s when it was gifted to the State. The Civilian Conservation Corps worked hard to plant trees, stabilize eroded slopes, and establish management practices that would allow wildlife to thrive again. Today, recreational users can enjoy hiking, hunting, and mountain biking within the scenic forest.



## Nystrom Park

Nystrom Park is a beloved cornerstone of the Thomaston community. This park provides a playground, a soccer field, tennis courts, a track, a baseball and softball field, a small beach area for recreational use, picnic tables and grills, and a gathering space around a pavilion. The 64-acre area contains a large swath of forest and the beautiful Nystrom Pond, a popular fishing spot.



## Thomaston Dam & Northfield Brook Lake

Although these two properties are managed by the Army Corps of Engineers primarily for flood control, they offer conservation, recreation, and historic features as well. Both contain scenic picnic areas, DEEP-stocked fishing waters, and abundant hiking trails, including miles of motorbike/ATV trails at Thomaston Dam (a unique feature, given that many nature trails restrict the use of motorized vehicles). Northfield Brook Lake has also been the subject of a reforestation effort from Corps employees and Scouts, who have reclaimed the "borrow area" (where earth was excavated to construct the dam) by the brook to reestablish wildlife habitat. The Corps reports that "White-tailed deer, beaver, red fox, raccoon, grey squirrel, cottontail rabbits," and many species of birds are common on both properties.





# OPEN SPACE IN WATERBURY, CT

## QUICK STATS

### OPEN SPACE

- Total Open Space Acreage: 2608.22 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Open Space: 14%
- Total Number of Open Space Properties: 113
- Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.02

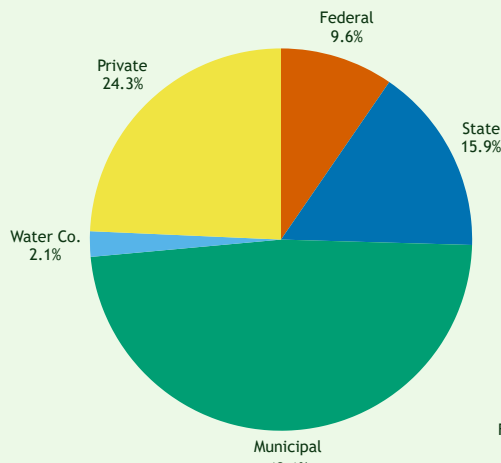
### PROTECTED OPEN SPACE

- Total Protected Open Space Acreage: 1823.24 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Protected Open Space: 10%
- Total Number of Protected Open Space Properties: 88
- Protected Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.02

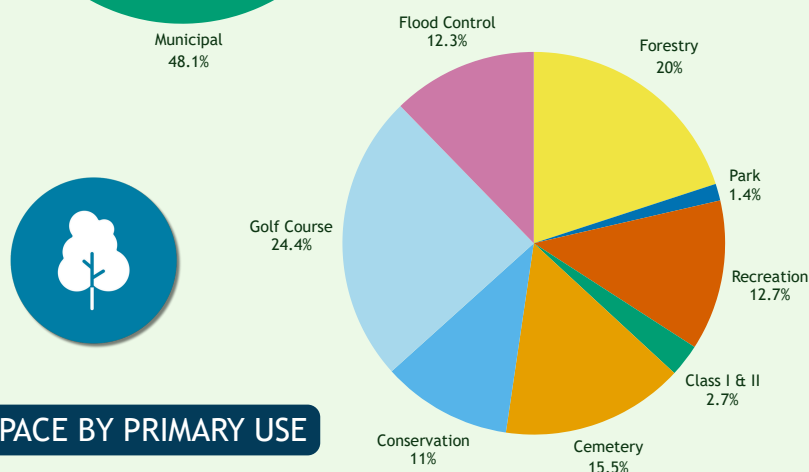
### PARCEL SIZE

- Avg. Size: 23.08 acres
- Min: 0.08 acres
- Max: 363.07 acres

## OPEN SPACE BY OWNER TYPE



## OPEN SPACE BY PRIMARY USE



## NARRATIVE OVERVIEW

As the fifth largest city in Connecticut, Waterbury relies on its variety of open space to balance densely populated and developed areas. In the absence of a local land trust, most open space is either municipally or privately owned, with two large exceptions. In the south, the Army Corps of Engineers maintains Hop Brook Dam as both flood control infrastructure and a recreational area for swimming, hiking, and picnicking. In the north, roughly 400 acres are conserved as part of the Mattatuck State Forest which spans three other towns in our region.

Most privately owned open space parcels are either social clubs - like the 240-acre Country Club of Waterbury - or cemeteries - like Pine Grove, Riverside, or Calvary. Municipal open space is also abundant, ranging from golf courses to city greens. Waterbury boasts a number of municipal parks, large and small, that provide important enrichment and recreational opportunities for families.



# WATERBURY FEATURED OPEN SPACE

## Fulton Park

Lewis E. Fulton Memorial Park was designed in 1920 by the Olmstead Brothers landscape architecture firm, which was also responsible for New York City's Central Park. This nearly 70-acre amenity is on the National Register of Historic Places and brings nature into a residential neighborhood of Waterbury. Walking paths snake through the beautifully landscaped property, which contains two ponds, a playground, tennis courts, a baseball field, several gazebos and gathering spaces, a free mini library, and an eye-catching butterfly garden with pollinator-friendly plants. Wide, mowed lawns are perfect for picnics and serve as exercise space for children and pets. Fulton Park is an extremely well-loved landmark that has benefited Waterbury residents for 100 years.



## Riverside Cemetery

For nearly two centuries, Riverside Cemetery has served our region as a final resting place. In the 1890s, Puritan remains from the Ancient Burying Ground (one of the oldest colonial cemeteries, dating as far back as 1695) were moved to Riverside. Its name evokes both its position along the banks of the Naugatuck River, as well as the many ponds and water features throughout the property. Landscape architecture, including sculptures, obelisks, and ornamental plantings, create a serene atmosphere on the well-maintained grounds. Many prominent Waterbury residents, from brass barons to Native American activists, will forever call this urban forest home.



## The Waterbury Green

Bus lines line the curbs of this 650-foot-long community green in the heart of downtown Waterbury. CT Transit uses the Waterbury Green as a pulse point, meaning all bus routes in the city meet there at least once to facilitate transferring between routes. While users are waiting for buses, they can enjoy the walking paths, the iconic fountain (once used to provide drinking water for horses - another form of transportation!), memorial plaques and statues for local veterans, and landscaping. Public works staff decorate the impressive pine trees for the winter holidays, providing an aesthetic cultural gathering space for community members.





# OPEN SPACE IN WATERTOWN, CT

## QUICK STATS

### OPEN SPACE

- Total Open Space Acreage: 4652.72 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Open Space: 25%
- Total Number of Open Space Properties: 187
- Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.21

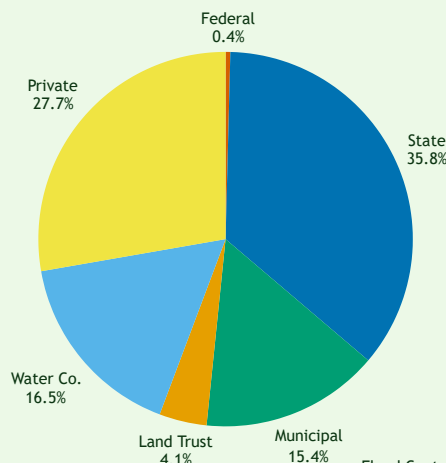
### PROTECTED OPEN SPACE

- Total Protected Open Space Acreage: 3977.43 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Protected Open Space: 21%
- Total Number of Protected Open Space Properties: 155
- Protected Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.18

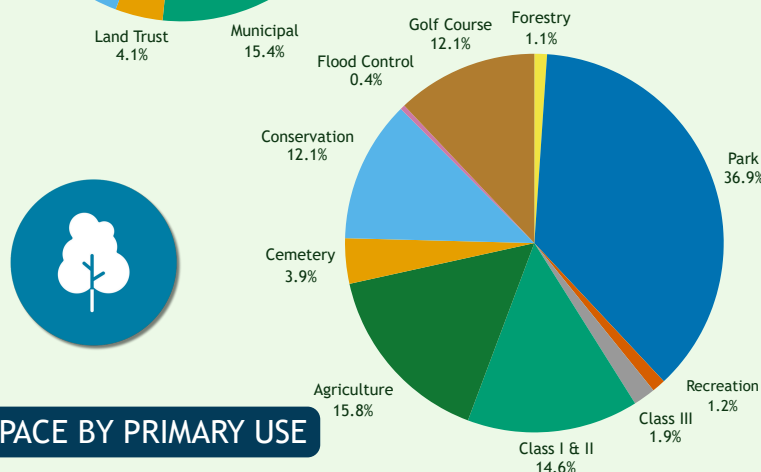
### PARCEL SIZE

- Avg. Size: 24.88 acres
- Min: 0.05 acres
- Max: 885.89 acres

## OPEN SPACE BY OWNER TYPE



## OPEN SPACE BY PRIMARY USE



## NARRATIVE OVERVIEW

Most of the land along Watertown's northern and eastern borders is legally protected, and includes water company land, state forests, and federal flood control facilities, spanning over 2,000 acres of open space. Anyone who has driven along Route 8 and taken in the scenic, forested cliffs on either side of the Naugatuck River has enjoyed Watertown's natural landscapes. This community also benefits from a variety of parks, which include playgrounds, monuments, and outdoor swimming areas. Watertown is expanding its greenway trail along Steele Brook, which is being constructed using Federal Highway Administration funds and local match. Hundreds of acres of protected farmland also speak to Watertown's pastoral roots.

Watertown Land Trust stewards 286 acres of land in Watertown, and even one property over the border in Bethlehem. The town is also peppered with small municipally-owned parcels, many of which appear to be set-asides from subdivisions. Although these haphazard pieces of land do not achieve the same "protected and connected" status of the land along the eastern border, they serve as important planning tools to provide green space in areas otherwise dominated by single family homes.



# WATERTOWN FEATURED OPEN SPACE

## Black Rock Federal Dam and Black Rock State Park

A network of properties in eastern Watertown represents the important partnership that can exist among federal, state, and municipal governments in sharing land for beneficial purposes. Straddling the Watertown-Thomaston line, Black Rock Federal Dam is managed by the Army Corps of Engineers and was constructed in response to the historic Flood of 1955 that ravaged the Naugatuck Valley. The ACOE estimates the Dam has prevented over \$217,000,000 in flood damages between 1971 and 2011. Black Rock State Park and Mattatuck State Park are both managed by the State and run along either side of Route 6. These properties provide challenging hiking trails, 78 campsites, hunting grounds, and hundreds of acres of valuable wildlife habitat.



## Crestbrook Park

Crestbrook Park contains many amenities, including an 18-hole golf course, a golf apparel store, a swimming pool, tennis courts, and a restaurant. The Town purchased the golf course in 1975 and now manages the facility, organizing leagues and lessons for community golfers. The privately-owned Sunset Grille not only provides a dining option for park-goers, but hosts events like musical performances and comedy shows. Crestbrook Park is a well-provisioned municipal asset that provides a variety of recreational opportunities for the public.

## Gustafson Farm

Three hundred acres of this family farm was protected in perpetuity through a Purchase of Development Rights in 2020. The Gustafson family worked with the US Department of Agriculture, Connecticut Department of Agriculture, and the Connecticut Farmland Trust for nearly two decades to arrange the PDR, which ensures that the land will always be used for farming. The property is valued not only for the orchard and grazing pastures that have been cultivated there, but for its high-yielding prime farmland soils and location in a public drinking water watershed.





# OPEN SPACE IN WOLCOTT, CT

## QUICK STATS

### OPEN SPACE

- Total Open Space Acreage: 3124.08 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Open Space: 23%
- Total Number of Open Space Properties: 59
- Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.19

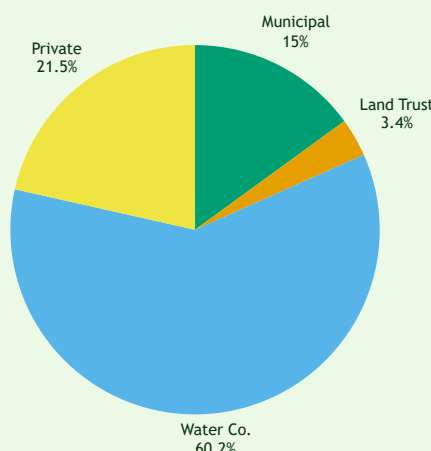
### PROTECTED OPEN SPACE

- Total Protected Open Space Acreage: 2396.58 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Protected Open Space: 18%
- Total Number of Protected Open Space Properties: 33
- Protected Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.15

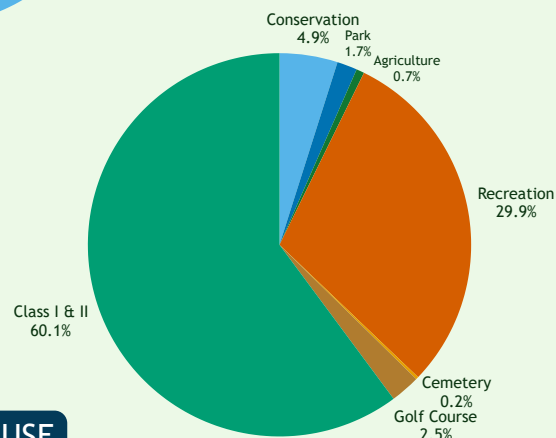
### PARCEL SIZE

- Avg. Size: 52.95 acres
- Min: 0.05 acres
- Max: 915.81 acres

## OPEN SPACE BY OWNER TYPE



## OPEN SPACE BY PRIMARY USE



## NARRATIVE OVERVIEW

Wolcott's open space parcels are largely concentrated along its eastern border, most of which belong to water companies. Roughly 1,800 acres are Class I or II watershed land, owned by the Southington and New Britain Water Departments. Interestingly, exact acreages, property boundaries, and deeds are unavailable due to these properties being owned by government agencies. The water company land is bordered by holdings from four different fishing and hunting clubs, amplifying the connectivity of these conservation corridors.

