

Manhan greenbelt expansion planned

By DAVID BERGENGREN

EASTHAMPTON — Town Planner Stuart Beckley made a presentation to the Pascommuck Conservation Trust last night that members hope will be the start of a more aggressive effort to add to the approximately 75 acres already held as part of the Manhan River greenbelt.

A recently completed study presented by Beckley, identifies approximately 200 owners of property along the Manhan, including a small number of commercial or industrial interests.

Last night's presentation was a warm-

200 property owners involved in proposal

up for a similar pitch that will be made to these owners, probably in April.

The trust hopes to have land or easements donated to the greenbelt or, if necessary, to purchase such land.

"It's a road map, if you will, to help us realize one of our primary goals, to establish a greenbelt along the Manhan River," said Kenneth Larsen, a past president of the trust.

Board of Directors member Donald Po-

lonis said, "The important thing of the presentation was that the study gave us a list of the landowners we need to contact."

The study actually was conducted last summer and fall by Amy Petrone and Christopher Campbell, graduate students with the Regional Planning Department at the University of Massachusetts in Amherst. It was funded by a state grant of slightly more than \$2,000 received

jointly by the trust and the town's Conservation Commission, Beckley said.

Petrone and Campbell are expected to make the presentation in April to landowners along the Manhan. Beckley stood in for the two students last night, because scheduling conflicts kept them from attending the trust's annual meeting.

"The Manhan River Greenbelt Study looks at creating a greenbelt for an area along the river in Easthampton and

Southampton, for various types of recreation and to maintain open space," Beckley said. Fishing, canoeing, hiking and biking are included among the activities such a greenbelt might encourage.

The study includes a review of current land uses along the Manhan and identifies about 20 key parcels needed to make progress toward creating a true greenbelt, Beckley said.

The greenbelt would not necessarily run the full length of the river, but might include portions long enough to create an

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Owners involved in greenbelt plan

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area people could use and enjoy, he said.

Beckley presented a slide show for trust members, mostly of photos taken in May by Petrone and Campbell on a canoe and hiking tour of the Manhan, including the river's north branch along the Easthampton-Southampton border.

"Hopefully the slides will show the value of preserving this green space. Clearly there's beauty, and the opportunity of getting away from civilization," he said.

The slides of this river that flows nearly through the middle

of town showed a panorama of riverway canopied by trees, meadows, open forests, sandbars and even a few small waterfalls. The area is home to a large variety of wildlife, Beckley said.

Pascommuck Trust President William Burgart described a canoe trip he and Conservation Commission Chairman William Carroll had taken on the Manhan, saying it was like being transported into another world, it was so quiet. "You feel like you're in the middle of nowhere," Burgart said.

Beckley said it would take a great deal of work to clear the

river of obstacles to navigation, but added the water was clean enough to permit fishing and swimming.

Edward Dwyer, the organization's treasurer, said approximately 15 acres near the Southampton town line purchased from Paul Lussier for \$4,650 recently was added to the greenbelt acreage.

Also included in present holdings are about 40 acres near Pleasant Street purchased for \$1 from Easthampton in the mid-1980s, about eight acres of donated land along Lovefield Street and about three acres off West Street.

February 28, 1995

Editor:
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Gazebo planned as memorial for vets clerk

IN a tribute to Joyce A. Brown, Easthampton's clerk for veterans services for 17 years, The Pascommuck Conservation Trust plans to build a small gazebo on the shore of Rubber Thread Pond.

Brown, of East Street, died on June 16 at age 55. She was a member of the Pascommuck Conservation Trust and gifts were made to the trust in her memory.

"We're thinking of dedicating it to her," said John Bator, a trust member, "It's going to be a small one, mostly for shelter, not for entertainment."

The gazebo, which will cost about \$2,000, will stand where a

Laura Longsworth



kiosk is now placed at the edge of Rubber Thread Pond. On Thursday morning, town employees were removing the kiosk and said they planned to put it in Nonotuck Park.

Family members and those who knew and worked with Brown over the years remember her as a kind person who was extremely dedicated to her work, and said they are pleased that

the gazebo will be built in Brown's name.

"She was a terrific kid," said John Jurkowski, a World War II veteran.

Jurkowski said that since he retired he spends every morning and afternoon at the pond and that he has wanted a gazebo for several years.

"Lots of the elderly like to sit there. You've seen the flowers down there. The gazebo would be a beautification project," said Jurkowski.

Mary Brewer, the former town accountant, said that 18 years ago Brown came to work in her office through a training program. Brown had no office

skills, but picked things up quickly and a year later landed her permanent job with the town.

"She remembered everything we taught her. She was the best pupil I ever had," said Brewer. "She was just the most conscientious person I ever knew."

