

Working from solid foundation, land trust sets goals

By HEIDI JOHNES
Staff Writer

3/2/00

EASTHAMPTON — The Easthampton Pascommuck Conservation Trust held its annual meeting this week to review past accomplishments, set goals for the future, nominate a new board member and watch a slide show of the town's history.

The trust is a nonprofit organization that has been working since 1982 to preserve Easthampton's natural resources through conservation and education. It is given or buys land or easements with scenic, natural, agricultural or recreational value, according to trust officials. The organization currently controls 13 parcels in Easthampton, all of which were officially named in 1999.

Some of the most noteworthy include the 40-acre Manhan River Conservation Area, nearly 64 acres in White Brook Plains, the Old Pascommuck Conservation Area and John Bator Park.

The group also maintains trails such as the half-mile E. Florence Smith Nature Trail and a 1.5-mile trail in the Brickyard Brook Conservation Area.

The trust earned \$16,000 last year, spent \$24,000 and has a current balance of \$19,200. One of its biggest projects last year was the creation of the Brickyard Brook Trail, which was constructed by Americorps Vista volunteers. The trust also became a member of the Easthampton Chamber of Commerce in 1999.

Another project it supports is Old Turtle

Farm, a vegetable-growing co-op. The trust helped the co-op gain funding.

The trust also is backing the fight against housing developments on the Mount Holyoke Range.

Some of the trust's goals for this year include reaching more area youth through school programs, posting property signs on conservation land and producing maps and brochures of conservation areas.

"We will continue our property walks," said John Bator, trust president. "Every year we walk around the perimeter of our properties to check on the condition of things."

One troubling issue that has recently confronted the trust is the illegal construction of BMX bike trails on its conservation land. A tractor was recently

brought in to level one in the Hannum Brook Conservation area.

"I don't know how the kids build these things," Bator said, referring to the large mounds of dirt moved to create jumps and ditches. "But by the time they get through, it looks like World War II."

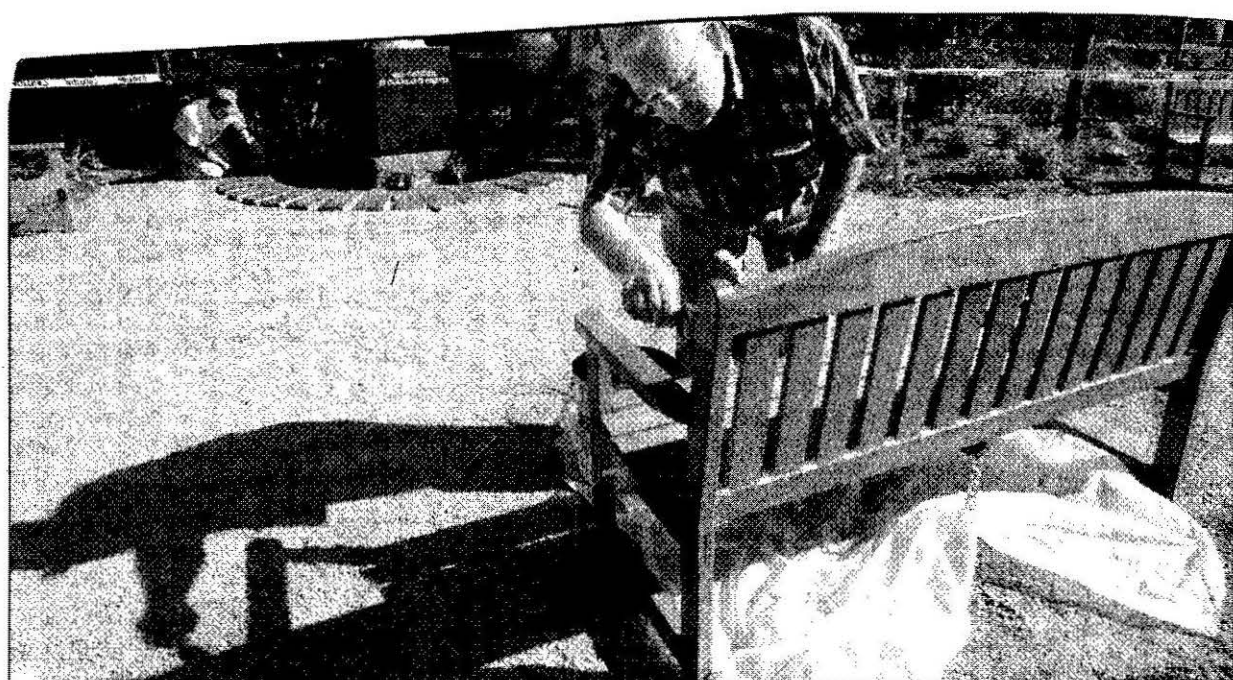
The trust will also be working to maintain the greenbelt along Manhan River, applying for grants and fundraising. The possibility of a calendar with photos of local conservation areas was discussed.

Two parcels in White Brook Plains are maintained as farmland as long as it is being farmed, and the trust notified its members that the farmer's lease had run out and they needed find another farmer to maintain it under its current status.

The nine board members voted to add Peter Ugulewicz to the board and then adjourned the meeting to watch a slide show featuring scenic pictures of their land holdings and historical photos of Easthampton.

"This what we are all about," Bator said when the audience let out an appreciative gasp at the first slide, which was an idyllic fall foliage scene.

The historical slides were narrated by Easthampton historians Earl Mielke and Edward Dwyer and depicted the town during slower times when the Nashawanuck Pond was the focal point of recreational activities, church was an all-day affair, trolley cars carried people in and out of town and the fire truck was drawn by a horse.



KEVIN GUTTING

Ed Zabawa of Southamptton applies a second coat of stain to a park bench last week in front of the Christmas Box Angel Memorial in the John Bator Park in Easthampton. In the background, Scott Wark of Easthampton arranges stone tablets in preparation for Sunday's dedication.

Dedication nears for angel memorial

By VICTORIA GROVES
Staff Writer

EASTHAMPTON — The Christmas Box Angel Memorial, a remembrance to children who have died, will be officially dedicated Sunday in John Bator Park.

The memorial was organized by the local chapter of Compassionate Friends, a group that aids families grieving after the death of a child and provides information to help others support those experiencing such a loss.

A 3-foot bronze angel stands in the middle of the memorial, surrounded by a brick walkway engraved with 144 names of children who have died.

The dedication will be held Sunday from 1 to 4 p.m. in the park on Williston Avenue, rain or shine.

Co-chapter leader Bob MacDonald of Westhampton said hundreds of friends, family and community members are expected to attend the dedication. "I know we are going to fill the park," MacDonald said. "Anyone who wants to come is welcome."

As each child's name is read, family members will place a flower at the memorial.

MacDonald suggests people bring an umbrella, a chair, water, tissues and a white flower to the ceremony.

MacDonald said the memorial is already receiving visitors who want to spend a quiet moment reflecting as well as talk with others who have experienced the loss of a child.

"It's a place of peace, and it's already doing its magic," MacDonald said. "It will be an emotional ceremony." MacDonald and his wife, Nance, were instrumental in establishing the



KEVIN GUTTING

Tablets bearing the names of 144 children who have died were cemented around the base of the memorial. The local chapter of Compassionate Friends, a group that helps families after the death of a child, was instrumental in bringing the memorial to Easthampton.

memorial in Easthampton. Their son David died at age 16 in 1997 in a car accident.