The Town features two major parks: Woodtick Recreation Area, which includes Scovill Reservoir, Mill Pond Way trail, and the adjacent ballfields; and Peterson Park, which features a playground, the blue-blazed Mattatuck Trail, and a dog park. Additionally, the Wolcott Land Conservation Trust holds eight parcels scattered through the town, including some property on the banks of Hitchcock Lake. The organization also operates as a de facto homeowners association, promulgating regulations to maintain the water quality of the lake.



# WOLCOTT FEATURED OPEN SPACE

## Scovill Reservoir

The largest waterbody in Wolcott - referred to both as Scovill Reservoir and Woodtick Reservoir - supports a variety of conservation and recreation uses. Although the 120-acre manmade pond was once part of a brass production facility, it now serves as a popular fishing and boating destination. A five-mile loop, known as Mill Pond Way, encircles the area and features self-guided exercise stations. This trail goes through forests, slopes, wetlands, and provides stunning views of the water. It is a paradise for birdwatchers and wildlife lovers. At one end of the reservoir sits a small beach with nearby picnic tables and public grills, known as the Woodtick Recreation area. Scovill Reservoir is a success story of how a former industrial site can be transformed into a beloved community space.



## Wolcott Land Owners Protective Association

This 54-acre private hunting club and shooting range has been around since 1933. Aside from a few small buildings and two mowed fields, the property is densely forested with brooks forking through it. Instructors conduct pistol permit training courses and provide space for recreational shooting (trap, skeet, pistol, and rifle). Hunting and fishing clubs throughout the Naugatuck Valley region are important open space partners, as they maintain habitats for both recreational and conservation purposes. This is a members-only facility.

## Pillwillop Therapeutic Farm

Nurture in nature: that is the motto of Pillwillop Therapeutic Farm, a counseling center with a 23-acre conservation easement. The barn at the front of the property serves as an office for licensed clinicians. Clients have the option of receiving their therapy sessions throughout the small farm and forested trails behind the barn. Cats, rabbits, ducks, chickens, and even rescue pigs enjoy life on this cozy farm. A prayer labyrinth, memorial garden, and seating nooks alongside ponds and streams provide a healing experience for visitors. Pillwillop also holds recreational events, such as therapeutic gardening, yoga, and art workshops. The public are welcome to enjoy this incredible community resource.





# OPEN SPACE IN WOODBURY, CT

## QUICK STATS

### OPEN SPACE

- Total Open Space Acreage: 4948.01 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Open Space: 21%
- Total Number of Open Space Properties: 425
- Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.51

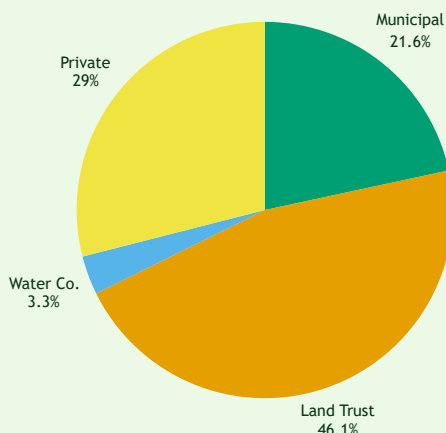
### PROTECTED OPEN SPACE

- Total Protected Open Space Acreage: 3672.94 acres
- Percentage of Land that is Identified as Protected Open Space: 16%
- Total Number of Protected Open Space Properties: 260
- Protected Open Space Acres per Capita: 0.38

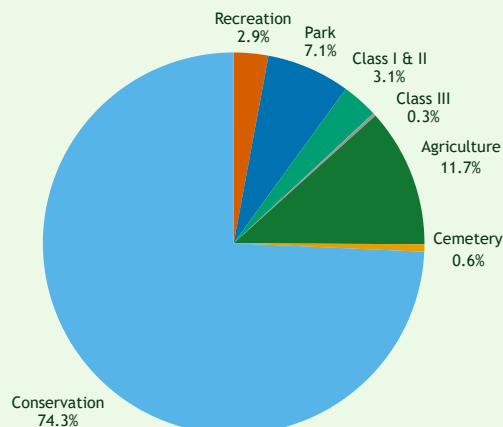
### PARCEL SIZE

- Avg. Size: 11.64 acres
- Min: 0.01 acres
- Max: 700.15 acres

## OPEN SPACE BY OWNER TYPE



## OPEN SPACE BY PRIMARY USE



## NARRATIVE OVERVIEW

Woodbury has been gifted with one of the most robust land trusts in our region: Flanders Nature Center & Land Trust. The Van Vleck farm that started it all was purchased nearly one hundred years ago; today, the organization boasts more than 2,400 acres of open space in Woodbury and neighboring communities, offering educational programming along with land stewardship. Many of their properties include hiking trails, as well as unique features ranging from a learning center to a sugar house (for maple syrup making) to waterfalls and kettle ponds. Flanders either owns or holds an easement on 35% (1,716 acres) of open space in Woodbury.

Woodbury's open space mix is dominated by land used for conservation purposes, as well as multi-use properties like farms that include agriculture, conservation, and recreation. Woodbury has relatively high connectivity among open spaces, creating corridors that amplify the benefits of each connected piece of land. Woodbury's Conservation Commission maintains a spreadsheet of open space properties and easements. The Town's subdivision regulations also contain an impressive 20% open space disposition requirement.



# WOODBURY FEATURED OPEN SPACE

## Oreanaug Park

Oreanaug Park offers multiple recreational opportunities, including a century-old fire tower from which six towns can be seen, a rock-climbing area, a disc golf course, and trails that are accessible from the Woodbury Senior and Community Center. The beautiful wooded area is also a place of historical significance. The name comes from the Pootatuck word for the trap rock (basalt) cliffs, some of which rise up to 140 feet. In the 1670s, a sheltered rock ledge called “Bethel Rock” within the park served as a meeting place for English colonists and a place of worship. The park has been maintained by the Town for public use for 132 years.



## Whitemore Sanctuary

This 700-acre parcel, owned by Flanders Land Trust, contains 8 miles of trails, birdwatching opportunities, endangered plants, ponds and wetlands, and a portion of Lake Quassapaug. According to Flanders, “The forest on the property is, historically, one of the oldest privately managed forests in Connecticut, containing planted white pine, regenerated oak and several large laurel and tulip tree stands.” It is an outstanding example of the conservation work that land trusts have done in our region.



## Nonnewaug Falls

Nonnewaug Falls was identified as an “open space action area” for the region 16 years ago, when COGCNV’s (one of NVCOG’s predecessors) Regional Plan mapped an area spanning Woodbury, Watertown, and Bethlehem. The falls themselves are about 18 feet tall and were formed by glacial melt during the last ice age. A 1916 plaque dedicates the area “to the memory of Nonnewaug, last chief of his tribe, friend of his white neighbors, who sleeps with his fathers near these falls which bear his name.” In 2022, Dr. Harold Leever bequeathed 50 acres of land to the Town of Woodbury and 12 acres to the Bethlehem Land Trust to protect the falls; however, the property on the opposite side of the trail is still privately held with no protection.



## Appendix B: Maps

The following pages contain static images of each municipality's open space map symbolized with the ownership type, as of the date of publication (July 2025). Visit the online Viewer for a more up-to-date and interactive version of these maps.

Visit the Viewer here:



[bit.ly/nvcogosi](https://bit.ly/nvcogosi)



# Open Space Inventory for Ansonia, CT

The open space parcels represented on this map are for planning purposes only. Please refer to each municipality for official open space classifications.

Seymour

Woodbridge

Ansonia

Derby

0 1,500 3,000 Feet

## NVCOG Open Space Inventory

### By Ownership Type

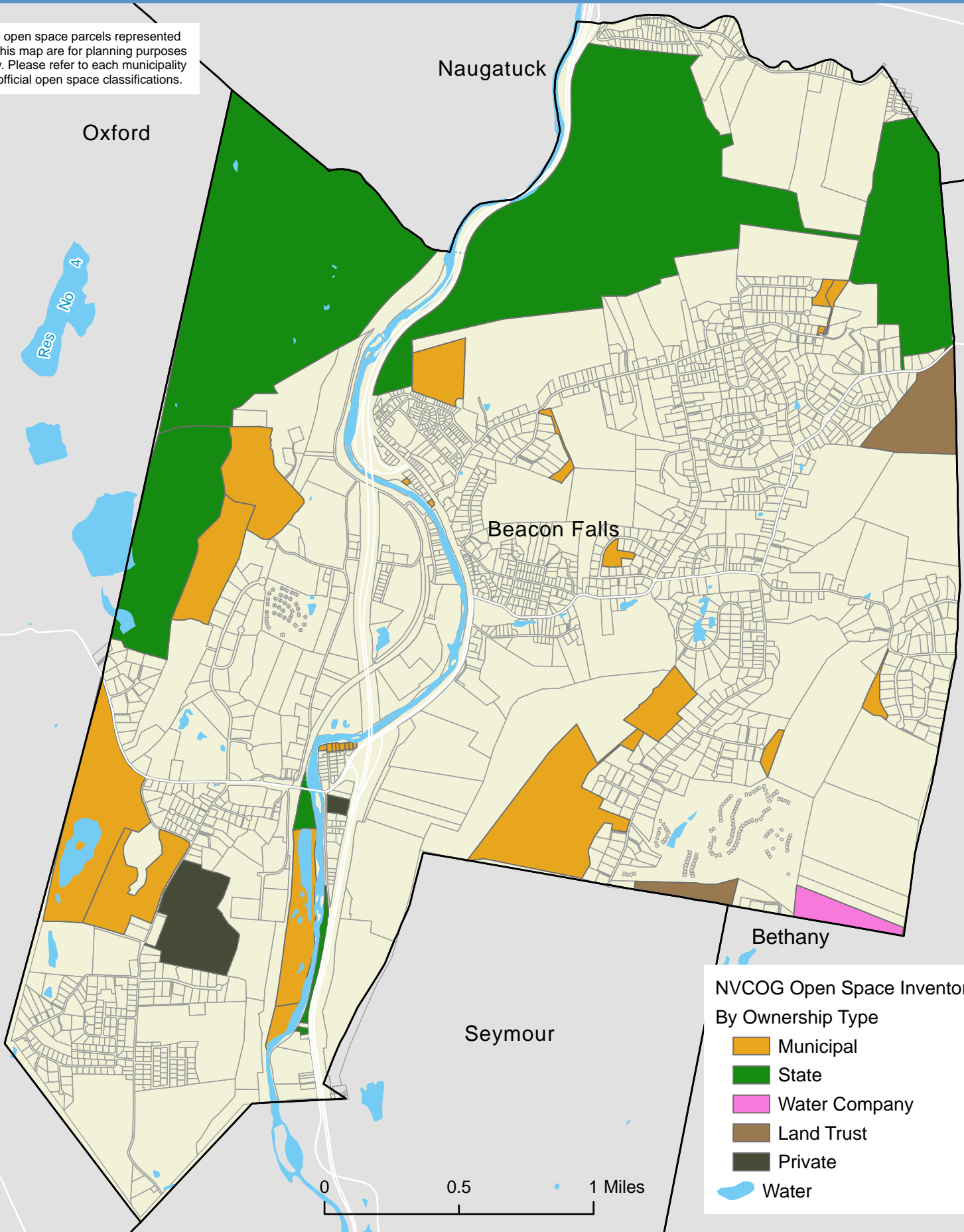
- Municipal
- State
- Water Company
- Land Trust
- Private
- Water



NAUGATUCK VALLEY  
COUNCIL of GOVERNMENTS

# Open Space Inventory for Beacon Falls, CT

The open space parcels represented on this map are for planning purposes only. Please refer to each municipality for official open space classifications.