Jennie A. Brown, Joyce Brown's mother, said she is happy the trust is remembering her daughter in the memorial gazebo.

"Oh, I think it's wonderful. I never expected it," she said.

James Zedonis, commander of the American Legion Post 224, said he knew Brown for many

years and worked with her on veterans issues.

"She'd go out of her way to help you out," said Zedonis. "If we went up for information she was the one who was always there."

Bator said the trust is in the process of acquiring the proper permits from the Conservation Commission to have the gazebo delivered and set up.

Nancy Machinton, chairwoman of the Conservation Commission, said she expects the gazebo will be a place for the public, particularly the elderly, to enjoy the pond.

"This should be very nice. It should go through fairly smoothly. It's just going to take some time to get the paperwork done," said Machinton.

Bator said the trust will also be selling raffle tickets with cash prizes to help pay for the gazebo.

Stella Wiernasz, a trust member, said \$1 raffle tickets will be sold to help pay for the gazebo. Wiernasz said three drawings for cash prizes of \$600, \$100, and \$50 will be held.

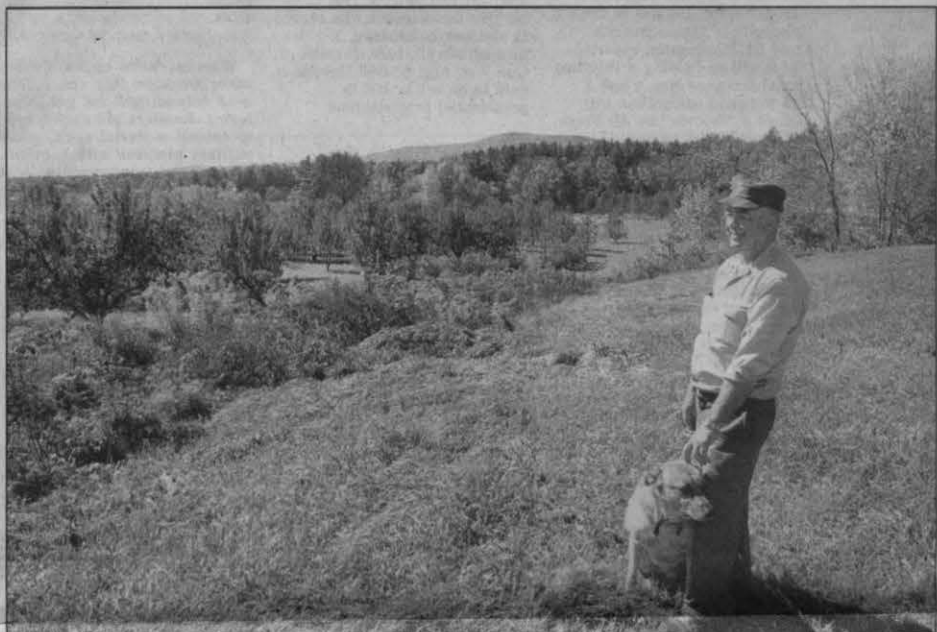
Laura Longsworth is a Gazette reporter based in Easthampton. Her column appears Mondays.



LAURA LONGSWORTH

In memory

Workers from Skip's Outdoor Accents, of West Springfield, install a gazebo near the Rubber Thread Pond. The Pascommuck Conservation Trust raised \$2,000 for the gazebo, which will be dedicated to the late Joyce Brown, the town's former veteran's agent secretary.



KEYING GUTTING

Lawrence Sena, one of the landowners seeking to preserve more than 400 acres in Easthampton and Northampton, looks over his orchards. At his side is Buddy. Mount Pomeroy is on the horizon.

Turning to preservation

More than 400 farm acres proposed for protection

By MARIELA MELENDEZ
Staff Writer

Property owners in Easthampton and Northampton are seeking to sell to the state the development rights to more than 400 acres, hoping to preserve the farmland from future development.

The land, in the Park Hill Road area and primarily in Easthampton, is currently devoted to the growing of apples, vegetables and hay.

Some 344 acres are in Easthampton and 67 in Northampton.

The land is owned by: Stephen Micka, 589 Park Hill Road in Northampton, who hopes to preserve 50 acres in Northampton and Easthampton; James Molitoris, 87 Park Hill Road, Easthampton, and Thomas Molitoris, 514 Park Hill Road, Northampton, 76.6 acres in those two

"That's one of the things about this project. It would really create a nice block of protected land."

— Richard Hubbard

towns; B & R Family Limited Partnership of Bloomfield, Conn., 165 acres on Park Hill Road, Easthampton; and Lawrence Sena, 82 Park Hill Road, Easthampton, 119 acres.