With the permission of the Easthampton Police Department and the city's Department of Public Works, Williston Avenue to Lake Street will be closed during the ceremony.

The ceremony will include a prayer by the Rev. James Wiese of Trinity Lutheran Church, as well as poems and songs.

Lisa May, angel representative with Richard Paul Evans Inc. in Salt Lake City, Utah, will read the Christmas Box Angel story. Evans commissioned the angel sculpture in 1994 after

writing "The Christmas Box," a popular book in which a woman visits an angel statue to mourn the loss of her daughter.

A butterfly release by Magic Wings of Deerfield and a dove release by Festive Feathers of Southamptton will also take place.

MacDonald said that since the memorial's completion, additional individuals have expressed an interest in donating money for a brick. While plans for future additions to the memorial are not certain, MacDonald said all those who sign a visitors list will also have their child's name read and have

the opportunity to place a flower at the memorial.

"We're taking names and in the future, if we expand, we'll contact them," MacDonald said.

The angel statue was delivered to the park Aug. 22 and will be presented to the Pascomuck Conservation Trust Inc.

The park is owned by the trust, a nonprofit organization that has been working since 1982 to preserve the city's natural resources through conservation and education. The group offered the use of the land after the Compassionate Friends had trouble finding a site for the proposed memorial.

FEBRUARY 19-20, 2000

LETTERS

Thanks to Easthampton for saving Mount Tom

To the Editor:

2/19/00

We at the Pascommuck Conservation Trust would like to thank all of the city officials and citizens who were instrumental in helping to save the symbol of Easthampton, Mount Tom, from further development by acquiring the Boruchowski property.

We would like to thank the City Planner, the Planning Board, the Nashawannuck Pond Steering Committee, the Conservation Commission and all other city officials who worked so hard to make this matching state grant a reality. We would especially like to thank the hundreds of concerned citizens who wrote letters and postcards, placed telephone calls, attended public meetings and performed countless other tasks so important for the success of this project.

The City Council is to be especially commended for the diligent and responsible manner in which it approached its obligation as our representatives. After a thorough and exhaustive examination of the facts, the council concluded that it was in the best interest of the town to protect the Barnes Aquifer, our view of the mountain, and the valuable wildlife habitat therein.

Finally, we would like to thank the Boruchowski family for coming forward and giving the community and the state the opportunity to add an important piece to the protection of Mt. Tom and our drinking water.

Stephen Donnelly
Board of Directors
Pascommuck Conservation
Trust
Easthampton

Trust agrees on land buy

By **BARNEY BEAL**
Staff Writer

11/22/70

EASTHAMPTON — The Pascommuck Conservation Trust has reached an agreement with the Sparko family to buy a 19¼-acre tract off Lovefield Street.

The sale will help preserve a corridor of land leading from the Manhan River to the Massachusetts Audubon Society's Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary.

"It's a great buffer between Arcadia and land the town owns on the Manhan," Trust President John Bator said. "There's good wildlife area and open space that should be saved. We feel permanent conservation of this land adds to an important buffer for Easthampton's real treasures."

The trust purchased the land earlier this month for \$42,500 and now owns roughly 200 acres, Bator said.

Located near the river and the town well, the land is part of the farm owned by the late John Sparko, a longtime local resident and farmer. Members of the family had no comment on the sale.

"It's a win-win situation," Bator said. "John Sparko was interested in conservation and we were happy to buy it. He used to come by when I worked at Arcadia."

The tract will also serve as a transition from developed land along Lovefield and O'Neil streets to the agricultural and wild area of the Meadows.

Purchasing the land from the Sparko estate was a lengthy process because the trust struggled to secure the financing, according to Trustee Garrett Stover. A portion of the land along Lovefield Street was sold for development.

"In order to make this deal, we had to do that," Bator said. "That's pretty much the standard practice right now."

Bator said the Pascommuck Conservation Trust will work with naturalists from Massachusetts Audubon Society to draw up a management plan for the new conservation land.

Land trust buys parcel

By DAVID BERGENGREN

Staff writer

EASTHAMPTON - A local non-profit land trust has purchased 41 acres along both sides of Clapp Street and adjacent to the Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary, to preserve it as farmland.

The Pascommuck Conservation Trust purchased the parcel for "slightly over \$420,000," trust project manager Gerrit T. Stover said yesterday.

The purchase was finalized Tuesday.

The trust bought the land from Anthony Pond of Stoughton and Peter Pond of Brussels, Belgium, two brothers who grew up in an adjacent house on Clapp Street that was sold earlier to a private party, Stover said.

"It's not the final piece, but I think it's a critical piece in protecting the border areas of the sanctuary and connecting it with (surrounding) natural areas," Stover said of the 41-acre purchase.

The parcel adjoins a 19-acre parcel previously purchased by the trust, and together they form a "protected greenway" between the Manhan River and Arcadia, the

trust said in a statement.

The purchase was made possible by a private donor who gave more than \$150,000 toward it, plus financing assistance from the Massachusetts Audubon Society, which owns the 700-plus acres of Arcadia, and from Florence Savings Bank, Stover said.

The trust plans to sell an Agricultural Preservation Restriction on the site to the state Department of Food and Agriculture for \$325,000, Stover said. The state has already approved the restriction sale, and the transaction is scheduled for approximately 2004, he said. The city has been requested to contribute a local share of 10 percent, or \$32,500, to the purchase.

The restriction will limit the parcel to agricultural use and block development.

Once the restriction has been sold, the trust plans to sell the 41 acres to the Pomeroy family of Westfield for its appraised farmland value of \$95,000, Stover said.

The Pomeroy, who operate a 120-acre dairy farm in Westfield and lease the 41 acres, will continue to use the parcel to grow hay and silage corn, he said.

Land trust regroups after council setback

By MEG A. FARRELL
Staff Writer

EASTHAMPTON — The Pascommuck Conservation Trust will decide whether to approach the city again after councilors voted last week against backing the preservation of 41 acres of farmland.

The City Council voted 6-3 not to provide support, and after discussion, sent the trust to the mayor to seek his support and a request for funding using proper procedure.

No formal request was made through Mayor Michael Tautznik's office before the council meeting, so the City Council took no vote on a request for \$32,500 in matching funds, and further declined comment on the money.

Tautznik blamed the vote of no-support on miscommunication between the two groups.

"The trust really needs to decide how we want to pursue this," said Gerrit Stover, trust board member. "If we do not gain support from the

council by going through the mayor's office first, then we will have to raise the money ourselves."

The Pascommuck Trust bought the land, which is adjacent to Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary, from Anthony Piond of Stoughton and Peter Piond of Brussels, Belgium, for \$420,000 in May.

The trust plans to sell the parcel's development rights to the state Agricultural Preservation Restriction program and to sell the farmland at its appraised value of \$95,000 to Seth, Louis and Harlow Pomeroy, Westfield farmers who have been using the land to grow feed corn and hay.

"It's a very important meeting place for the Manhan River and Arcadia for wildlife and agriculture," Stover said. "It's a beautiful area that we need to preserve."