## NVCOG Open Space Inventory

### By Ownership Type

- Municipal
- State
- Water Company
- Land Trust
- Private
- Water

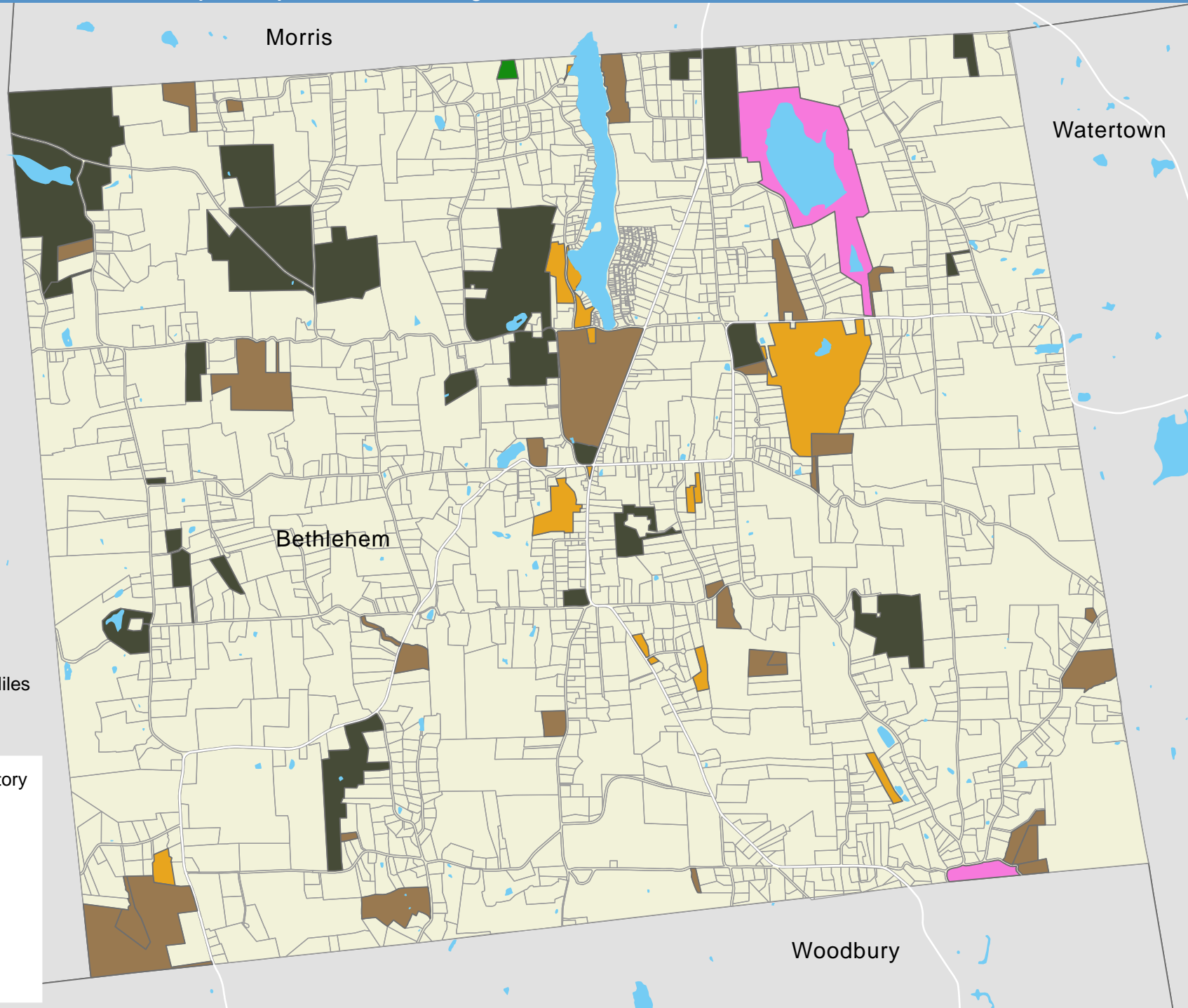


NAUGATUCK VALLEY  
COUNCIL of GOVERNMENTS

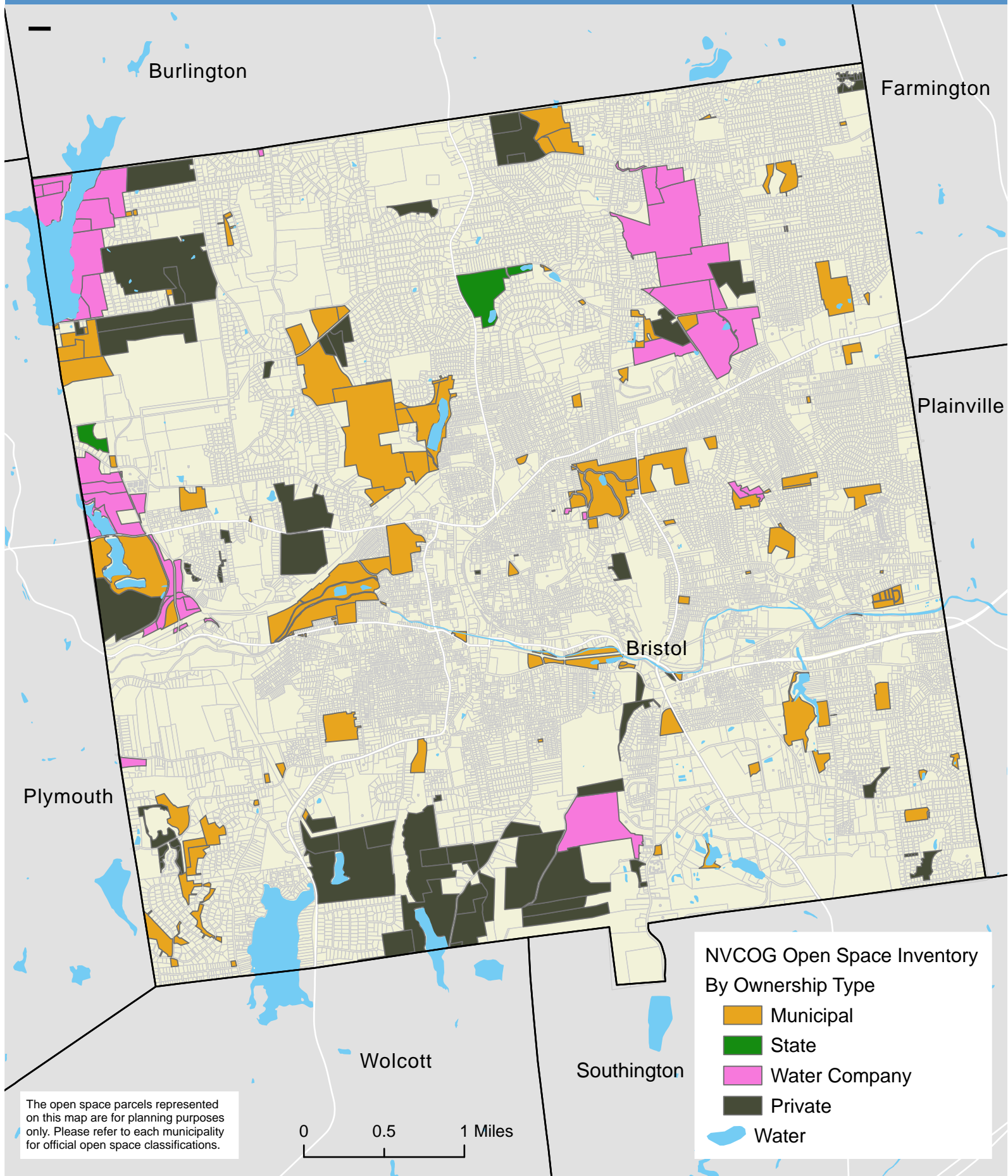


# Open Space Inventory for Bethlehem, CT

The open space parcels represented on this map are for planning purposes only. Please refer to each municipality for official open space classifications.