Under the state's Agricultural Preservation Restriction program, the owners are inviting the state to pay the difference between their lands' market value and its agricultural value. In exchange, develop-

ment of the properties would be permanently restricted.

"Basically, the owner has to agree to continue to farm and not to do anything to that farm that is going to permanently damage that soil," explained Richard Hubbard, assistant commissioner of the state Food and Agriculture Department, which supervises the program.

Hubbard said independent contractors are now appraising the values of the properties. He said he expects his department to make an offer to each in the next couple of weeks.

The application is not binding, and the farmers can still choose not to take advantage of the program if the state's offer doesn't meet their expectations.

To decide whether to include a

■ See AREA/Back of section

Area farmland proposed for preservation

■ Continued from Page 1

farm in the program, the department looks at the quality of its soil, its likelihood to stay as a farm, the demands for development in the area and its closeness to other farms under the APR program.

"That's one of the things about this project," Hubbard said referring to the latter point. "It would really create a nice block of protected land."

A commitment by a community or local conservation groups to pay at least 10 percent of the cost of restricting the property is also a plus, though not a requirement, Hubbard added. "It could make the difference of having this project move along," he said.

Feeling the heat

Some of the landowners say they have felt the pressure from developers.

Sena, 63, said he considers his Park Hill Orchards a heritage he wants to be able to pass it along to the next generation of his family.

But labor costs and other econom-

ic factors have made it difficult for him to fend off developers who approach him frequently to sell. Selling the rights to his acreage will help him continue to farm the land, he said.

Easthampton Mayor Michael Tautznik said he supports the project and plans to ask Town Council to help fund the 10 percent share, along with state and local groups, once the cost is determined.

"Personally, I think it would be a good idea and it would help preserve the character of the town," said Tautznik.

Northampton City Planner Wayne Feiden said Mayor Mary Ford and the Northampton Conservation Commission have endorsed the project and have indicated a willingness to contribute monetarily to the project.

Local preservation groups have also signaled an interest, and made an investment in the effort.

Gerrit Stover, of the Valley Land Fund trust, said his organization and the Pascommuck Conservation Trust, Easthampton's land trust, have helped pay the cost of appraising the properties.

Stover said one of the reasons

local groups and the town should consider helping out with the cost is that state money would not become available immediately, but the farmers would like to have the some of the money available as soon as possible.

The Easthampton and Northampton preservation effort comes at a time when the state is attempting to replenish its APR fund.

"We're a little low and we're trying to get our APR funding up to \$5 million," Agriculture Commissioner Jonathan Healy said Friday.

While Healy was not familiar with all the acres, he said, "I think it's very nice agricultural land."

He said the state has to negotiate with the owners on a fair market price for their land. "The process is well on its way," he said.

There are already 196 acres in Easthampton preserved under the program. They include 56 acres of town-owned land on Oliver Street and 101 acres of privately owned land on Torrey and Oliver streets, which are both near the Park Hill Road area. In addition 40 protected acres are owned by the Pascommuck Conservation Trust.

October 18, 1997

Council supports drive to buy land

10/7/98
By DAVID BERGENGREN

Staff writer

EASTHAMPTON – The Town Council voted unanimously last night to appropriate \$90,000 as the town's share of a proposed \$915,000 purchase of development rights to 124 acres off Park Hill Road.

The appropriation means the Valley Land Fund, a private non-profit group based in Northampton, and the Pascommuck Conservation Trust can continue putting together funding for the remaining \$825,000 needed for the purchase.

Property owner Lawrence G. Sena has an offer hand from a Hadley-based developer to purchase the bulk of his 124 acres for \$1.2 million, but says he prefers to sell the development rights and continue farming.

Sena thanked a packed house of supporters last night, and said, "It's not just about preserving my land, it's about saving open space, open land, in the town of Easthampton. There's not much open space left."

A petition with 1,058 signatures in support of the \$90,000 appropriation had been submitted to the council.

Discussion of the issue sparked plenty of emotion last night, but not much debate, as no one spoke against the measure.

Before the vote, however, several councilors took umbrage at what they perceived as criticism that they might have less than open minds on the issue.

"I think we all came here with an open mind," councilor Angelo C. Yacuzzo said. "I also take offense at allegations of being in the pockets of developers, and (that I'm) not to be trusted. I've never been in the pocket of anybody."

In the end, public support for the measure appeared to sway any councilor who might have had doubts, with the final vote in

Land: Council votes to aid deal

Continued from Page B1

favor of the \$90,000 by a tally of 9-0.

Council President Merritt J. Loomis IV, who had expressed reservations at a meeting of the council's Finance Subcommittee about three weeks ago, said last night that "with the overwhelming support of the people for this measure," he would support it.