The trust was asking the city for \$32,500 as the 10 percent share required by the APR program. The city would then jointly own the parcel's development rights with the state.

Closing scheduled on land purchase

By **DAVID BERGENGREN**

Staff writer

SOUTHAMPTON – The Valley Land Fund hopes to close Friday on the purchase of 130 acres between Cook and Mountain Roads that it plans to preserve as open space and farmland.

Until early last year, the parcel of woodlands and open fields near the town line with Easthampton was the planned site of a 41-lot subdivision by local developer Robert E. Schmidt.

The project was opposed by area environmentalists and neighbors as a threat to the Barnes aquifer and to the character of the surrounding neighborhoods.

After Schmidt died last year, his heirs entered into negotiations with the Valley Land Fund to sell the property and leave it undeveloped.

"We've been very grateful that they've been so cooperative," said Gerrit T. Stover of the land fund yesterday about Schmidt's three daughters who inherited the property.

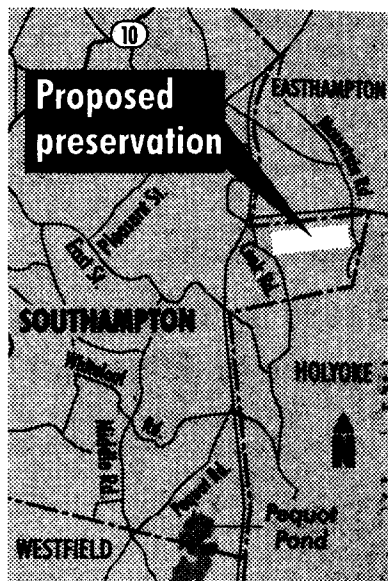
He declined to reveal the sale price, but said the land fund hopes to recoup most of the cost by selling a \$420,000 agricultural preservation restriction on the site to the state, and then by selling the parcel at its appraised value for use as a farm.

The restriction will ensure that the site may never be developed.

The Conservation Commission has pledged \$15,000 toward the required \$20,000 local match portion of the \$420,000 agricultural preservation restriction sale, said Commission Chairman James H. Moore.

In addition, neighbors of the site have raised about \$41,000, and the Pascommuck Conservation Trust of Easthampton has raised about \$2,700, to help defray the land fund's borrowing costs in the transaction, Stover said.

"It sits on the aquifer, and I get my water from the aquifer, so I feel



Staff map

I'd rather not see it developed," said Barry LaFlam of 20 Cook Road of the 130-acre site.

Also, "the addition of 40 or 50 houses would've changed (the character of the) neighborhood a lot," he said.

LaFlam applauded the efforts of the land fund, neighboring residents, and others in raising funds to protect the land.

"It's been a high priority for watershed protection for years," Stover said of the parcel.

Area environmentalists have been pursuing the purchase for about nine years, he said.

"This is one of those properties which offers so many benefits to the region – good farmland, important wildlife and plant habitat, and a strong connection to local water supplies," Stover stated yesterday in announcing a purchase-and-sale agreement for the property.

The Valley Land Fund, working together with the Pascommuck Conservation Trust and other area and state environmental groups, has preserved more than 5,000 acres of open space and farmland in Hampshire, Hampden, and Franklin counties since 1986, Stover added.

Trust: City's rural nature can be saved

By **NICOLE SEQUINO**
Staff Writer

EASTHAMPTON — Here's one dream: living in a city where plenty of green places thrive, farmers can afford to pursue their vocation and wildlife co-exists peacefully with humankind.

On its 20th anniversary Wednesday, the Pascommuck Conservation Trust asserts that it has accomplished this for Easthampton and will continue to do so.

"We've saved plenty of property, but we've still got plenty more to go," said board president John Bator, a noted environmentalist who has a park near Nashawannuck Pond named for him.

As a result, trust members will host a celebration Wednesday, 7 p.m. at the Nashawannuck Gallery at 40 Cottage St., that features environmental author Michael Tougias.

Tougias will present a slideshow, "400 Miles Down the Connecticut River," on the history, environmental issues and scenery of the river.

Tougias, who has written several books including "Nature Walks in Central and Western Massachusetts" and "New England Wild Places," will be signing his book, "River Days, Exploring the Connecticut River from Source to Sea."

Since 1982, the trust has preserved 14 properties totaling 250 acres in Easthampton through its own funds or private donations.

"The purpose of this celebration is to look back to the founders of the trust and appreciate their foresight in protecting East-

hampton's natural resources," said board member Gerrit Stover. "We feel very strongly that our kids and grandkids have the same experiences we did as youths."

Under the trust's ownership, the lands are forever protected from development and may be used by residents for hiking, bird watching, wildlife viewing and fishing, where legal.

Also, some farmers have sold their land's development rights to the trust in return for permission to continue growing crops, according to Joseph E. Kielec, one of the 15 members of the trust's board of directors.

Other lands protected include farmland along and east of Loudville Road, north of the Manhan River, along East Street and the White Brook Plains Conservation area, and places like the Manhan River Conservation area, E. Florence Smith Nature Trail and the Old Pascommuck Conservation area.

In conjunction with its 20th anniversary, the trust published full maps pinpointing the properties and farms that it has preserved since 1982.

"We're trying to raise awareness and use of our properties," said Kielec. "We need more volunteers to help with trail cleanup and fund-raising. As Easthampton continues to grow, we need to preserve as much open space as possible, and we can only do that with more help."

Tickets for the event are \$8, which includes a year-long membership to the trust. For information, call 527-6536.

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Thirty more acres may be preserved

State may buy rights to keep land in agriculture

By DAN CROWLEY
Staff Writer

8/29/02

EASTHAMPTON — The state is considering acquiring the development rights to a 30-acre parcel between Clapp Street and Fort Hill Road as part of its Agricultural Preservation Restriction program, according to officials at the state Department of Food and Agriculture.

The land, which is privately owned and currently used for agricultural purposes, would remain so if the state succeeds in securing an agricultural preservation restriction.

The city now has about 371 acres with agricultural preservation restrictions,

including five parcels clustered in the northwest section of the city, according to figures provided by the city planner's office.

The approximately 30-acre parcel, which is owned by Jairus Burt of Easthampton and William Burt of Plainfield, is situated in a critical agricultural area, say local and state environmental officials.

"It's important for a lot of reasons," said Gerrit Stover, a member of Pascommuck Conservation Trust. "It's part of the (Manhan River) floodplain, part of the connection between Mount Tom and Arcadia (Wildlife Sanctuary), and it's also a beautiful piece of land."

The property is also near two other parcels owned by the Pascommuck Conservation Trust. Those include a 40-acre parcel that the trust bought in May 2001 and that it is seeking to put under an agricultural preservation restriction.

Nearby is about 19½ acres of marginal

farmland that the trust is currently keeping open for wildlife, Stover said.

Jairus Burt, whose family has owned the property since the 1950s, said his land has been used to raise pickles and is currently used to grow hay.

"Down the road, I know we can put a lot of houses in there and make a dollar or two, but I hate to see it in my lifetime," said Jairus Burt, 73. "I'm too much of a farmer at heart. We're farmers and we want to use it for farmland."

Richard Hubbard, the state's APR program director, said that if the Burts' application is successful, the state would like to increase its efforts to preserve farmland in the city. "We're hoping to continue to add on to this one," Hubbard said.