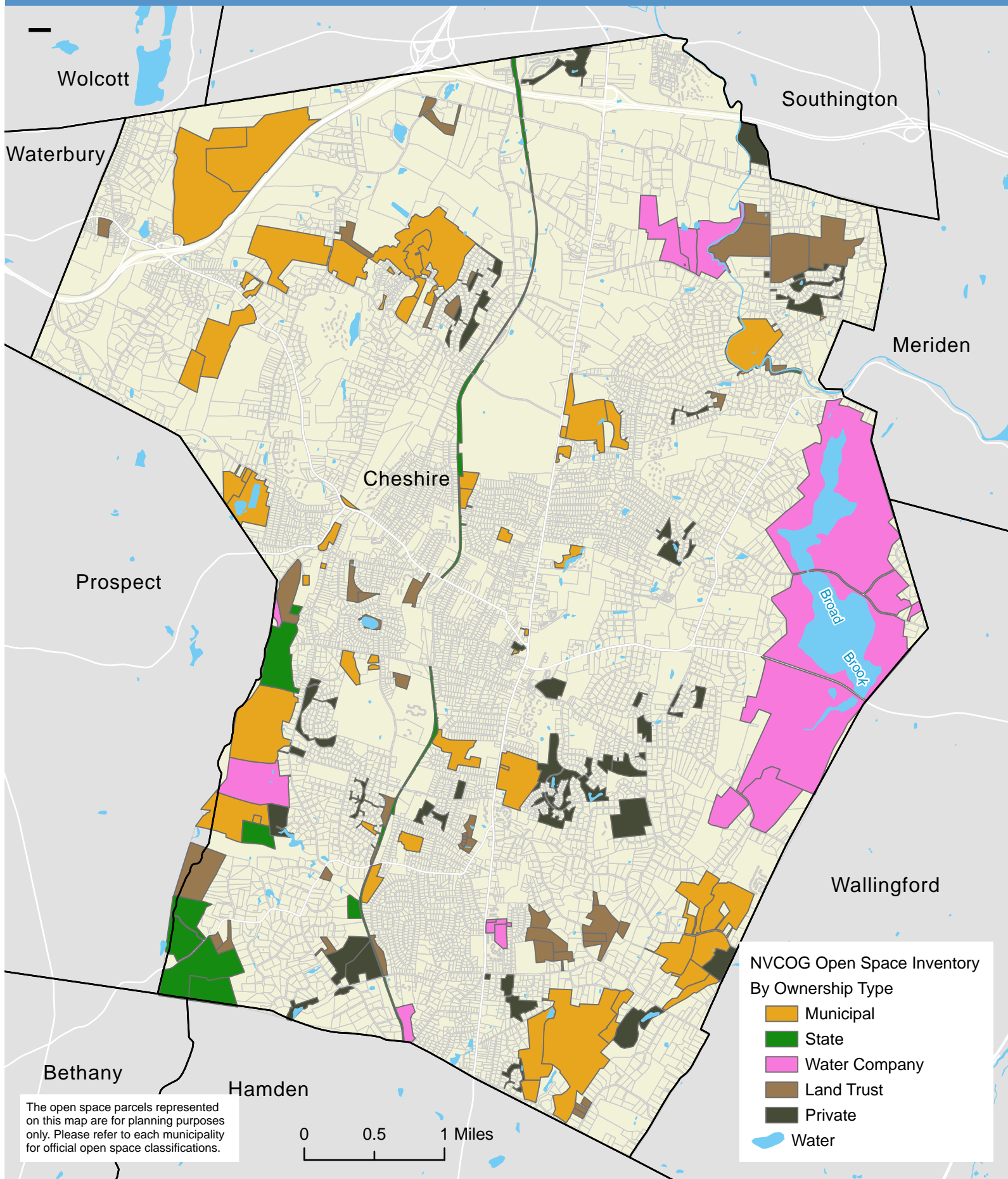


# Open Space Inventory for Bristol, CT



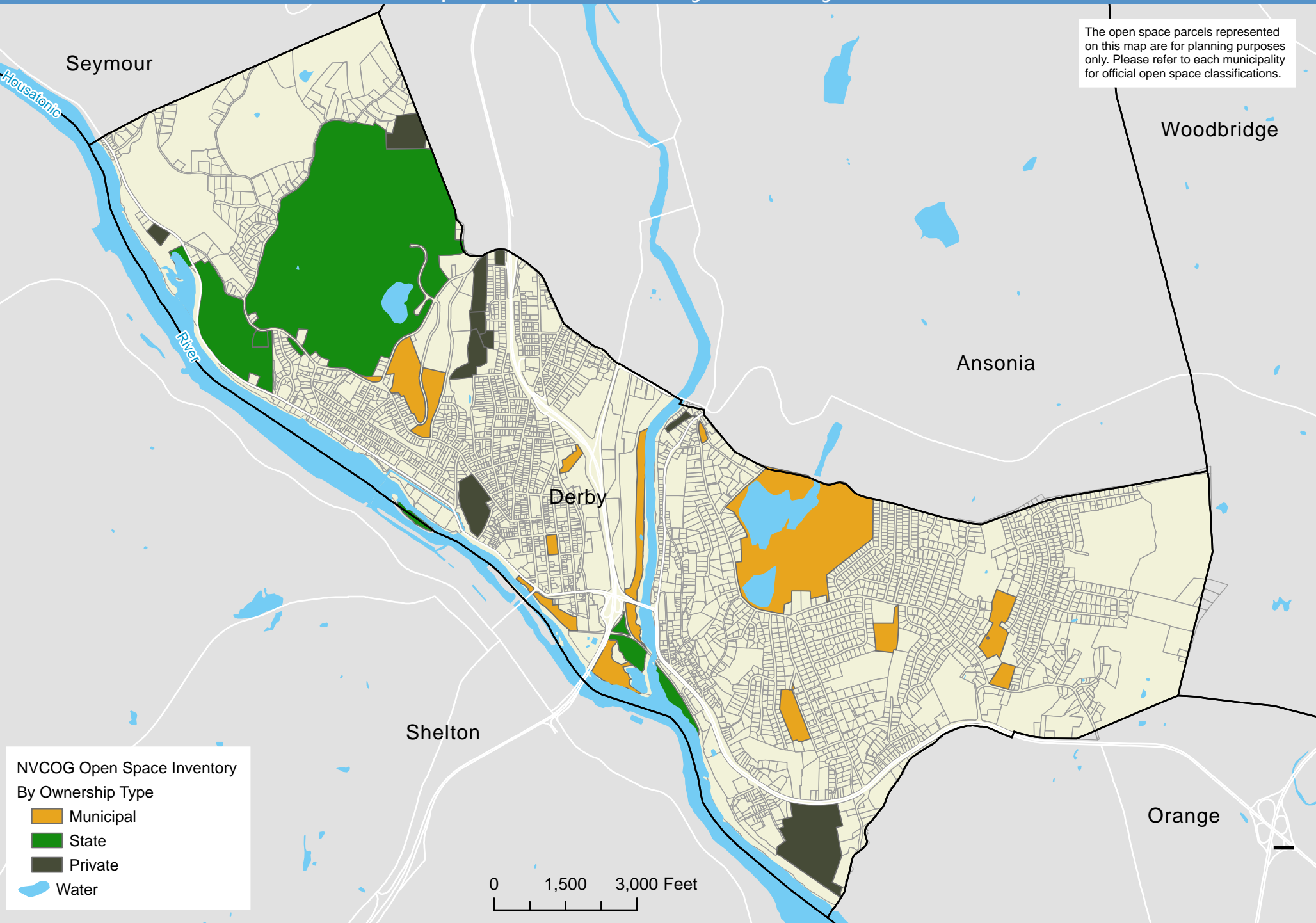


# Open Space Inventory for Cheshire, CT



# Open Space Inventory for Derby, CT

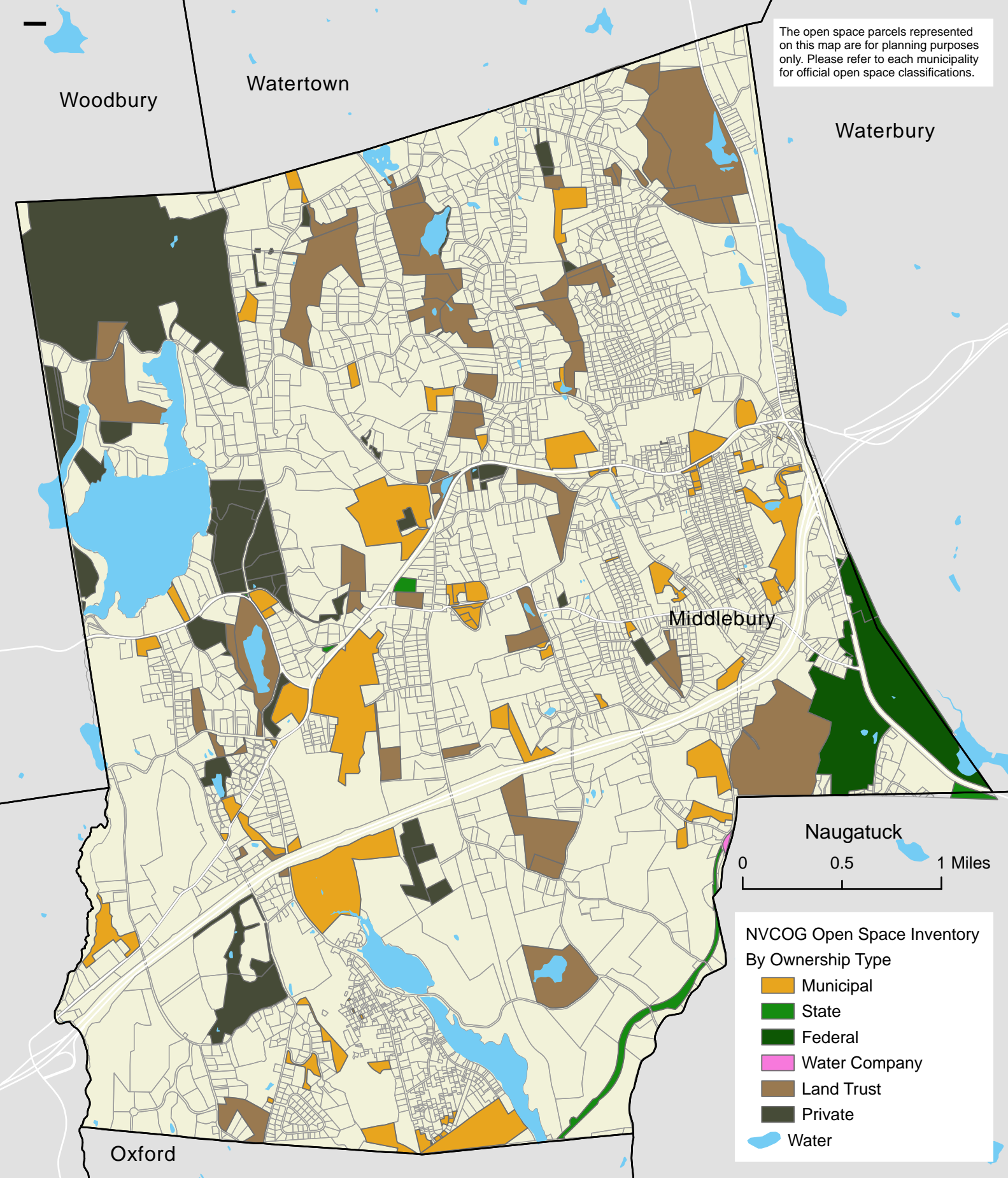
The open space parcels represented on this map are for planning purposes only. Please refer to each municipality for official open space classifications.



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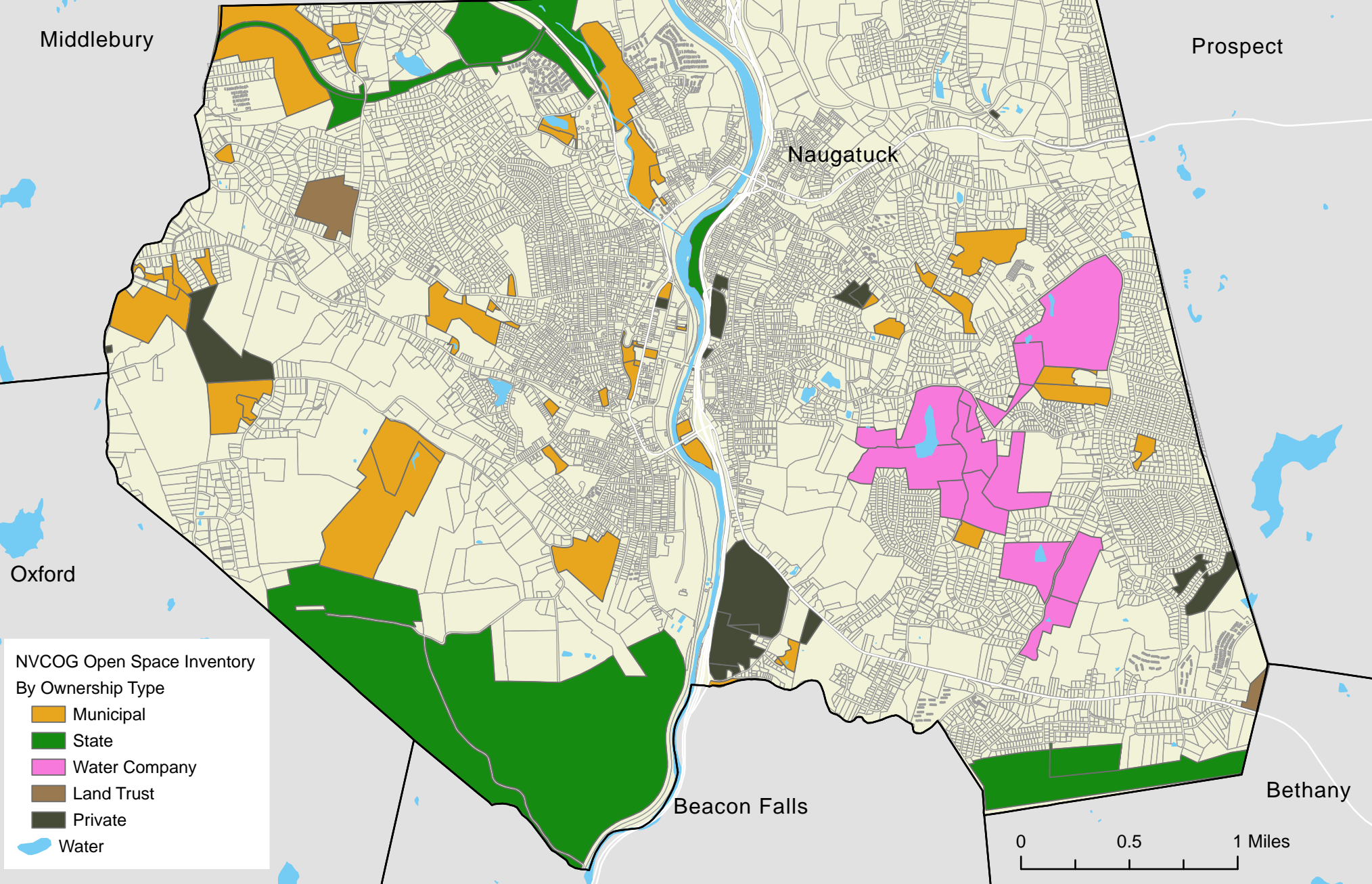


# Open Space Inventory for Middlebury, CT



# Open Space Inventory for Naugatuck, CT

The open space parcels represented on this map are for planning purposes only. Please refer to each municipality for official open space classifications.



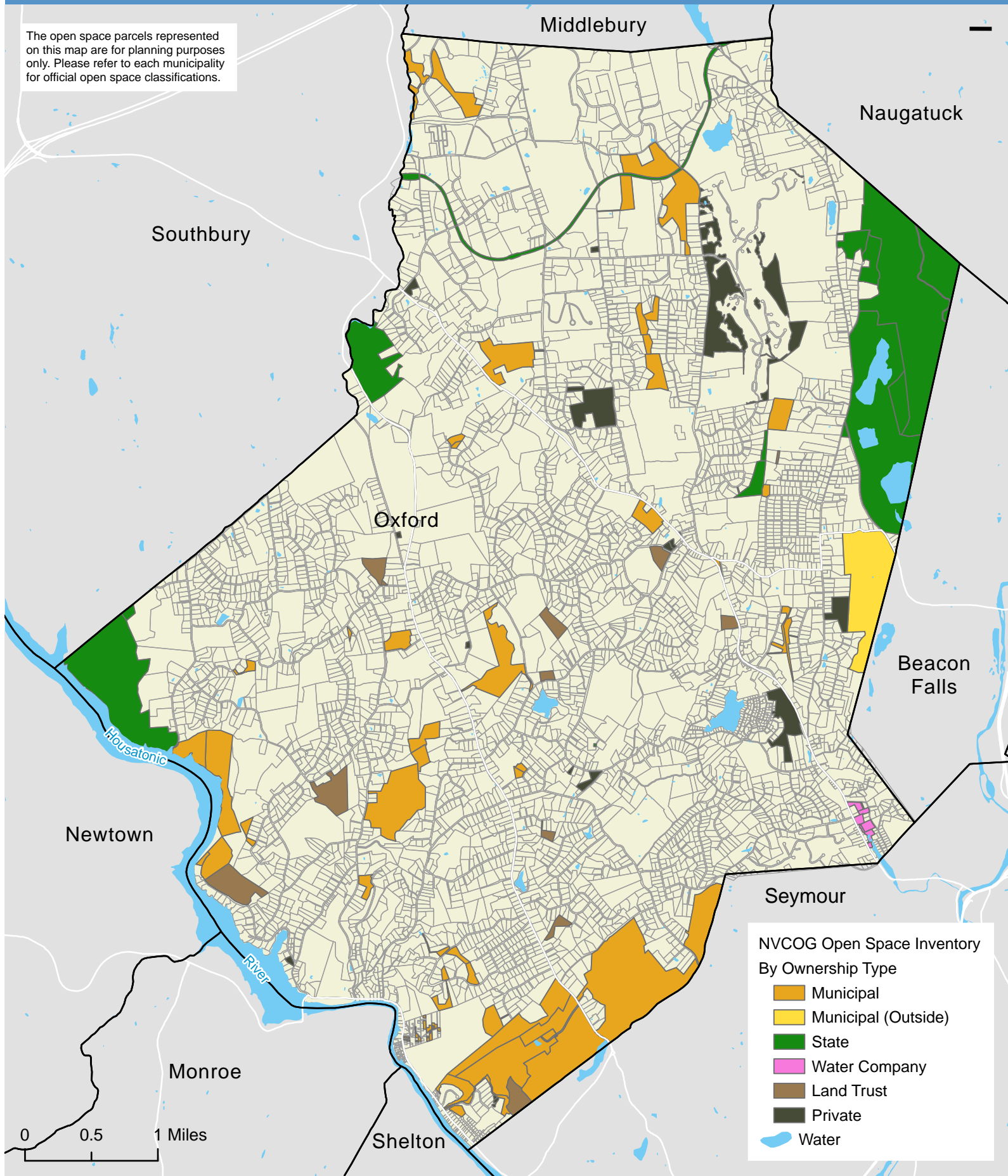
## NVCOG Open Space Inventory By Ownership Type