The \$90,000 will be transferred from funds left over from a fiscal 1998 \$200,000 appropriation for the removal of town-owned underground fuel storage tanks, which cost much less than anticipated.

The appropriation to help purchase Sena's development rights, which under the state's Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR) program is designed to preserve the land for agricultural use forever, won support ranging from Mayor Michael A. Tautznik to Julia M. Ashton, of Worthington, a senior at Smith Vocational and Agricultural High School in Northampton.

"The reason that people move here is because of the open space, the character of the community," Tautznik said.

Ashton said she wanted to show that young people were still interested in farming.

"I am here tonight to show people there is still an interest in agriculture," said Ashton, who works on a dairy farm and studies agribusiness. "We will need this land in the future, to keep farming going."

17 acres saved from developer

A local group still needs to raise about \$75,000 to help preserve the land off East Street.

By DAVID BERGENGREN

Staff writer

EASTHAMPTON — A local group, working with a regional private nonprofit organization, has succeeded in saving a 17-acre parcel of wooded and agricultural land off East Street from development.

The Trustees of Reservations, a nonprofit land conservation trust based in Beverly, completed its purchase yesterday of the parcel for \$150,000, said Charles D. Wyman, a land protection specialist with the trust.

The property was purchased from Wallace Torrey and Ann Tomaszewski, who live in Guilford, Maine.

Several months ago, Torrey and Tomaszewski were negotiating to sell the property to local developer David M. Lepine, Mayor Michael A. Tautznik has said.

Because the land had been carried for several years in a special tax status that had protected it from development, the town had 120 days to exercise its right to match the purchase price and buy

the land, or to assign its purchase rights to another entity, Tautznik has said.

The purchase rights were assigned to The Trustees of Reservations, said Peter J. Ogulewicz, one of the organizers of Easthampton Citizens for Preserving Open Space, the local group that took the lead in efforts to preserve the land as agricultural and open space.

The longer-range plan calls for The Trustees of Reservations to hand about nine acres of the property that is woodlands or wetlands over to the local Pascommuck Conservation Trust, to preserve it as open space, Wyman said.

In addition, Eileen J. Droscher of Southwick plans to purchase the adjoining property owned by the estate of Ralph Morgan, who died last winter, as well as the remainder of the parcel now owned by The Trustees of Reservations, and turn it into a co-op farm, Wyman said. All Droscher's land will be protected from development by an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR), he said.

Droscher confirmed yesterday she had signed a preliminary purchase-and-sale agreement on Wednesday for the nearly 10-acre Morgan parcel. Executors for the Morgan estate are Phyllis and Ralph Becker of Wilbraham, Wyman said.

The Trustees of Reservations are fronting the costs of purchasing the Torrey-Tomaszewski parcel, but expect to recoup the money by selling an APR to the state and through fund-raising by Easthampton Citizens for Preserving Open Space, he said.

The local group will need to raise roughly \$75,000, Wyman said.

"The community has really pulled together to preserve that land," said Droscher, who is purchasing the Morgan property with her own funds and plans to move into a house there.

Ogulewicz, whose group garnered more than 400 signatures on petitions to help save the land, said nature trails open to the public are planned for nine acres.

East Street plot becomes conservation land

By JASON CARPENTER
Staff Writer

8/4/98

EASTHAMPTON — East Street residents will see vegetables, not houses, on a 17-acre plot of land on the street, now that it has been purchased by a conservation trust.

Charles Wyman, land preservation specialist, confirmed that the Massachusetts Land Conservation Trust has purchased the parcel for \$150,000, the same amount that a local developer had agreed to pay.

Wyman said the land purchase is a victory for conservation. "This is a piece of land that should be preserved as open space, and we're delighted to be part of making it happen," said Wyman. "It's great agricultural land. It's

scenic and it's just a great piece of land that we've been trying to preserve."

Wyman said the land will be divided nearly in half between farming and open space. He said that a Southwick farmer, Eileen Droescher, will purchase 8.8 acres to grow vegetables.

The remaining 9 acres, consisting of woodland and wetlands areas will be sold to the Pascommuck Preservation Trust to be protected as open space.

According to Wyman, the land that Droescher will use for farming will be protected by the state Agricultural Preservation Restriction program, which is designated the Massachusetts Department of Food and Agriculture. APR will purchase the

property's development rights.

The land had been slated to be developed by David Lepine, a contractor who lives at 262 East St.

The owners of the property, Wallace Torrey and Anne Tomaszewski, who now live in Maine, agreed April 3 to sell Lepine the property for \$150,000.

Lepine had planned to build a 12-home "cluster development." He proposed building the homes on five acres. The rest would have been donated to the Pascommuck Conservation Trust.