Dan Crowley can be reached at dcrowley@gazettenet.com.

Dumping in ravine continues despite efforts

By DAN CROWLEY
Staff Writer

12/14/02

EASTHAMPTON — For more than a decade, health officials, environmentalists, property owners and neighbors have tried to solve the riddle of an historic illegal dumping practice in a ravine off Terrace View.

Fines have been issued, educational campaigns conducted, barriers installed, and several thousands of dollars spent on clean-up costs.

But despite all these efforts, the dumping continues, say local officials.

As a result, the City Council agreed last week to allow the Pascommuck Conservation Trust, which owns a 40-acre conservation area bordering the dump site, to install a 250-foot-long, 8-foot high fence along the roadside on Terrace View.

Under a licensing agreement with the city, the trust would be responsible

for maintenance of the fence, part of which would run along a city right-of-way.

The city could terminate the license at any time.

If the plan goes through, the fence will be installed in cooperation with four property owners whose land abuts what is known as the Manhan River Conservation Area off Pleasant Street.

The Pascommuck Conservation Trust purchased the land from the city in 1985.

Commenting on the situation, Health Agent Dennis R. Lacourse said a significant amount of debris has been dumped over the banks during the past year, and that the Health Department is determined to put an end to it.

"The city is not talking about sticks and leaves," said Lacourse, who has held meetings with several department heads and property owners this year to discuss the problem. "It's rubbish

and garbage."

Lacourse said the fine for illegal dumping can range up to \$3,000 under state law. Vehicles used in illegal dumping operations can be impounded and licenses and registrations suspended for up to 30 days, he said.

"Property owners have asked us to enforce this regulation," said Lacourse in a recent interview. "They want it stopped."

Lacourse said repeat offenders will get consideration for larger fines and noted that a neighborhood watch is in effect.

Meanwhile, the Pascommuck Conservation Trust is continuing its negotiations with abutting property owners about the fence, a barrier its members hope will thwart debris dumping on Terrace View once and for all.

M & L Plastic Corp., of 50 Terrace View, is planning to install a length of

the fence on its property soon, according to the company. Other abutting property owners involved include Norman Savoie of Old Mountain Road and Burt Tractor & Equipment, Inc. at 1 Lovefield St.

"It's been a long time coming," said trust board member Gerrit Stover. "We don't like fences anymore than anyone else does, but in order to keep trash from going down the hill, it needs to be at the top of the road."

The trust organized in May a cleanup of the site. Volunteers spent a Saturday morning hauling up an assortment of trash, including diapers and appliances.

In past cleanups, including one that involved the use of a crane in 1991, volunteers pulled all kinds of objects from the ravine, from tires and automotive parts to furniture and appliances.

"It's a chronic problem," said Stover. "The (debris) is very hard to get out once it's down there."

Those familiar with the site's history suspect that some of the more recent dumping has involved people from outside the neighborhood.

"My understanding is that several people saw pickup trucks pull up and dump bags of trash over the banks," said Stover. "When word gets out that there's a place where you can dump and get away with it, word can spread quickly."

According to the trust's proposal, the fence would still allow for pedestrian and restricted motor vehicle access into the wooded conservation area, which rolls down to the Manhan River.

As a boost, the trust received a \$2,000 grant from the Community Foundation of Western Massachusetts this year to assist with labor and material costs for the fence.

Dan Crowley can be reached at dcrowley@gazettenet.com.

Conservation trust protects farmland

By PATRICK JOHNSON

Staff writer

EASTHAMPTON – The Pascommuck Conservation Trust announced yesterday that it has sold the development rights on a 42-acre parcel on Clapp Street – an action preventing farmland from ever being developed.

On Friday, the trust completed transactions with the Agriculture Restriction Program of the state Department of Food and Agriculture and with the Winding River

Land Conservancy, a Westfield organization that helps farmers file for conservation restrictions.

The state agency paid \$292,500 for permanent development rights – meaning it has control over how the land can be used – and Winding River paid \$95,000 for the property itself.

Winding River then traded ownership of the 42 acres to the Pomeroy family of Westfield in exchange for an agricultural preservation restriction on 80 acres of the family's farm on the Westfield and Southampton line.

The Pomeroy family, who have rented the Clapp Street land for the last five years, will continue to use it to grow hay and feed corn for their dairy herd in Westfield.

The total amount of the transaction, \$387,500, is equal to the amount the conservation trust paid for the property in May 2001.

The trust purchased the property from Peter and Anthony Pond after obtaining a \$368,000 below-market loan from Florence Savings Bank and a \$19,500 loan from the Massachusetts Audubon Society.

The property, adjacent to the Audubon Society's Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary, had been eyed as a possible 10-lot subdivision.

John Bator, the trust president, was not available for comment.

In a prepared statement, he said the importance of preserving the land goes beyond its 42 acres.

"This transaction solidifies a number of environmentally important parcels," he said.

In addition to the active farm and neighboring woods and wetlands, the parcel is near Arcadia, the Manhan River greenbelt in

Easthampton and the Mill River area in Northampton, he said.

Gerrit Stover, project director for the trust, said the transactions pay off the trust's loans, allow the property to see continued use as a farm and preserve open space that otherwise would have been snatched up by developers.

"It's a sparkling piece of land with a view of the Mount Tom range in the background and 10 minutes from Northampton," he said.

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LOCAL

FRANKLIN COUNTY
HAMPSHIRE COUNTY

Sunday Republican

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19C
PAGE A11

Open-space allies celebrate payoff

A land-conservation fund-raising effort saved an Easthampton area from a planned housing development.

By DAVID BERGENGREN

Staff writer

EASTHAMPTON – Local environmentalists and others are celebrating the raising of \$82,050 needed to repay a land conservation trust for helping to finance the preservation of 17 acres of woods and farmland off East Street four years ago.

The Trustees of Reservations, a

non-profit group based in Beverly, fronted \$150,000 to buy the land from Wallace R. Torrey and Anne V. Tomaszewski of Guilford, Maine, in 1998. It then deeded about nine acres of the parcel to the local Pascommuck Conservation Trust, and sold about eight acres to Eileen J. Droscher, then living in Southwick.

Droscher also purchased an adjoining 10 acres from the estate of Ralph E. Morgan and started

running Ol' Turtle Farm, a cooperative vegetable farm, at the site.

The Pascommuck trust set up the Brickyard Brook Conservation Area on its nine acres. It is open to the public for hiking and nature studies.

The selling of eight acres to Droscher, plus the selling of agricultural preservation restrictions on the full 17 acres to the state, still left the Trustees of Reservations \$82,050 short of covering its \$150,000 in purchase costs.

A local group, Easthampton Citizens for Preserving Open Space, agreed to raise the \$82,050 to reimburse the trust.

On July 18, the Pascommuck trust, Mayor Michael A. Tautznik, and other citizens celebrated the fund-raising achievement by dedicating a "memorial rock" off a hiking path built three years ago by AmeriCorps volunteers on the conservation area's nine acres.

The rock lists the names of 19 people or organizations who donated \$500 or more for the the land preservation project.

Another 140 names or so are listed at new signposts at either end of the hiking trail. These acknowledge citizens who contributed \$25 or more.