- Municipal
- State
- Water Company
- Land Trust
- Private
- Water



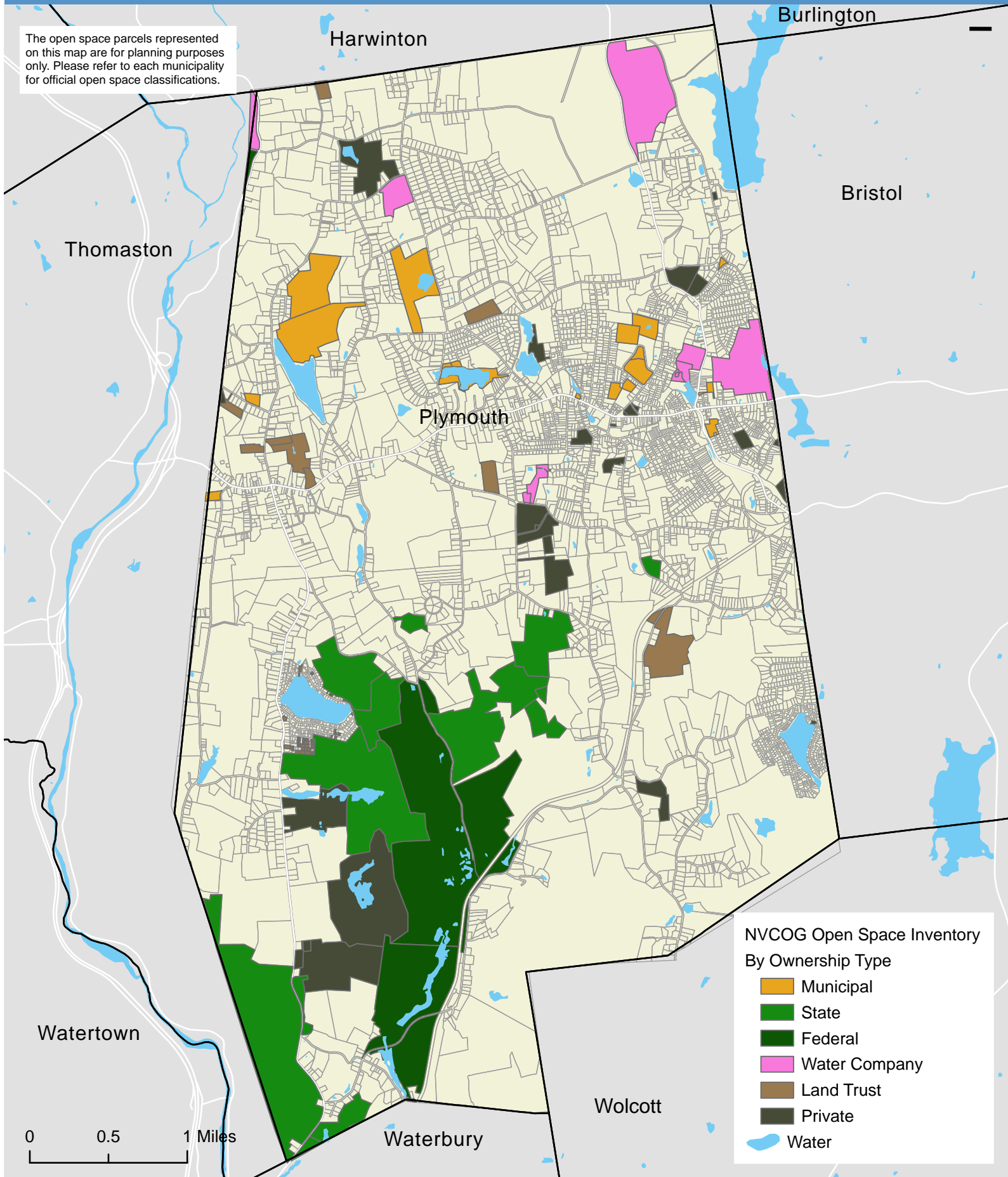
# Open Space Inventory for Oxford, CT

The open space parcels represented on this map are for planning purposes only. Please refer to each municipality for official open space classifications.



# Open Space Inventory for Plymouth, CT

The open space parcels represented on this map are for planning purposes only. Please refer to each municipality for official open space classifications.





# Open Space Inventory for Prospect, CT

The open space parcels represented on this map are for planning purposes only. Please refer to each municipality for official open space classifications.

- NVCOG Open Space Inventory
- By Ownership Type
- Municipal

Municipal (Outside)

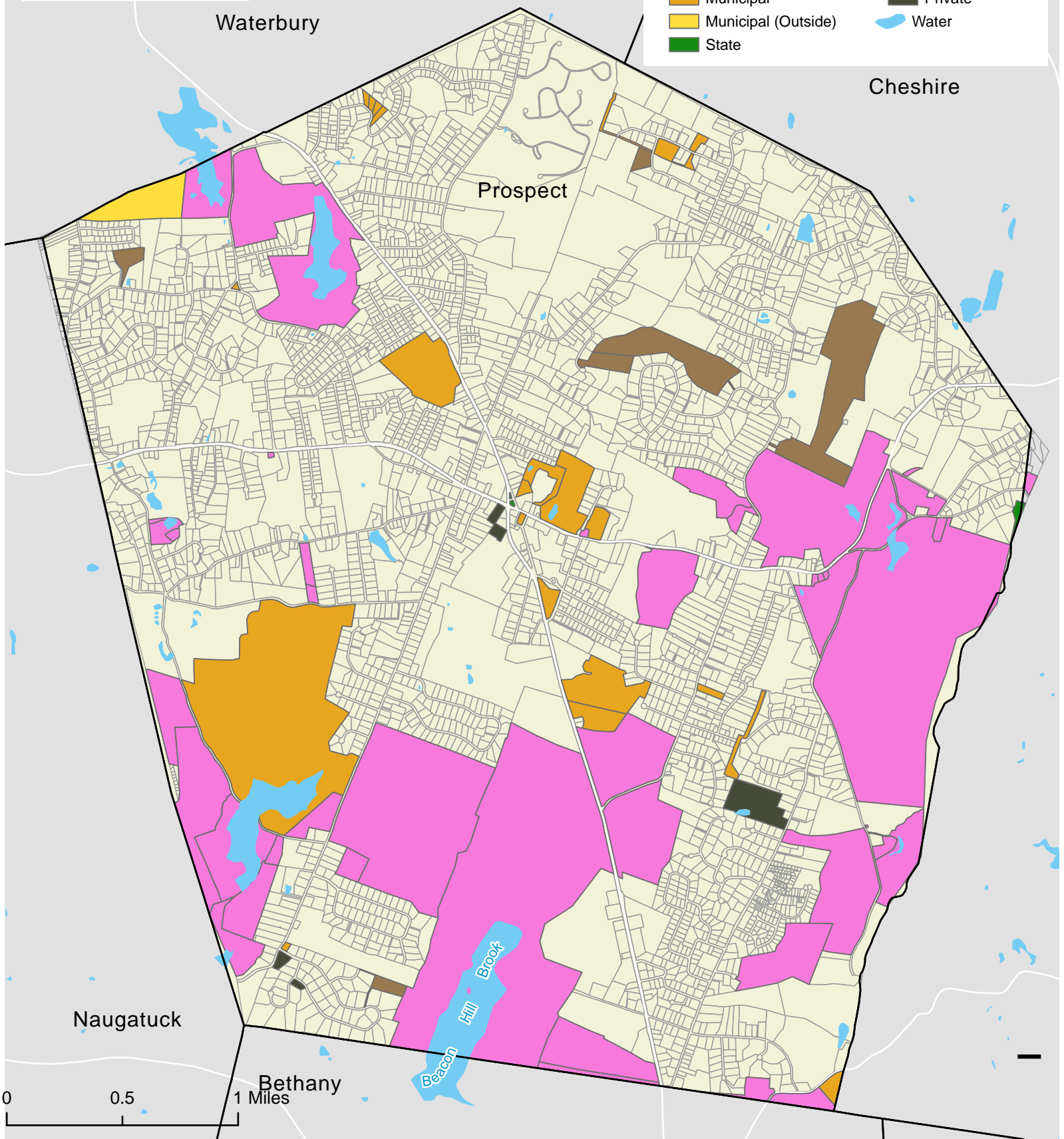
State

Water Company

Land Trust

Private

Water

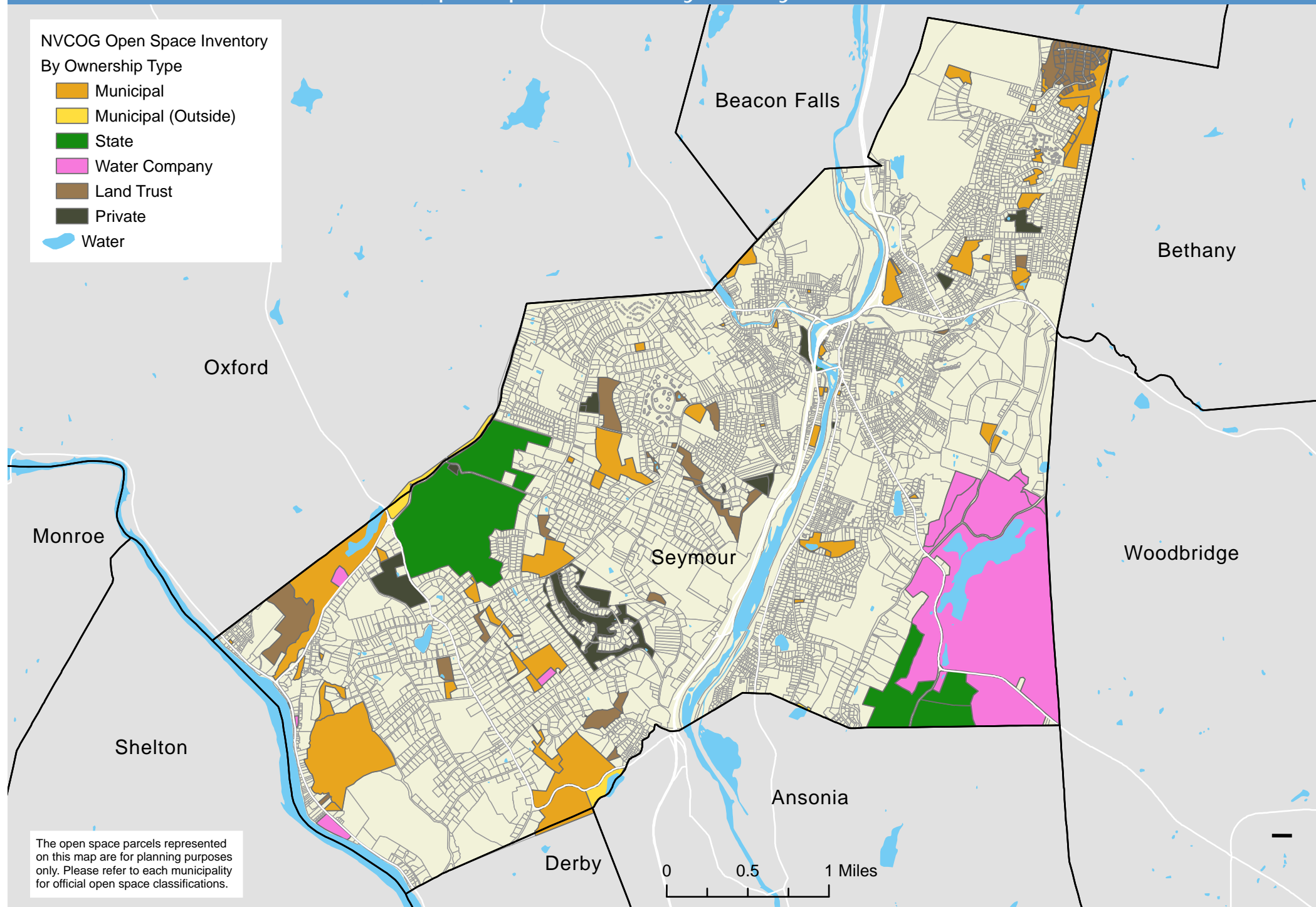


# Open Space Inventory for Seymour, CT

## NVCOG Open Space Inventory

### By Ownership Type

- Municipal
- Municipal (Outside)
- State
- Water Company
- Land Trust
- Private
- Water