Because the land fell under a special classification that gives farmland a tax break, the town had the right to buy the property by matching any purchase price. The town could also transfer the purchase rights to a nonprofit

organization that would preserve it as farmland.

Mayor Michael A. Tautznik said that protecting the land is helping to keep the "feel" of the town.

"I think that the citizens in town have indicated that there is a need to preserve the character of the community," said Tautznik. "I think the preservation of farmland is a very important part of the future of this community. We value the small-town atmosphere."



White Brook students giving back

By JASON CARPENTER

Staff Writer 10/14/98

EASTHAMPTON

FROM food drives to hydrant painting, students at the White Brook Middle School are doing their part in a number of community activities this month.

The most visible effort is the painting of fire hydrants near the school.

Mary Szalankiewicz, a language arts and social studies teacher at White Brook, said that seventh- and eighth-grade students in her team will be chaperoned by teachers and will paint several fire hydrants in the area. She said the actual painting of the hydrants is a result of the students using many of the skills they learn at the school.

The students used their English skills to write letters to the Fire Department to volunteer their services, and used math skills to design the templates to paint the hydrants. Finally, they will use their art skills to do the painting, all the while learning about the importance of community service.

"I think they're thrilled about it," Szalankiewicz said of the eight or 10 students involved. "They get to actually go out in the community and help the Fire Department."

Students in the fifth and sixth grades have also been active in the Coats for Kids drive in conjunction with WGGB Channel 40 in Springfield, according to Szalankiewicz.

The coat drive began at the beginning of the month and will continue until Oct. 16. Students have been seeking coats that will be distributed across western

Jason
Carpenter



Briefings

Massachusetts to those in need.

Fifth- and sixth-graders are also participating in the collection of aluminum pull tabs from soda cans for Shriners Hospitals, which turn in the tabs at a recycling center for money that is used to purchase medical equipment.

Finally, the entire school has been involved in a food drive. Students have been asked to bring in tuna fish and peanut butter to donate to food distribution centers in the area. That drive will conclude on Oct. 24.

Szalankiewicz said her team of students is in the middle of a drive it started in March and hopes to collect 1,500 pounds of food that will be distributed in Easthampton and Northampton.

A place to hang

A group of youngsters enjoying their Columbus Day off from school congregated at Easthampton Bicycle for an impromptu viewing of the latest BMX performance video, Props: Road Fools

II.

Shawn Korza, 12, Jason Biladeau, 12, Adam Grygorcewicz, 9, and Paul Gray, 14, sat on the floor of the bike shop watching as the pro riders pulled off the newest stunts.

"I came her to get a tire for my bike, but then the new video came in, so I had to watch it," said Gray.

Easthampton Bike owner Will Cluster said he holds the spur-of-the-moment video screenings a couple times a week. Monday Cluster was giving his regulars a sneak peek of the new video.

"The UPS man just brought it," said Cluster.

The four boys said they hang around the shop nearly every day after school, and went there on Columbus Day because they knew they find other people to go riding.

They said they planned to go riding on the dirt ramps built off Mount Tom Avenue by several local bikers.

Cluster said he enjoys watching the videos as much as anyone else, and didn't mind at all the boys coming in to watch them on their day off.

"The kids need a place to go, and they're really respectful of this place," Cluster said.

Jason Carpenter reports on Easthampton for the Gazette.

This is the view southwest from land in Northampton now owned by Stephen and Joan Micka that will soon be protected from development. The tract, on Park Hill Road, sits amid orchard lands in Northampton and over the line in Easthampton that face development pressure.

TOWN OF EASTHAMPTON

In Town Council, May 5, 1998

BE IT RESOLVED

WHEREAS, the Town of Easthampton has identified several parcels of farmland on Park Hill Road, now or formerly owned by Stephen P. and Joan M. Micka, as being critical to the preservation of farmland, scenic vistas, and open space in Easthampton. Said parcels consist of 57 acres, more or less, of which 19 acres, more or less, is in Easthampton; and

WHEREAS, the Commonwealth of Massachusetts funds the joint purchase of Agricultural Preservation Restrictions with municipalities to ensure that farmland remains permanently protected as farmland and open space; and

WHEREAS, the Valley Land Fund, Inc., has offered to coordinate the purchase of agricultural preservation restrictions on the Micka property and to fund or borrow the Commonwealth's share until such time as Commonwealth funds are available in a manner which insures that if Commonwealth funds do not become available in the future Valley Land Fund would either complete the transaction or release the property and rescind their Purchase and Sale Agreement; and

NOW THEREFORE BE IT RESOLVED, that the Town Council hereby authorized the Mayor, on behalf of the Town of Easthampton, to participate with the Valley Land Fund, The Pascommuck Conservation Trust, the City of Northampton, and eventually with the Commonwealth, in an agricultural preservation restriction on this parcel and to accept grants and donations for this project; and

The Town Council hereby approves said agricultural preservation restriction.