"There certainly is a strong sen-

timent here in the community for the preservation of appropriate open space," Tautznik said.

William Burgart, a prominent member of the fund-raising effort, said the endeavor saved the area from a planned housing development.

"It's a great community-supported project," said City Planner Stuart B. Beckley. "A lot of people put effort in, or funds, both toward preserving open space and the farm."

David Bergengren may be reached at dbergengren@union-news.com

WEDNESDAY, MARCH 5, 2003

DAILY HAMPSHIRE GAZETTE

B1

Easthampton trust adds to farmland preserve

By DAN CROWLEY
 Staff Writer

3/5/03

EASTHAMPTON — The Pascommuck Conservation Trust has reached an agreement to purchase the development rights to 29 acres, thus preserving prime farmland at the corner of Clapp Street and Fort Hill Road.

With spectacular mountainous views, the parcel is part of a larger swath of properties the trust has helped seal from development. Owned by Jairus Burt of Easthampton and William Burt of Plainfield, the 29-acre parcel is located on the Manhan River near the entrance to Mass Audubon's 750-acre Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary.

"The most pressing thing for us is that it's a great piece of agricultural land, and you can see the inroads of development on Clapp Street, and we wanted to prevent any more of that happening," said Gerrit Stover, a trust board member.

In an agreement reached with the Burts, the trust has secured the rights with an initial \$40,000 low-interest loan provided by the Hadley-based Valley Land Fund in cooperation with Fleet Bank.

The trust plans to sell the development rights to the state under its Agricultural Preservation Restriction program in the near future for \$225,000, of which the state has agreed to pay 90 percent, said Stover.

Stover said the trust will initial fund

raise for the remaining \$22,500 in local matching funds and accrued interest.

"We're sinking a lot of money into it," said Stover. "If they (the state) can stick to their timetable, (the purchase) could be as early as next fall."

Jairus and William Burt, who will continue to own the land, declined to comment for this story. But, Jairus Burt said in an August interview that he wanted to see his land remain farmland.

The 29-acre parcel is one of three parcels in this section of the city that the trust has helped protect from development. The other two are 41 acres of adjacent farmland owned by Seth Lewis and Harlow Pomeroy of Westfield and 19 acres of trust-owned land.

The three parcels comprise a kind of green buffer zone that the trust says will help protect Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary, the Manhan River, and the Oxbow section of the Connecticut River.

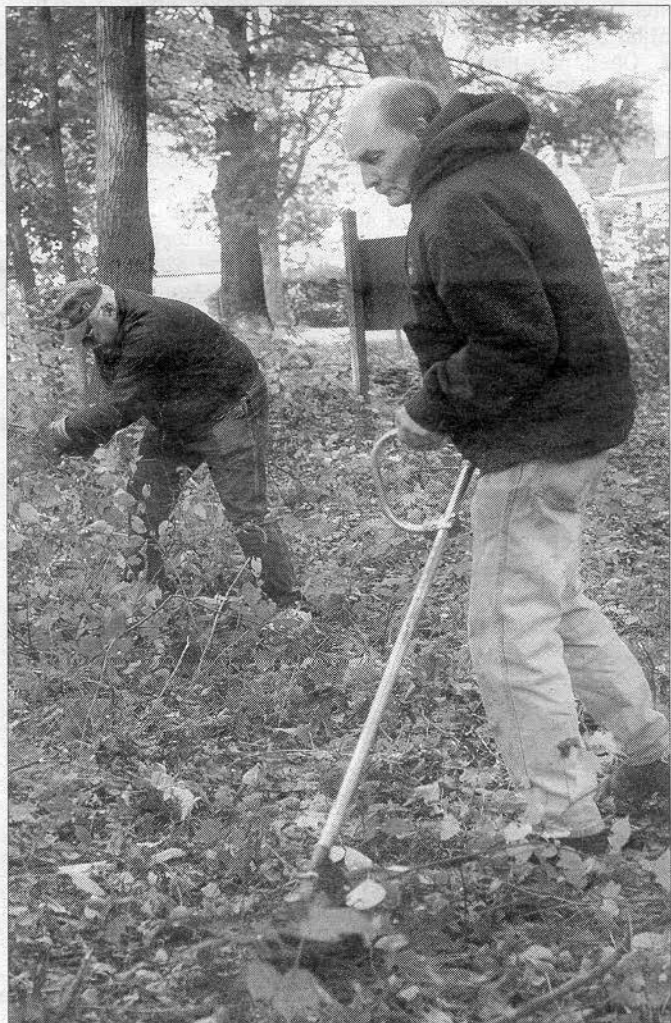
Mary Shanley-Koeber, director of Arcadia Wildlife Sanctuary, said she was overjoyed by the trust's efforts to preserve the 29-acre parcel from development. "It's just really good news for us," she said.

Shanley-Koeber noted that the land is of particular benefit to migratory species that pass through Arcadia. Its preservation also will help protect endangered species and habitats in the sanctuary, such as its rare floodplain forest and grassland.

"It's a very appropriate place to limit development because of its proximity to the (Manhan River) floodplain and quality of the soils," said Mayor Michael A. Tautznik, who called this land preservation an "excellent addition" to the string of preserved properties in the northeast corner of the city.

According to the trust, an appraiser estimated that as many as 14 houses could be built on the 29-acre parcel.

What's more, the property is historically significant. The dead from a 1704 raid on the colonial settlement of Pascommuck are believed to be buried in unmarked graves on the land. A roadside flagpole and plaque currently mark the site.



CAROL LOLLIS

Trail work day

Members of the Pascommuck Conservation Trust took to the trails last Saturday for a day of work. Here Ed Procon of Florence and John Bator, trust president, clear leaves and underbrush from walking trails.

The Summit 11/3/05

Trust pledges \$1M toward city farm

By KRISTIN PALPINI
Staff Writer

EASTHAMPTON — The national non-profit Trust for Public Land has pledged \$1 million to protect one of the last large-scale open spaces in Easthampton.

At issue is the future of agriculture at Echodale Farm, on Park Hill Road.

The trust's pledge is part of a complex plan involving the city of Easthampton to cover the property's \$2.85 million pricetag.

The 164-acre farm is on the city's wishlist for land conservation.

Under the trust's proposal, the remainder of the purchase price and about \$300,000 in associated costs (including closing fees, a title review and surveys) would be picked up by five different funding sources, including \$650,000 from the city's Community Preservation Act funds.

Mayor Michael A. Tautznik has

proposed the city borrow the \$650,000 and have it paid back through the city's Community Preservation Act coffers.

"Borrowing is where this money will have to come from," Tautznik said. "In general I think the (Community Preservation Committee) has been supportive of the acquisition of the farmland."

Tautznik added that the city may be able to recover a portion of its contribution by way of the state's Self Help program.

If the sale goes as planned, Easthampton and the state would co-own development rights on the property. The land would be protected as farmland in perpetuity under an Agricultural Preservation Restriction. The land would be sold by the trust to a farmer willing to keep it in cultivation.

By law, the city has the right of first refusal to purchase the property because it is taxed by the city as agricultural land.

The city's Community Preservation Committee will meet Thursday at 6:30 p.m. in the Municipal Building to discuss how — and if — the committee should come up with the requested funds.