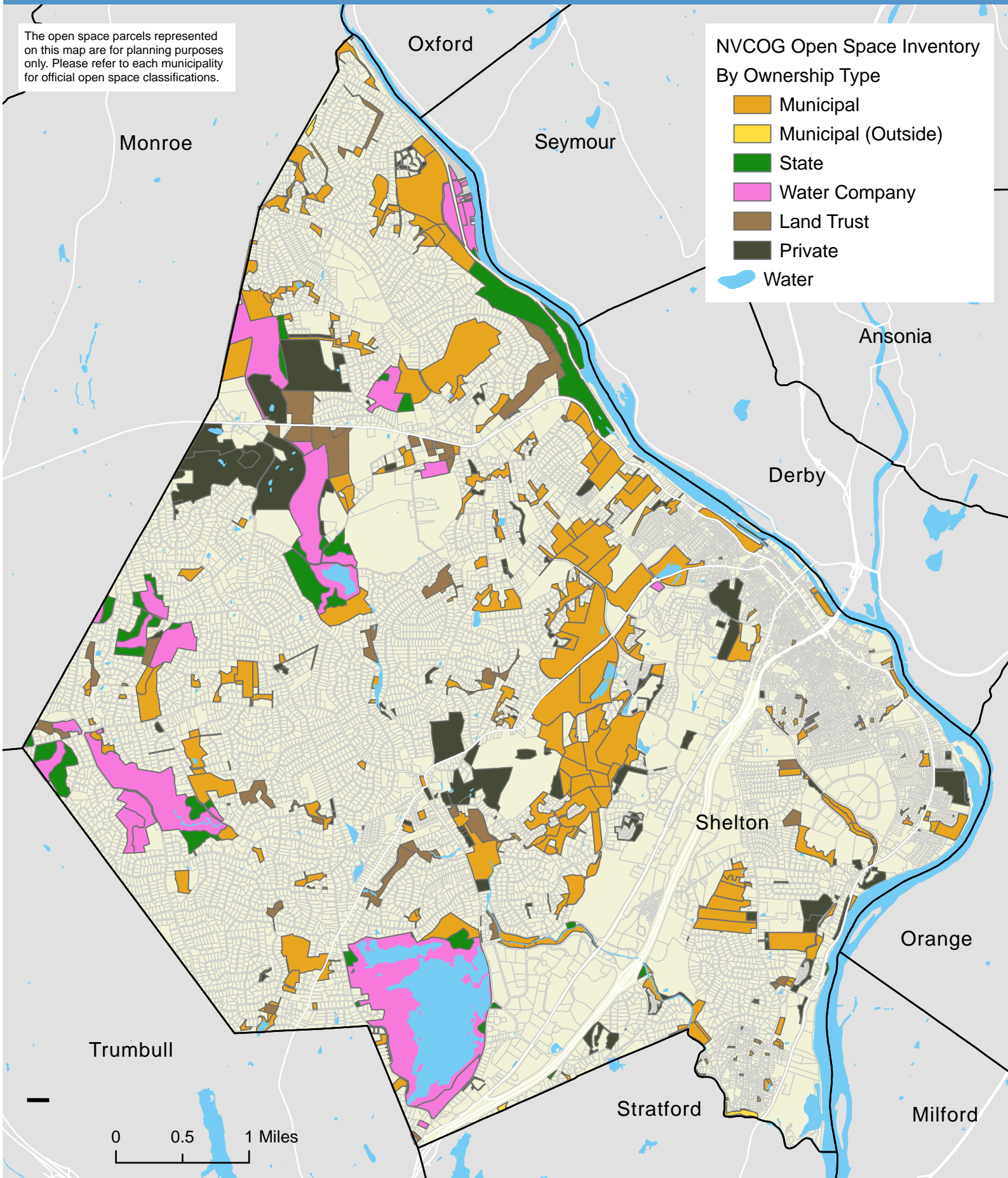


# Open Space Inventory for Shelton, CT

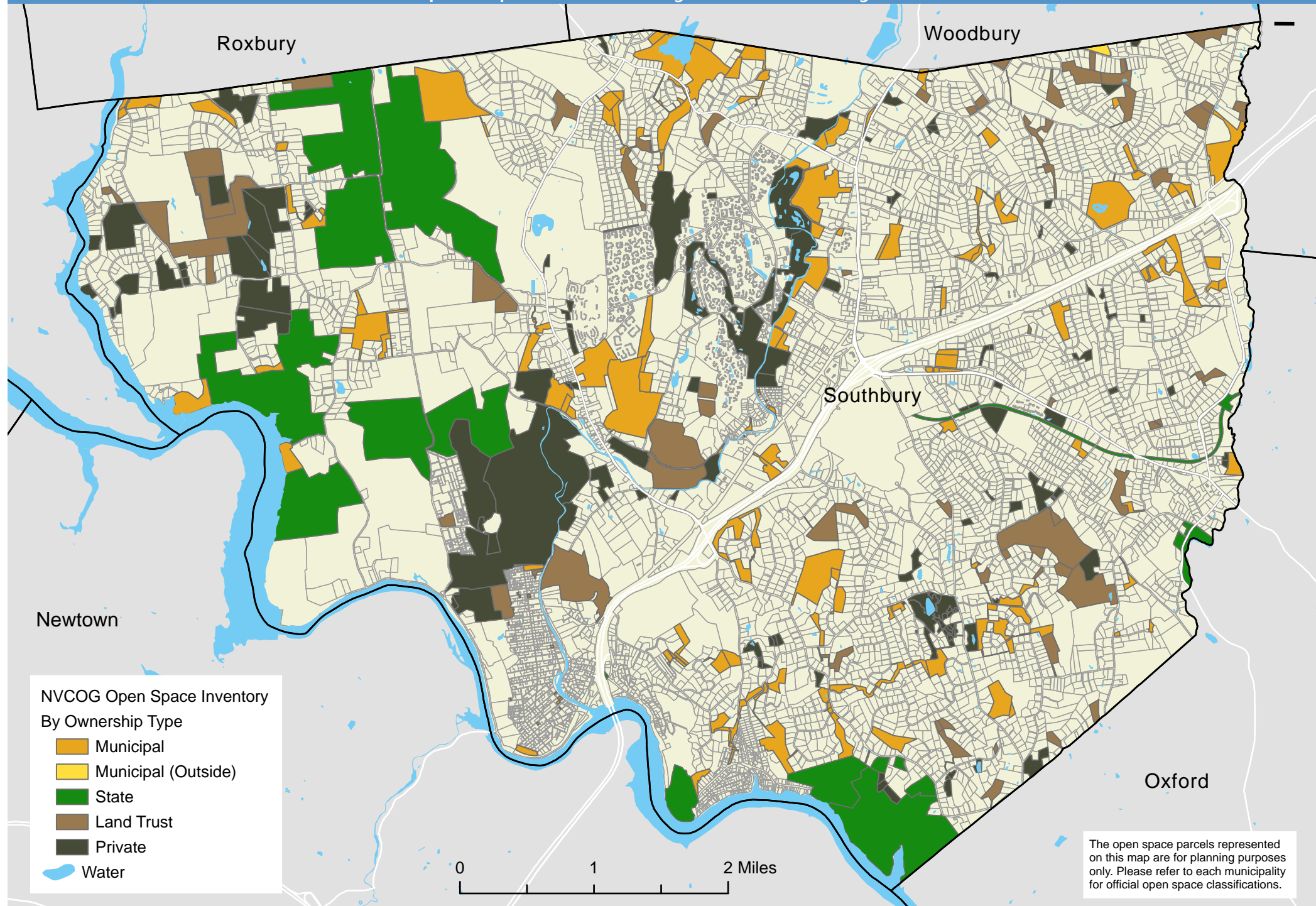
The open space parcels represented on this map are for planning purposes only. Please refer to each municipality for official open space classifications.

## NVCOG Open Space Inventory By Ownership Type

- Municipal
- Municipal (Outside)
- State
- Water Company
- Land Trust
- Private
- Water



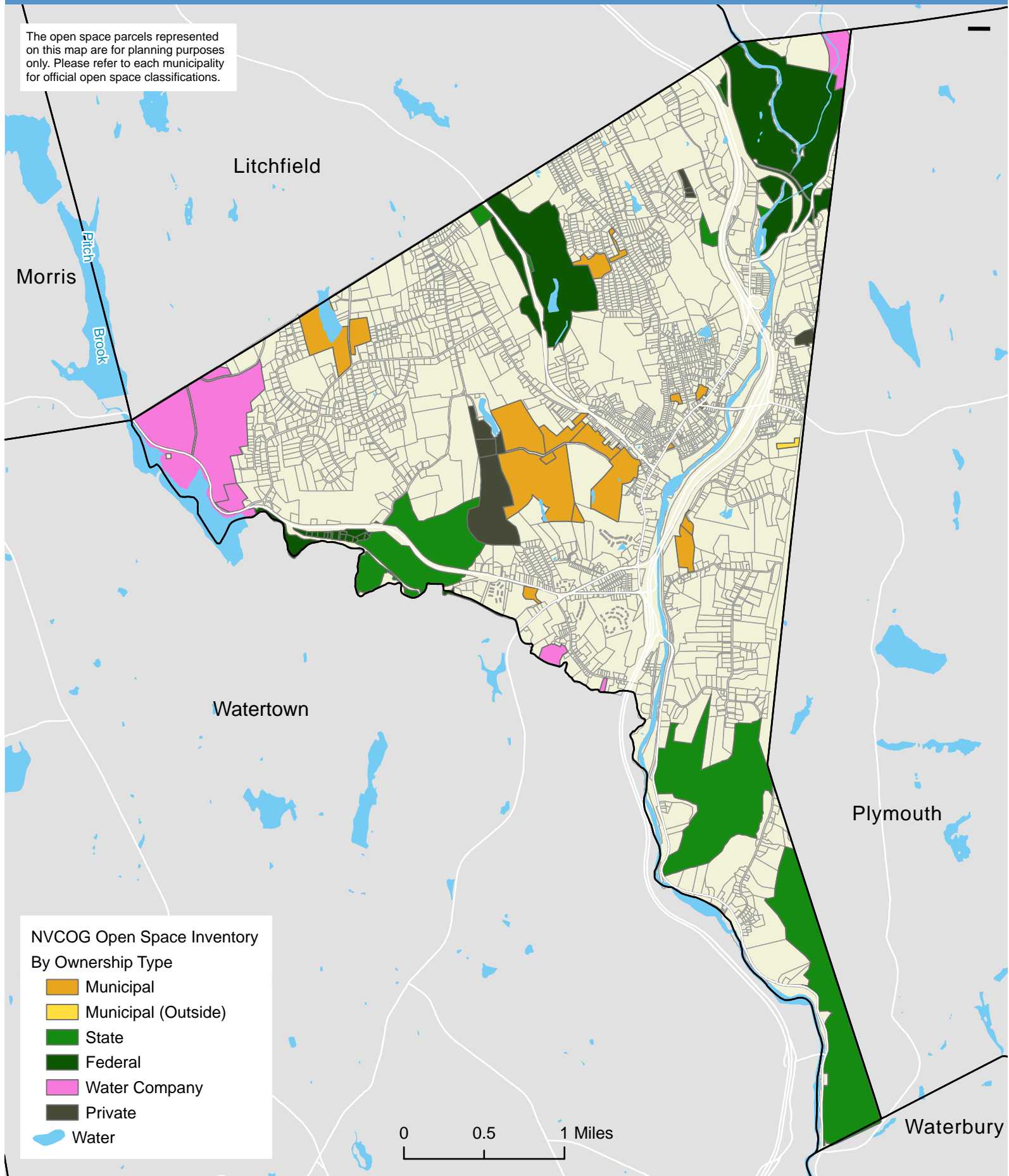
# Open Space Inventory for Southbury, CT





# Open Space Inventory for Thomaston, CT

The open space parcels represented on this map are for planning purposes only. Please refer to each municipality for official open space classifications.



## NVCOG Open Space Inventory By Ownership Type

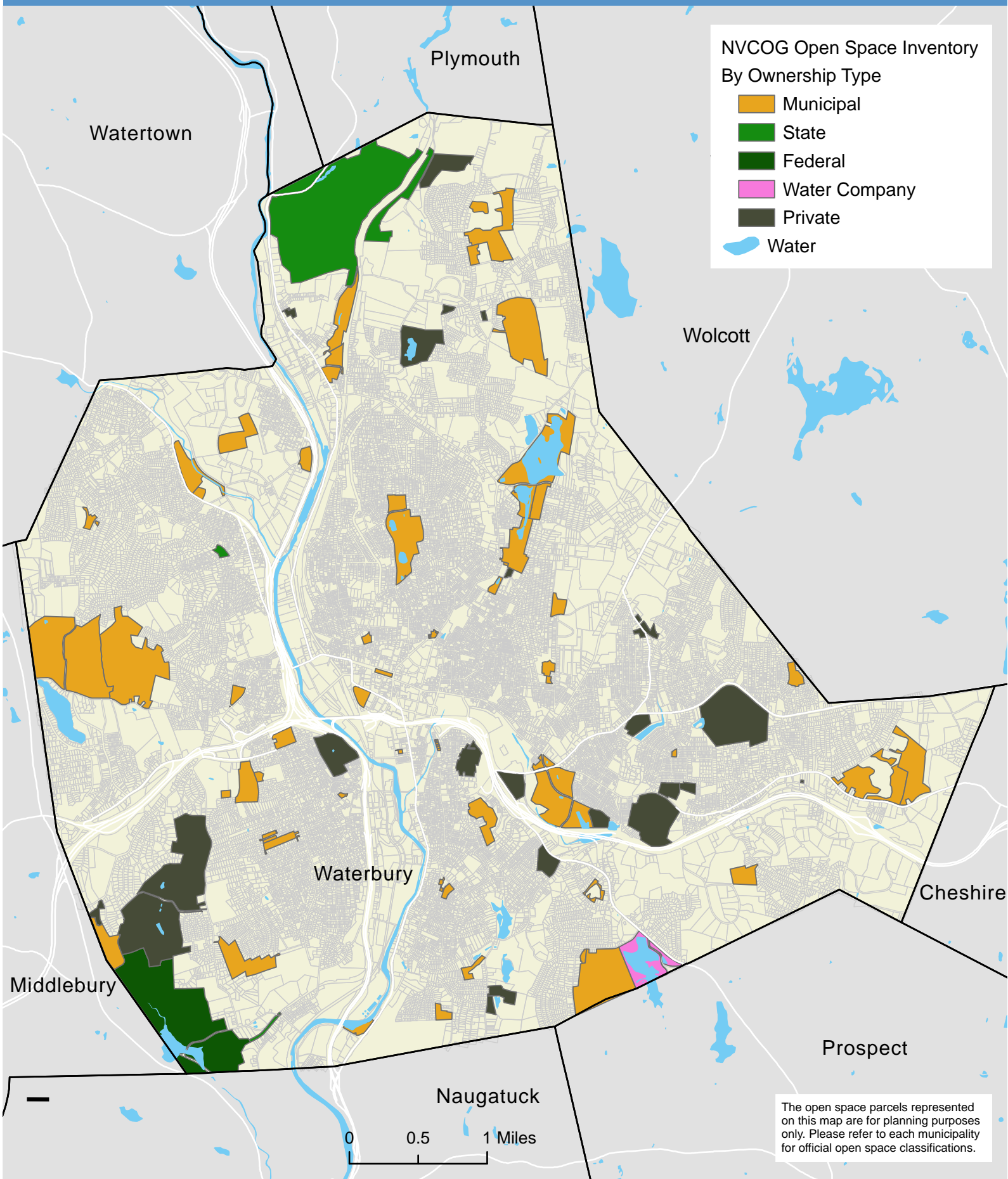
- Municipal
- Municipal (Outside)
- State
- Federal
- Water Company
- Private
- Water