Jay's Winnie
Et. Parks
Alan Shah
Tom Ruff

Samuel DeMusa

Wesley H. DeMusa
Angela Yarns 20
Al Bourgea

Saving land's a tradition

Conservationists in the Western timberlands and ranch country are getting credit for ingenious ways of saving the environment, but hasn't the world noticed what's going on right here in Western Massachusetts?

Western lovers of the land have been complaining for years about the federal government leasing grazing lands at low prices, and selling off lumbering rights cheap.

Just opening their complaining mouths hasn't worked, so they have decided to open their wallets.

They outbid the ranchers, and plant the land to stop erosion and soil exhaustion.

They outbid the lumber giants for logging rights, and therefore assure proper harvesting of lumber instead of clear-cutting and slash and burn.

The Westerners are Johnnies-come-lately to such cleverness. For centuries, New Englanders have found ways to outfox the foxes. The land conservationists are in a proud tradition.

Look at some recent examples:

An orchardist on the Easthampton-Northampton town line wants to preserve the farmland, and so offers to sell development rights to the Massachusetts Agricultural Preservation Restriction program. It has run out of money, but the private Valley Land Fund and the Pascommuck Conservation Trust come to the rescue. They will borrow the money to complete the deal and get repaid when the new state appropriation kicks in.

In other cases, Western Massachusetts farmland, orchards and open lands have been preserved by a complex combination of tax deductions, sale of development rights, life tenancy of the property and resale to someone who is ready to work within the restrictions.

Conservationists in Western Massachusetts are employing these and many other devices to preserve and conserve land, and folks in the rest of the world should not be surprised.

Haven't they noticed that Ingenuity's first name is Yankee?

Easthampton faces decision on APR 10/5/98

To the Editor:

On Tuesday evening, Oct. 6, the Easthampton Town council will consider the wisdom of approving the transfer and expenditure of \$90,000 in surplus funds to help secure the permanent protection, in the form of an Agricultural Preservation Restriction (APR), of the 124-acre Sena Park Hill Orchard.

The question was an apparent "no-brainer" until a builder/developer became an overnight champion of the school system. He suggested using the money instead to save our children by increasing the school budget by a mere three-quarters of 1 percent. It was an obvious attempt to drive a divisive wedge between generally kindred spirits, and apparently a dismal failure. Support for the position and the argument never materialized.

Residents, in unprecedented numbers, have come forward in support of the "some places are precious" ethic. They care about their schools; they care about their community, its character and its future. They care about their children and the heritage they will bestow upon them. They seem to be echoing the Joni Mitchell refrain of a few decades ago ... "Don't it always seem to go that you don't know what you've got 'til its gone. They pave paradise and put up a parking lot."

Will Park Hill be Easthampton's Eden or Paradise Lost? The answer lies with nine elected representatives!

Robert E. Pinkos
Easthampton

associates who would lose money if no development occurred.

These people have been claiming that their true concern is for the schools. I don't think that the schools of Easthampton are interested in selling the town's environment down the drain for \$90,000. I only hope that school officials and other citizens make that perfectly clear to our constantly wavering Town Council.

Teresa Serafin
Easthampton

Open space in Easthampton

To the Editor:

I was saddened but not at all surprised to read that Easthampton's Town Council is once again wavering in regard to an environmental issue — whether the town should spend \$90,000 to purchase development rights to 124 acres of open space.

Apparently the money is already available; Easthampton is only being asked to contribute \$90,000 out of a total of \$915,000. Much of that money will eventually be returned to the town in the form of payment on back taxes; and such a purchase has been advocated for years in open space plans, master plans, visioning plans, etc.

So, who could possibly be against such a deal which brings so much to Easthampton at so low a cost? The developers in town, of course, and their business

Americorps volunteers at work

Workers building trails in nature area in Easthampton

By MICHAEL SCHERER
Staff Writer

EASTHAMPTON — They have come from all over the country, brought together by a love of nature, a desire to contribute to society and a need for money to pay for college.

These members of the Massachusetts Forest and Parks AmeriCorps Program spent the winter teaching public school students about constellations and pond life and much of the summer building bridges and out-houses in state parks. Until Friday they will be blazing a trail for Easthampton's newest nature preserve at the foot of Mount Tom.

When completed, the approximately 1.5-mile-long nature trail will loop through a 9.22-acre parcel that was permanently set aside as a conservation area last fall. The Pascommuck Conservation Trust will manage the Brickyard Brook Conservation Area.

The AmeriCorps volunteers are members of a small army of young people who have decided to devote 10 months to public service in exchange for valuable experience, a \$50 per week stipend and a \$4,750 award for college.