The committee's funds are generated through an annual 3 percent surcharge on property taxes, with the first \$100,000 in property value exempt. The state then matches the total garnered through the surcharge.

When asked if the committee is amenable to funding the city's portion of the project, its chairman, Edwin L. Quinn replied, "I don't know. We'll all have to talk about it at the meeting."

The trust also proposes using these other funding sources to make the purchase possible:

- \$100,000 from the Pascommuck Conservation Trust.

- \$900,000 through a state grant from the Department of Agricultural Resources Agricultural Preservation program

- The sale of the property's barn, house and a portion of the farmable land to a farmer for about \$500,000.

The Pascommuck Trust announced its contribution to the purchase in September.

If the full amount for the purchase price cannot be raised, the trust will attempt to protect most of the property in another way. It is considering the sale of a portion of the property for residential development.

The farm's sale was announced in August by its owners, B&R Family Limited Partnership. From the get-go, city officials said that unless a nonprofit entity was brought on to bankroll a substantial portion of the purchase, the city would probably not be able to afford the property.

A public hearing to transfer the city's purchasing right of the farm to the Trust for Public Land will be held Thursday at 6 p.m. at the Municipal Building.

Easthampton votes to save farm

Saving the 164-acre parcel in Easthampton is a one-time opportunity, proponents said.

By DAVID BERGENGREN
dbergengren@repub.com

EASTHAMPTON – The City Council voted 8-1 last night to authorize borrowing up to \$650,000 against anticipated community preservation receipts to help preserve the 164-acre Echodale Farm off Park Hill Road.

The \$650,000 appears to be the final piece of a \$3.15 million package being put together by the Trust for Public Land, a national nonprofit land conservation organization the city turned to for help when West Springfield developer Fred L. Aaron made a \$2.85 million offer to purchase the property several months ago.

The city has the right of first refusal to match the offer because the parcel is taxed as agricultural property, giving the owner, B&R Family Limited Partnership of Bloomfield, Conn., a significant tax break.

The city has until Dec. 14 to either exercise its right to purchase the property or to transfer the right to a nonprofit organization such as the trust.

The trust's Board of Directors is expected to vote Tuesday in San Francisco to accept the transfer, now that the city has authorized contributing \$650,000, trust project manager Katherine A. Cooper said.

Assuming all goes smoothly, the trust will probably close on

the purchase in April, Cooper said. The organization has pledged \$1 million from private donors, including foundations and businesses, as part of its funding package to buy the land.

The music room at White Brook Middle School was packed last night with those who wanted to save the farm from development. They said they were pleased with the council's vote.

"It's excellent. I just can't believe it. Wonderful, what a relief," said Susan J. Giles, who has lived in the 201-year-old farmhouse on the property for 17 years.

"I think it's just wonderful," Ann L. Hallstein, who has lived upstairs at the house for six years, said. "To me, it's practically a miracle. I'm so proud of the town of Easthampton for

funding it."

"I'm very happy," said John Bator, president of the local Pascommuck Conservation Trust, which has pledged \$100,000 toward preserving the land. "Now we can start getting into the work, the fund-raising."

Before the vote, Mayor Michael A. Tautznik and several councilors emphasized that the city may not have to borrow the full \$650,000.

A combination of accrued community preservation funds, and possibly state grant funding, will be used to offset the amount that needs to be borrowed, they said.

"We're going to work as hard as we can to keep the costs to the (community preservation) accounts as low as we can," Tautznik said.

Please see Farm, Page B2

Farm: Protection sought

Continued from Page B1

Most councilors agreed the city should not pass up the chance to preserve one of its largest remaining stretches of farmland and wildlife habitat.

"You can't put a price on this land, because once it's gone, it's gone (forever)," councilor Joy E. Winnie said.

Councilor Donald L. Cykowski, who cast the lone dissenting vote, said his primary concern was that a lot of community preservation money had been

approved for other projects recently, and now money would likely have to be borrowed.

Saying he knew the measure would pass, Cykowski added, "I just had to make the point that the thinking was faulty somewhere on this issue."

With the state providing dollar-for-dollar matching funds, the city brings in about \$400,000 to \$500,000 a year in community preservation funds, raised through a 3 percent surcharge on property taxes approved by voters in 2001.

Loan OK'd to save farm

By **DAVID BERGENGREN**
dbergengren@repub.com

EASTHAMPTON - In a crucial vote, the city's Community Preservation Committee agreed last night to recommend borrowing up to \$650,000 against anticipated receipts to help preserve the 164-acre Echodale Farm off Park Hill Road.

"This is a critical step to fruition," said Mayor Michael A. Tautznik after the vote. "I'm thankful that the Community Preservation Committee sees our long-term plan to protect land and to protect the Park Hill section of the community."

The City Council will conduct a public hearing on the proposed \$650,000 loan on Dec. 6 at 6:15 p.m. in the White Brook Middle School. It is expected to vote on it that night.

The \$650,000 is part of a \$3.15 million package being put together by the Trust for Public Land, a national non-profit land conservation organization the city went to for help when West Springfield developer Fred L. Aaron made a \$2.85 million offer to purchase the property.

The city has the right of first refusal to match the offer because the parcel is taxed as agricultural property, giving the owner, B&R Family Limited Partnership of Bloomfield, Conn., a significant tax break.

The city has until Dec. 14 to either exercise its right to purchase the property, or to transfer the right to a non-profit organization such as the trust.

Katherine A. Cooper, project manager for the trust, outlined plans for the preservation project last night. She said that she

was confident that all or most of the parcel could be saved from development.

"Most important, I would say, is the level of support in the city," she said. "It does seem like it's a part of town that people think of as contributing to the community's character."

Support ran high among the crowd of about 15 in attendance last night.

"This is the largest operating farm in Easthampton," said City Councilor J.P. Kwiecinski. "This is a milestone for Easthampton."

The local Pascommuck Conservation Trust has pledged \$100,000 toward preserving the land. In addition to that and the city's \$650,000, the Trust for Public Land is pledging \$1 million from private donors, includ-