0 0.5 1 Miles



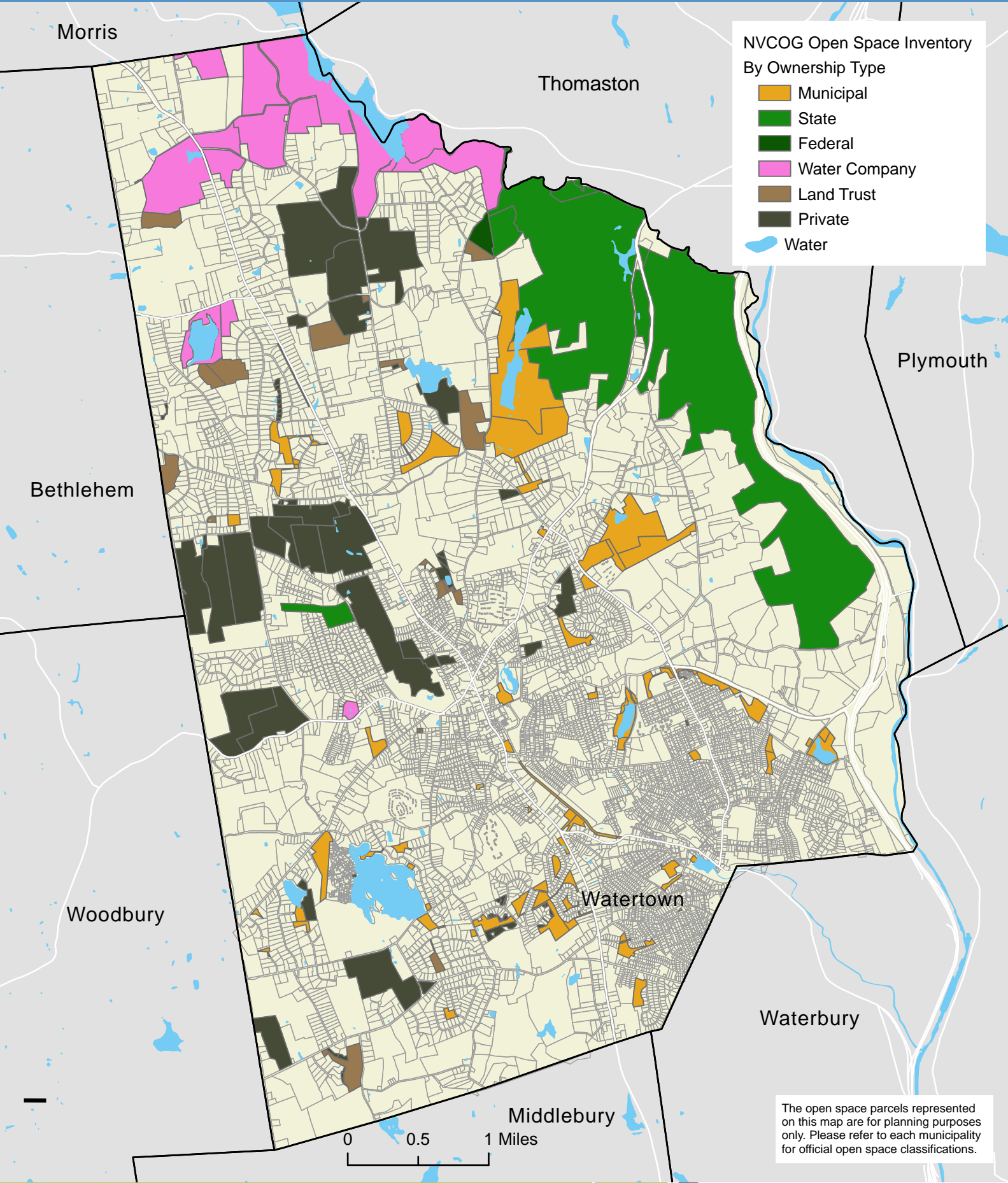
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COUNCIL of GOVERNMENTS

# Open Space Inventory for Waterbury, CT





# Open Space Inventory for Watertown, CT



# Open Space Inventory for Wolcott, CT

The open space parcels represented on this map are for planning purposes only. Please refer to each municipality for official open space classifications.

Plymouth

Bristol

Waterbury

0 0.5 1 Miles

NVCOG Open Space Inventory  
By Ownership Type

- Municipal
- Water Company
- Land Trust
- Private
- Water

Wolcott

Southington

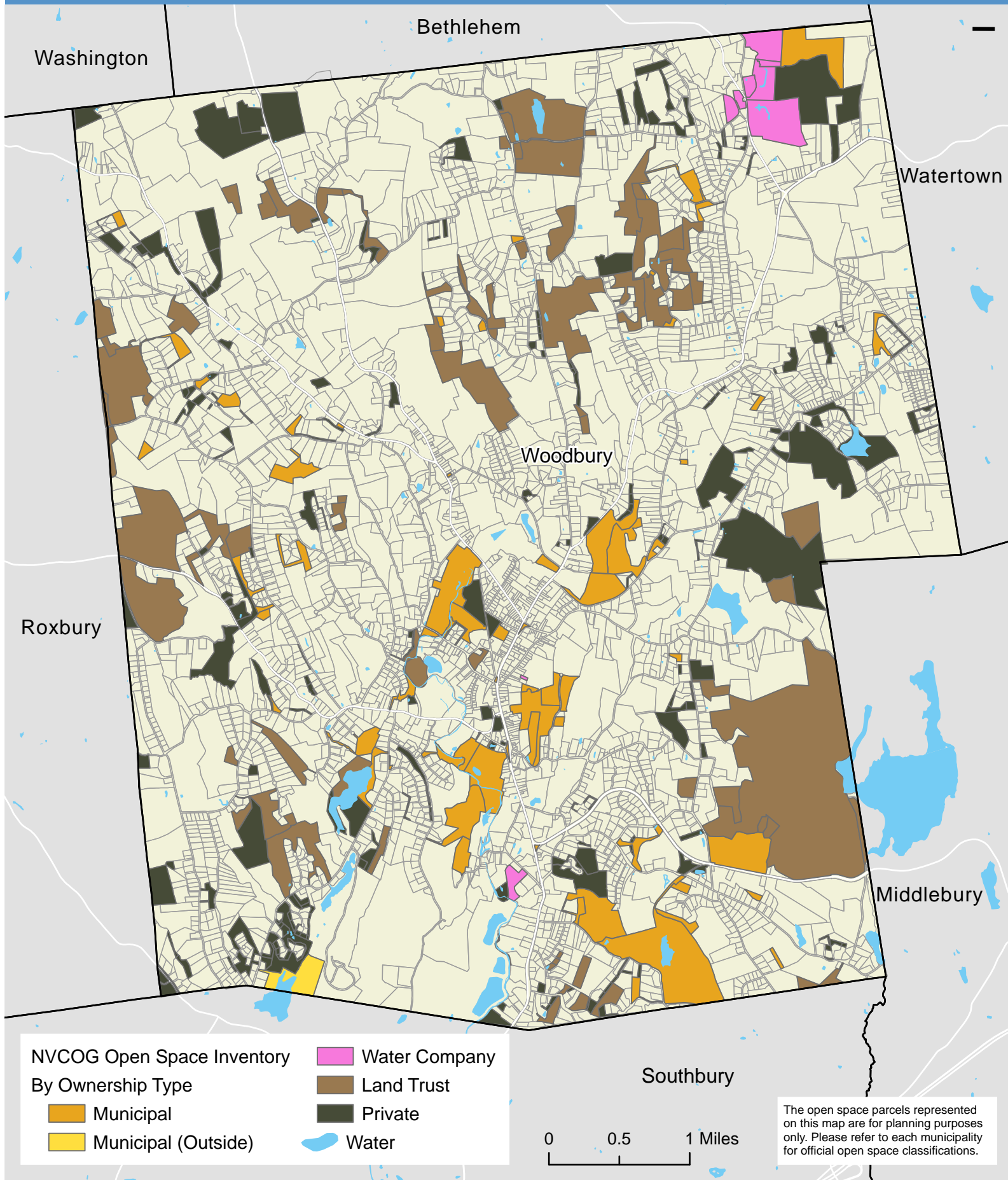
Cheshire



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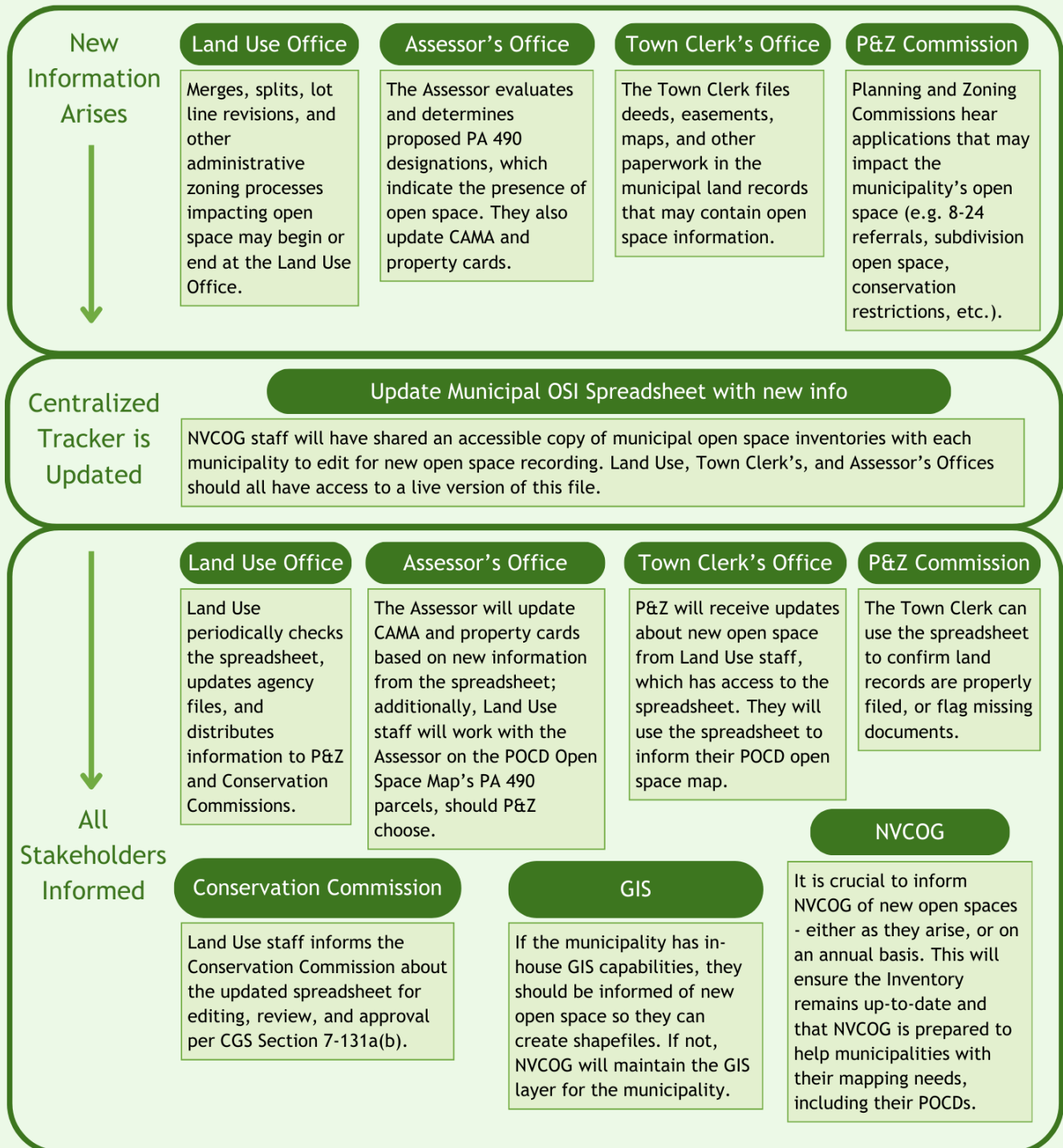


# Open Space Inventory for Woodbury, CT



## Appendix C: Suggested Reporting Protocol

Appendix B is meant to be a resource and reference for municipal staff to use regarding reporting new open space acquisition in their respective municipal departments and partners. The goal of these recommendations is to establish secure and consistent points of contact for future open space reporting between the Naugatuck Valley Council of Governments (NVCOG) and the municipalities we serve in the region. This partnership ensures that NVCOG retains an up-to-date open space inventory and map of the region for municipalities to use and for future regional projects.