"I don't think anyone knew what to expect," said Jill Kolodzne, a recent college graduate who grew up in Wisconsin. But like the other five AmeriCorps volunteers who spent this past week with picks, shovels and saws cutting a new trail the experience has been rewarding.

This summer the program will complete 32 different trail projects around the state, contributing nearly 12,000 service hours to conservation areas. But the Forest and Parks Program is just one of 30 different AmeriCorps programs in Massachusetts that include more than 900 people, mostly between the age of 18 and 26.

"If you have a lot of work to do, you'll work 10 to 12 hours a day," said Jennifer Taylor of Salem, who is also working on the AmeriCorps crew in Easthampton. "All we need is food and we're psyched."

■ See AMERICORPS/Page A4



GORDON DANIELS

AmeriCorps volunteers, from left, Brad Pierce, Jennifer Taylor and Jill Kolodzne use hand tools to construct the trail. The volunteers from the Massachusetts Forest and Parks AmeriCorps Program are building a nature trail at the Brickyard Brook Conservation Area at the foot of Mount Tom in Easthampton.

Americorps volunteers build nature trails

■ Continued from Page 1

Trail designer Patrick Fletcher of Westfield and others who have been working to establish the Brickyard Brook Conservation Area are garnering rewards from this AmeriCorps group in the form of about 500 hours of free, skilled labor.

"These kids are building something that will be used for generations," said Fletcher. "It's great for the kids. It's great for the park systems. And it's great for the trails."

As a trail chairman for the Appalachian Mountain Club, Fletcher helped design the new Brickyard Brook Trail with East Street resident William Burgart and other members of the Pascommuck Conservation Trust.

The trail will be accessible both from the end of Mount Tom Avenue and a trailhead next to Burgart's property at 395 East St. The property was formerly owned by an absentee landlord from Maine.

Last fall, the nature preserve was used primarily by a group of local BMX bikers who had fash-

"These kids are building something that will be used for generations."

Trail designer Patrick Fletcher

ioned a series of dirt jumps out of the forest floor. What remained of those jumps was leveled July 23 to make way for the trail.

With the help of the AmeriCorps volunteers, parts of the land that were previously inaccessible to the public will now become a quiet spot for passive recreation.

Claudia Ward, the AmeriCorps volunteer leading the project, said they are putting in 10 bridges and five footpaths. The workers will also put in stairs and erosion-control devices along sloped portions of the trail.

Once the project is completed the AmeriCorps volunteers will pack up their tents and return to their home base at the Dubuque State Forest in Hawley for one more week. Then their 10-month program will come to an end. "This

is the last project for us," Ward said.

But for many of the volunteers toiling away Thursday at the Brickyard Brook Conservation Area, the end of the program will be an opportunity to apply the skills they have learned.

Kolodzne said her next stop will be San Diego, where she plans to become a leader of another AmeriCorps program, focusing on trail work and disaster relief.

Ryan Riggins, an AmeriCorps volunteer who joined the program just out of high school, said he plans to return home to Bloomington, Ind., and use the skills he has learned to become a firefighter, with eventual plans of returning to college.

"I wasn't interested until I came out here," Riggins said of his academic future.

The Pascommuck Conservation Trust has organized a social gathering to celebrate the hard work of the AmeriCorps volunteers on Thursday at 4 p.m. on Burgart's property. Anyone interested in getting a tour of the new trail is invited.



GORDON DANIELS

AmeriCorps volunteer Claudia Ward uses loppers to clear-cut vegetation for a new nature trail at the Brickyard Brook Conservation Area in Easthampton.

BMXers seeking place to ride

by MICHAEL SCHERER
Staff Writer

EASTHAMPTON — A group of young BMX riders has asked the town to consider setting aside land and supplies so it can build dirt jumps.

Since last year, when the Pascommuck Conservation Trust banned bikes from a private wooded area at the end of Mount Tom Avenue, the riders have not had a place to practice.

That spot had served as the training ground for a generation of local riders, some of whom had gained national recognition in competitions and industry magazines.

With the spring thaw, a time that traditionally meant spending hours of time after school and work launching into the air off dirt ramps, many of the riders said they sorely felt the loss.

So on May 30, a group of 25 riders met at Flywheel, a community arts center, to draft a letter asking for the town's help in building the jumps. The riders delivered the letter to Mayor Michael Tautznik last week.

"The young people did a good job of summarizing their needs," Tautznik said.

*On on May 30, a group of 25
riders met at Flywheel, a
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letter asking for the town's help
in building the jumps.*

The letter lists three possible sites for the park — Nonotuck Park, near the David MacDonald Memorial Skateboard Park off Ferry Street and open space the town owns off of Oliver Street. The riders specified they needed 2 or 3 acres, a nearby source of water, clay-based dirt and some tools.