Please see Farm, Page B2

Farm: Rescue loan OK'd

Continued from Page B1

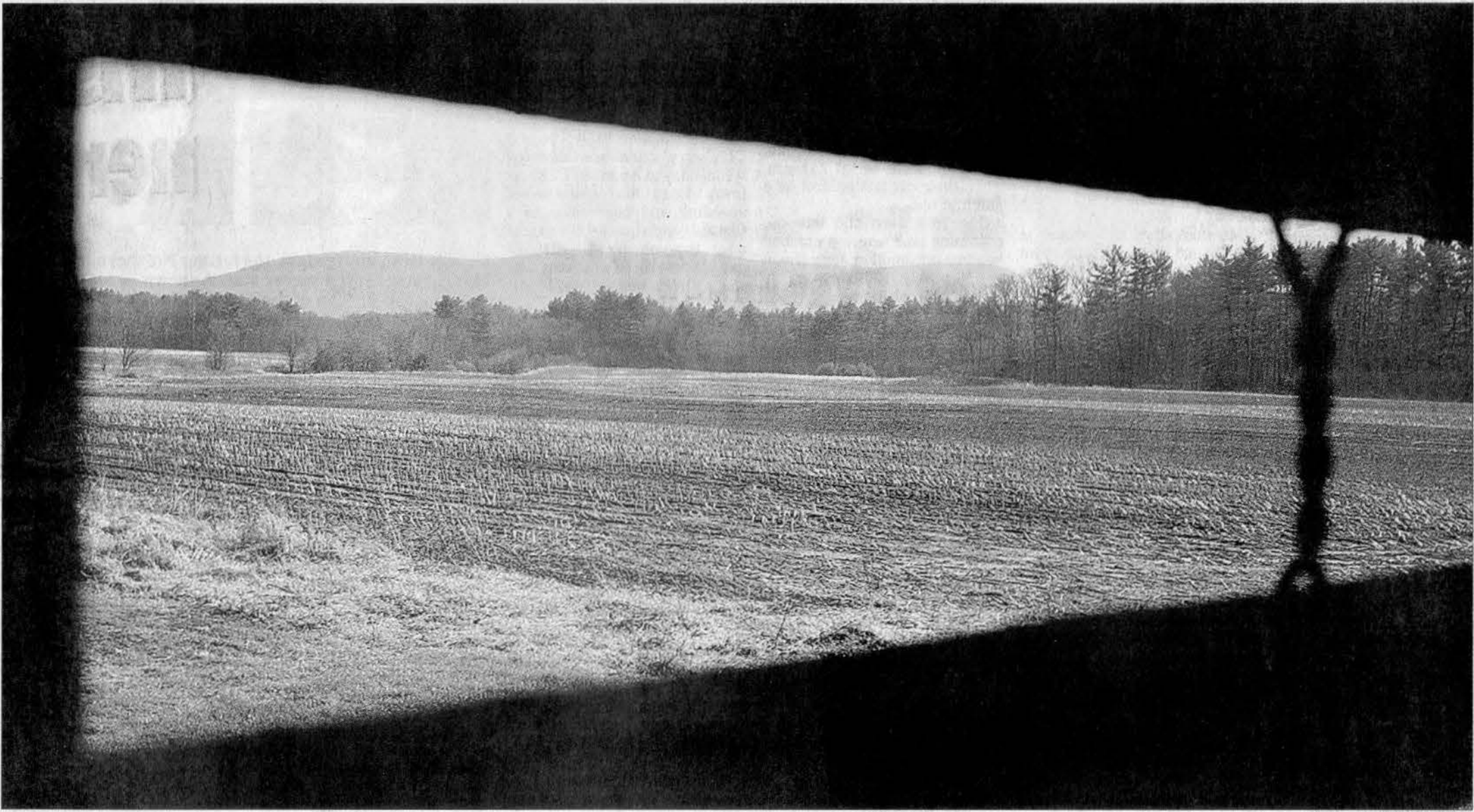
ing foundations, and is planning to seek about \$900,000 from the state in the form of an agricultural preservation restriction.

The restriction would ensure the property remaining as agricultural land in perpetuity.

The trust also plans to contribute another \$500,000 by selling all or part of the property - with the restriction attached - to a farmer.

Kim H. Sarafin of West Chesterfield, who has farmed the acreage for 17 years, said last night that he would be interested in purchasing the farm, along with its two-family house and barn.

The trust plans to spend the \$300,000 it raises above the \$2.85 million purchase price on "due diligence" costs such as appraisals, environmental surveys, title reviews, and holding and closing costs.



At Echodale Farm in Easthampton, the view from the cornerrib shows a slice of the Mount Tom Range. The 164-acre farm is for sale. The city of Easthampton is working against a December deadline to line up a deal to protect it from development.

Stakes high on Echodale’s lofty ground

Easthampton working against deadline to save open space at old farm

By KRISTIN PALPINI
Staff Writer

EASTHAMPTON — With Echodale Farm on the market, there is more at stake than the estate’s 164 acres of prime agricultural land. A farmer’s livelihood, a piece of the city’s history dating back to the 1800s and a swath of open space also hang in the balance.

In August, the Park Hill Road farm’s owners, the B&R Family of Connecticut, put the land on the market for \$2.85 million.

The land is bordered by several farms already protected from development under the state’s Agricultural Protection Restriction program. It is being aggressively sought after by the city, which seeks to save it from development.

Though the city has secured allies for the purchase, including a national land preservation group, no deal is definite. Officials insist the land must be preserved. The city faces a Dec. 15 to arrange a purchase.

A pastoral area of with rolling hills, woods, brooks, an old

The farm was used as a hunting ground by area residents in Colonial times. It was settled in the early 1800s and was the site of farms that tended dairy and beef cattle, orchards and vast fields of grains.

white-washed barn, a blue farm house and plenty of wildlife, the Echodale Farm stretches from West Street to up and along Park Hill Road, where it has most of its road frontage.

The farm was used as a hunting ground by area residents in Colonial times. It was settled in the early 1800s and was the site of farms that tended dairy and beef cattle, orchards and vast fields of grains.

The 201-year-old farm house



GORDON DANIELS

The land at Echodale Farm, which has been under cultivation for centuries, is bordered by several farms already protected from development under the state’s Agricultural Protection Restriction program.

has been updated through the years and is still used as a dwelling. Tenant Susan J. Giles said she is often visited by people who have memories of the farm.

“There isn’t a week that goes by that someone doesn’t come here because they either knew someone who lived here, worked here, hunted here or just hung out here as a kid,” said Giles, who is the Easthampton office manager of the Gazette.

“People have such a heart-felt connection to this land and

house,” Giles said. “It’s part of their history and they feel like they belong here — and essentially they do.”

The farm is now tended by second-generation farmer Kim H. Sarafin, owner of the Maple Acres Farm in Chesterfield. He grows corn, hay and soybeans for animal feed on his Easthampton farm. Sarafin has been leasing the land for 17 years.

Sarafin walked the farm with a visitor the other day, in early-morning fog. He is a blue-eyed

■ See **ECHODALE**/Page B2

Land’s odd acoustics helped give it a name

By KRISTIN PALPINI
Staff Writer

EASTHAMPTON — Echodale Farm’s name isn’t quite a century old, but the property has a long agricultural pedigree.

According to Edward Dwyer’s book “Images of America: Easthampton,” the area on Park Hill Road that comprises the 164-acre farm was used as a hunting grounds in Colonial times.

Today, the land remains a habitat for a variety of wildlife. Susan Giles, who rents the farmhouse on the property, said she has spotted over 40 kinds of birds on the property, as well as 11 varieties of animals including deer, bear, foxes, moose and coyotes.

A majority of the land is designated as core habitat by the Massachusetts Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program.

In the 1800s, Daniel Lyman built the large farmhouse where Giles now lives. Lyman was one of the first to settle Easthampton’s Park Hill Road area. The road is in the city’s northwest corner and runs

north into a rural part of Northampton.

The Lyman family lived on Park Hill Road through the early 1900s.

A good portion of the farm was purchased by Andrew and Susan Sena in the 1920s. The Senas named their parcel Echodale Dairy Farm.

Kim H. Sarafin of Chesterfield, who now leases the farm land, said when he is tilling the soil he sometimes finds milk bottles bearing the old farm’s name.

Giles said she believes Echodale got its name because of the rolling field’s odd acoustics. “They call it that because of the echo,” Giles said. “You can be in the middle of the field and hear someone talking over at the Molitoris’ (a nearby farm). And sometimes you can be standing next to someone and you can’t hear what they’re saying.”