## Appendix D: Open Space Resources

### Supporting Organizations

#### *Connecticut Land Conservation Council (CLCC)*

- As the umbrella organization for Connecticut's 120 land trusts, CLCC provides capacity building, training and technical assistance, grant funding, and legislative advocacy. In addition to maintaining a robust website and informative newsletter, CLCC convenes one of the largest land trust state association annual conferences in the country for networking, learning, and sharing conservation success stories. They even maintain a template library with model language for conservation easements and more.
  - Mission statement: "CLCC's mission is to elevate and strengthen land conservation in Connecticut."
  - Website: <https://ctconservation.org/>

#### *Sustainable CT*

- Sustainable CT runs a voluntary certification program to recognize municipalities' sustainable actions like brownfield redevelopment, energy efficiency in public facilities, and conserving land. Points towards certification are awarded for municipalities that inventory their open space properties and use legal mechanisms to protect land from development. NVCOG has designed this inventory to comply with Sustainable CT requirements for credit.
  - Mission statement: "To foster inclusive, resilient, and vibrant Connecticut municipalities that provide opportunities for all to thrive by: providing a menu of sustainability actions that build local economies, support equity, and respect the finite capacity of the environment; offering technical assistance to help advance sustainability initiatives; and recognizing and certifying municipalities for their achievements."
  - Website: <https://sustainablect.org/>

#### *Trust for Public Land*

- This national nonprofit conservation organization, with a Connecticut office in New Haven, helps federal, state, and local governments, nonprofits, land trusts, and tribes preserve land and create parks for public benefit. TPL can offer both technical guidance or direct acquisition assistance. In Connecticut, TPL has helped preserve over 8,400 acres and over 100 sites, including Philips Farm in Southbury, Rockhouse Hill Sanctuary in Oxford, and Boulder Knoll/Prospect Ridge in Cheshire.
  - Mission statement: "We create parks and protect land for people, ensuring healthy, livable communities for generations to come."
  - Website: <https://www.tpl.org/>

#### *Northwest Connecticut Land Conservancy (NCLC)*

- NCLC is the largest land trust in the state and serves communities of Litchfield and northern Fairfield Counties, which include five municipalities in our region: Bethlehem, Woodbury, Watertown, Thomaston, and Plymouth. NCLC protects 13,300 acres in its service area, including 6.9 acres in

## OPEN SPACE REPORT & GUIDE

Bethlehem. NCLC has a dedicated partner program designed to strengthen the capacity of the greater land conservation community through collaboration, support, funding opportunities, and technical guidance for acquisitions and stewardship.

- Mission statement: “To conserve and protect Northwest Connecticut’s irreplaceable lands and waters and create a healthier, more sustainable future for all.”
- Website: <https://ctland.org/>

## Funding Opportunities

Please refer to the linked webpages for specifics, such as application requirements or matching funds. Those details have not been included here as they may change year to year.

### *CT DEEP Open Space & Watershed Land Acquisition Program (OSWA)*

- OSWA grants help applicants acquire open space land for conservation or recreational purposes; all land must be committed for public use.
  - Eligible applicants: Municipalities, land trusts, and water companies
  - Funding availability: Grants applications are accepted on an annual cycle. Money comes from State Bond funds and/or the Community Investment Act.
  - Webpage: <https://portal.ct.gov/deep/open-space/open-space-and-watershed-land-acquisition-grant-program>

### *CT DEEP Urban Green & Community Garden Program (UGCG)*

- The goal of this program is to support the development or enhancement of urban green spaces for public enjoyment or environmental education.
  - Eligible applicants: Distressed Municipalities or Targeted Investment Communities.
  - Funding availability: Grants applications are accepted on an annual cycle. Money comes from State Bond funds and/or the Community Investment Act.
  - Webpage: <https://portal.ct.gov/deep/open-space/urban-green-and-community-garden-grant-program>

### *CT DEEP Recreational Trails Grant Program*

- These grants may be used to plan, design, construct, maintain, or upgrade trails throughout the state.
  - Eligible applicants: Municipalities, nonprofits, state departments, and tribal governments
  - Funding availability: Grant applications are accepted on an annual cycle. Money comes from State Bond funds.
  - Webpage: <https://portal.ct.gov/deep/outdoor-recreation/trails/crt--funding>

### *Other Grant Opportunities from CLCC*

- CLCC maintains a database of land trust related grants, which can be filtered by type (state, federal, etc.) or category (recreation, wetlands, etc.). CLCC also sponsors their own grant programs for Climate Smart Land Stewardship, CT Conservation Partnerships, and Transaction Assistance.
  - Webpage: <https://ctconservation.org/grant-opportunities/>



## Keep in Touch

### *NVCOG Newsletter*

- Receive the latest updates on NVCOG projects and funding opportunities that may be of interest to our municipal partners.
  - Subscribe here: <https://nvcogct.us12.list-manage.com/subscribe?u=74dd6f0ac53c6cbb0c5034134&id=7310980882>

### *CT Land Trust List-Serv*

- Geared towards land trust members, this email chain provides a forum to discuss open space management or operational issues from a land trust's perspective.
  - Subscribe here: <https://ctconservation.org/ct-land-trust-listserv/>

### *CT Planners' List-Serv*

- Geared towards municipal officials and staff, this email chain is a great place to ask questions or tune into conversations about how other communities handle planning issues. Open space, management of public lands, or legal matters pertaining to commission decisions may be discussed here.
  - Subscribe here: <https://ct.planning.org/knowledge-center/planners-listserv/>

## Appendix E: Anatomy of an Open Space Deed

Deeds are legal land records establishing property ownership and, in some cases, placing restrictions on use. Deeds with conservation restrictions provide permanent, legal protection for open space land. Below is an annotated excerpt from a deed demonstrating the key components of a conservation restriction. Note that there are several different types of deeds and that some may look different from the example below.

1 The mere mention of the term “Open Space” in a deed **does not** constitute a conservation restriction.

2 This sentence defines the **conservation restriction**, specifying that the property must remain natural and prohibiting buildings. While included in the deed here, it is sometimes a separate document referenced by Book and Page number.

### Schedule “B”

2.148 acres/Open Space at The Farm At Park Road

The Premises are conveyed subject to the condition that the same shall remain in their natural, scenic and unspoiled condition and that no building and/or structure will be erected or maintained thereon incident to their use as open space, and in the event that the Releasee shall violate or permit violation of any of said conditions, then upon notice of condition broken given as herein provided, duly recorded in the Middlebury Land Records, the title to said premises shall vest in the Nature Conservancy of Connecticut, Inc. or if said Nature Conservancy shall not then exist, in such other conservation organization as may be designated to hold the same by a Court of the State of Connecticut having jurisdiction. Notice must be given and recorded by The Nature Conservancy of Connecticut, Inc. or if it has ceased to exist, by order of said Court having jurisdiction on petition of the Attorney General of the State of Connecticut.

The foregoing conditions shall not preclude (a) use of The Premises by the general public for walking, horseback riding and other similar woodland recreation pursuits, (b) forest management practices, including firewood cutting, and (c) wildlife and plant sanctuaries.

This is called a **reversionary clause**, and it provides for another party to take over the land if the current owner fails to live up to their obligation. It is best practice to include this clause as part of a restriction.

3

4 Clarifications or **reasonable exceptions**, such as the right for public access, often accompany a conservation restriction.



## Appendix F: Summary Data Methodology

In the Executive Summary and Municipal Profiles, the project team synthesized the data from the Inventory into summary figures, like total open space acres or protected open space per capita. They provide an important bird's eye view of open space in the region - but in zooming out that far, some accuracy and nuance is sacrificed.

One of the largest challenges in presenting accurate data was outdated property card (CAMA) acreages, as parcel size was the initial building block for many other calculations. In particular, land owned by the municipality or a water company often had inaccurate acres listed... sometimes to the magnitude of over 100 acres. We surmise that this is because municipal and water company land is not taxed, and therefore maintaining records of acreage was not a priority. Additionally, when the GIS team carved out athletic fields from school properties, no exact acreage for those fields exists on a property card or a deed. Finally, subdivisions or lot line revisions have sometimes resulted in updated parcels, but outdated acreages.

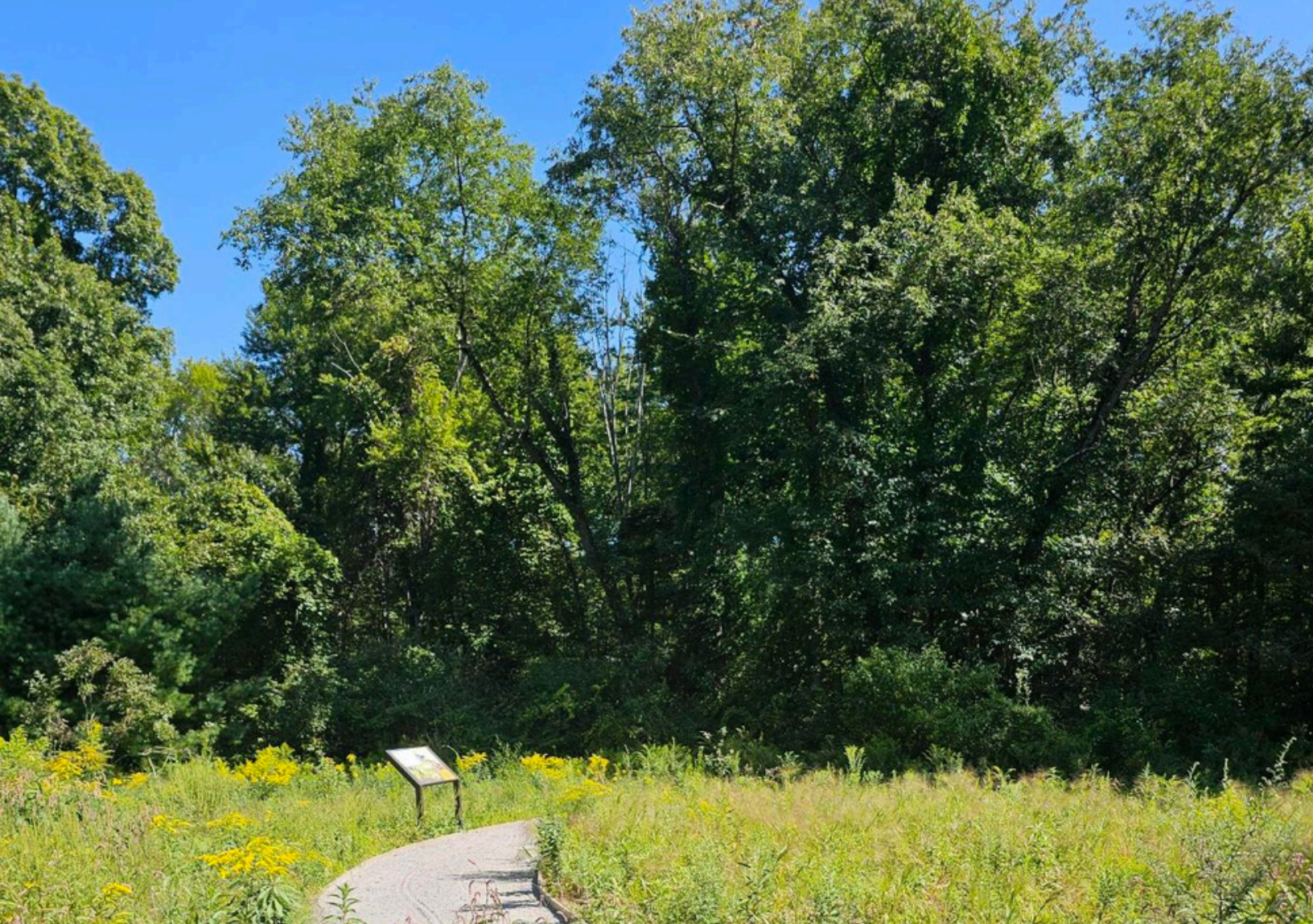
To work around property card inaccuracies that would have resulted in misleading figures, the project team used GIS acres as the basis for all summary calculations. GIS acres are not exact and should not be used for surveying or valuation decisions - but in case of totaling parcel sizes, they were the most accurate metric available.

Below are methodologies for all summary data in the Executive Summary tables and the Municipal Profiles.

- **Open Space Acreage:** Total GIS Acres for each municipality
- **Percentage of Land Identified as Open Space:** (Open Space Acreage) / (Municipal Acreage from 2023 American Communities Survey)
- **Total Number of Open Space Properties:** Count from spreadsheet
- **Open Space Acres Per Capita:** (Open Space Acreage) / (Municipal Population from 2023 American Communities Survey)
- **Protected Open Space Acreage:** GIS Acres for Protected: Yes
- **Percentage of Land Identified as Protected Open Space:** (Protected Open Space Acreage) / (Municipal Acreage from 2023 American Communities Survey)
- **Total Number of Protected Open Space Properties:** Count from spreadsheet, excluding unprotected
- **Protected Open Space Acres Per Capita:** (Protected Open Space Acreage) / (Municipal Population from 2023 American Communities Survey)
- **Ownership percentages:** Total GIS Acres for each Owner Type within each municipality
- **Use percentages:** Total GIS Acres for each Primary Function\* within each municipality

\* To see the full list of identified uses for a given property, click on the property and scroll through its attributes. The primary use pie chart only represents the most dominant use on the property, as identified by the project team.





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(203) 757-0535

[www.nvcogct.gov](http://www.nvcogct.gov)

For complaints, questions or concerns about civil rights or nondiscrimination; or for special requests under the Americans with Disabilities Act, please contact: Desira Blanchard, Communications & Community Engagement Coordinator at 203-489-0353 or [dblanchard@nvcogct.gov](mailto:dblanchard@nvcogct.gov).