The whitewashed barn that stands on the property was built in the 1930s. At the farm’s peak, it housed 66 head of dairy cattle. An empty cement silo is connected to the barn.

■ See **LAND**/Page B2

Echodale

■ Continued from Page B1

man dressed this day in black pants, black boots and a well-worn trucker’s cap,

He remembers when he first saw the farm. Its fields were choked with weeds that had grown over 6 feet tall, he said. That land has again been tamed. “I’ve put a lot of work into this farm,” Sarafin said.

Sarafin has invested in the rented land, but after learning that a sale was possible, he grew conservative. He has to cut back on making improvements at Echodale.

At his Chesterfield home, Sarafin has \$1,000 worth of seed he did not plant this year because of the farm’s uncertain future. He has also put off plans to improve the soil and add a drainage system.

“Farming is a long-term investment,” Sarafin said, while touring the farm with a visitor. “I can’t make a big investment if I don’t know what will happen.”

Standing in a mud-soaked portion of a harvested corn field, just a few steps from fresh deer tracks, Sarafin pointed to a tree line off in the distance, where the farm continues farther than the eye can see. “It’s beautiful out here,” Sarafin said.

“On a good spring day you go out back on a tractor and smell the blossoms. They smell so sweet,” he added, inhaling deeply. “I’m very proud I’ve been able to make this farm productive.”

Echodale’s future

Since the farm’s sale was announced, city officials have been scrambling to find funding for the \$2.85 million purchase.

“It has a fantastic view of Mount Tom, prime agricultural land and it’s the biggest working agricultural land in Easthampton,” said Pascommuck Conservation Trust president John Bator.

The trust has pledged \$100,000 for the farm’s

purchase. “It’s very important we save this. It would be a shame to let it go.”

By law, the city has the right of first refusal to purchase the property because it is taxed by the city as agricultural land.

The deadline for the city to execute its claim on the land is Dec. 15. If the city is unable to purchase Echodale Farm, it will be sold to Fred L. Aaron of West Springfield or his designee.

City Planner Stuart Beckley said he expects the land will be developed into condominiums if purchased by Aaron.

So far, the city has amassed \$1.75 million for the purchase, including a \$1 million pledge from the Trust for Public Land. The national nonprofit trust was courted by the city to help with the purchase. The city is also seeking state support through the purchase of development rights.

“We are very excited about this prospect,” said Kim Gilman, a spokeswoman for the Trust for Public Land. “This is a very important and significant area of conservation.”

The trust proposes that the remainder of the purchase price and other associated fees be covered through a state grant, money from the city’s Commu-

nity Preservation Act funds and the sale of the property’s barn, house and at least 80 acres of the land to a farmer.

The city’s contribution to the purchase will soon be debated by the City Council, the city’s spending authority. Sarafin said if possible, he would like to purchase the farm.

“I would love to own that farm,” he said.

Sarafin has already discussed purchasing the farm with the Bercowetz family, but could not afford the \$2.85 million asking price. The trust is proposing to sell the farm buildings and land for \$500,000.

“I’d like to see the farm stay open,” Sarafin said. “As much for the public to enjoy as well as to be productive.”

At least until the sale is decided the farm will continue to be used by hunters, bikers, joggers and the occasional hot air balloonist seeking a place to put down.

“You can walk for hours here without ever seeing another person or a building,” Giles said. “My hopes are people continue to use it in a healthy way. It’s an amazing open space.”

Kristin Palpini can be reached at kpalpini@gazettenet.com.

Land

■ Continued from Page B1

The barn hasn’t held animals in years. Much of the barn’s white paint has peeled off, revealing a washed-out black wood. A worn rectangular sign with black letters spelling out “Echodale Farm” hangs on the front. Inside, old bicycles, boxes and yard tools lean against metal bars that once kept cattle in their pens.

In 1953, the farm was purchased by Irving Bercowetz’s family. The family now owns the land under the name B & R Family of Connecticut. Around 1965, the family got out of the cattle business and auctioned off its herd and equipment.

The farm carried on as a dairy farm until the mid 1980s. Sarafin began farming the land shortly afterwards, planting sweet corn and other vegetables. Now, he grows hay and feed grains.

Echodale Farm has had its share of disasters. In 1992, an unoccupied barn that once held 54 head of cattle was struck by lightning and burned to the ground. Charred remnants of the barn’s frame still stand.

“It burned in 15 minutes,” said Sarafin.

Another time, a separate barn

also burned, according to Sarafin and Giles. A brush fire in the early 1990s engulfed 30 acres of farm land.

Easthampton respondents favor taxes for more open space

By JULIEN VERNET
Staff Writer

1/11/05

EASTHAMPTON — Almost half of the city's residents who responded to a survey would be willing to pay higher taxes for recreational or open space improvements, according to a Pioneer Valley Planning Commission.

In the survey, which outlines community land use priorities, 47.5 percent of respondents said they would agree to more taxes to fund the improvements while 44.5 percent said they would not.

More respondents, 71.3 percent, said they would be willing to pay user fees for improvements to open space and recreational areas if those improvements were going to specific facilities.

But City Planner Stuart Beckley said future projects are more likely to be funded by a combination of grants and Community Preservation Act money. The CPA was narrowly approved by voters four years ago, creating a fund for open space, historic preservation and affordable housing by adding a three percent surcharge to property taxes.

In June, open space and recreation questionnaires were mailed to about 90 percent of the city's households. The PVPC compiled responses from 1,150, or about one in six city households and released the survey in September.

The Planning Department and the Conservation Commission will use the survey to draft the 2005 open space and recreation plan this spring, a set of guidelines for long-range land use.

"This will be the key public input tool, it'll definitely help frame the priorities that are chosen in the plan," City Planner Stuart Beckley said. The last plan was written in 1998.

Denis Superczynski, a senior planner at the PVPC who worked on the survey, said it is crucial for the city to have an open space and recreation plan if it wants qualify for grant funding. A blind survey, he said, can be a advantageous in this effort.

"You have to be able to document that there is widespread support, especially in the competitive environment with fewer state dollars for these types of projects," he said.

Although he was not surprised by the survey's results, he said they reinforced

Taxes

■ Continued from Page B1

what has until now been mostly "anecdotal evidence" of high support for open space protection.

While the results demonstrate strong support for open space protection and acquisition, they also underscore a desire to develop the city's economic resources.

"It certainly appears that residents understand the importance of a balanced community," Beckley said.

In one section of the questionnaire, participating households were asked how much emphasis the city should place on certain areas. The possible answers were more, some, less, or none. Of the respondents, the highest percentage, 76.8, said they would like to see more emphasis on protecting the land over the Barnes acquirer.

Next, 62 percent and 54.8 percent said they would like to see more emphasis on protecting the Mt. Tom range and agricultural land, respectively.

Economic categories also received substantial support from respondents, with 52.4 percent wanting more emphasis on planning for future economic growth and 44.3 percent wanting more emphasis on attracting new business.

But respondents also indicated a desire to keep the city's economic development within boundaries. From a list of issues respondents would like to see explored, 59.6 percent said controlled growth. In another section of the questionnaire, 30.5 percent of respondents said the city should put less emphasis on attracting new residents.

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