"Car washes and stuff and even standing out in front of a bank or something — we wouldn't mind raising money," said Nathan Wojcik, a high school junior and BMX rider who helped write the letter.

In addition to any necessary fund-raising, Wojcik said the riders would take full responsibility for the construction and maintenance

of the area.

Tautznik, who remains optimistic that a suitable site can be found, has passed on the letter of request to Town Planner Stuart Beckley and Parks and Recreation Director Edward Piziak for review.

"There's probably some suitable places here in Easthampton that will suit their needs," Piziak said on Monday.

Piziak said he plans to meet with Beckley later this week to draw up a set of recommendations for the mayor, who will then set up a meeting with the riders.

"I would expect that if there was something we could do with existing property, that meets their needs, and that we have control over than we could do something this summer," Tautznik said.

The town will still need to find out the cost of insuring the new jumps and putting up appropriate signs, which may necessitate bringing the project before the council for capital funding approval, Tautznik said.

Meanwhile, the BMX riders in town will continue to jump off backyard wooden ramps, awaiting a day when they can return to dirt.

Easthampton losing its next-to-last dairy farm

By JASON CARPENTER
Staff Writer

EASTHAMPTON — The owners of one of the town's last two dairy farms will auction their herd of 350 cows and machinery next month, after deciding that farming is no longer a viable enterprise.

A big factor in closing Burt and Sons Farm, which has been operating for five generations, is the cost to contain runoff from corn stored in its silos, as required by the state Department of Environmental Protection.

The farm, located at 301 East St., is owned by cousins Adam Burt, of 324 East St. and Jarius Burt of 308 East St.

"I'm upset and I'm frustrated. The sad thing is that we were viable and we were making money," said Adam Burt. He said

he plans to try farming again at another location.

James Hines, director of dairy services for the state Department of Food and Agriculture, said the department tried to assist the Burts.

"I think given the resources that are available, I believe we worked to solve the (farm's) problems," Hines said. "It's too bad we couldn't have saved (the Burt farm). Unfortunately, we can't save them all."

The auction will take place April 9 and 10, at 10 a.m. at the farm, led by freelance auctioneer Phil Jaquier of Southwick. Up for auction are cattle, farming equipment including tractors, hay and corn silage.

■ See FARM/Back of section

I like John. He's a wonderful ment."

Farm

■ Continued from Page 1

The Burts farmed 500 acres, of which 370 was rented from other landowners. Adam Burt said there is a possibility the family will sell its acreage.

Jarius Burt acknowledged the farm equipment and livestock will be auctioned, but declined further comment.

Adam Burt said the farm's auction stems from a DEP consent order last year to stop the discharge from corn silage from polluting ground water. He said to follow the DEP order, he and his cousin would have had to install holding tanks costing about \$250,000, but he said there was no guarantee that would solve the problem.

"It would be trial and error at our expense. You can't afford to take a chance like that," said Burt. "The only way to correct the problem is to go out of dairy farming in that area."

Steven Halterman, the deputy regional director of DEP for the Western Massachusetts Region, said the department gave the farm as much assistance as possible.

"(DEP) has been up to that farm about 10 times and we have been working with them for 10 years," Halterman said this morning. "We probably went a little bit too long (in allowing) them to pollute that stream because they were farmers. Anyone else wouldn't have gotten away with that."

Halterman said DEP offered several alternatives to stop the pollutants, but the silo is in a bad

location, because it is on top of a spring. "It was the worst possible spot to have a dairy farm," he said.

Burt said he and his cousin agreed in January to pay a \$5,000 penalty for polluting a tributary of the Manhan River with the discharge, which is caused by the weight and moisture of fermenting corn stored in the farm's silos. DEP officials have said the pollutants can cause gray fungal material to grow in the river and potentially harm its ecosystem.

Burt said he is dismayed that circumstances have led to the farm's demise. But he said they hope their misfortune will lead state agencies to lend more assistance to farmers in similar situations.

But Hines said his department did everything possible to help the Burt farm stay in business. He said the state Department of Food and Agriculture provided assistance for the Burts in marketing their milk and recommended the farm to the Natural Resources Conservation Service for financial assistance.

Burt said he is also disappointed because the farm was not permitted to tie into the town's sewage system so its treatment plant could have handled the runoff.

Mayor Michael A. Tautznik said that in its raw state, the silage runoff could have caused an upset in the wastewater treatment process, thus possibly affecting its permit with the state.

Tautznik said the Burts were treated no differently than any

other business that wants to be hooked up to municipal sewer lines.

Tautznik said he is saddened that the town is losing one of the last two operating dairy farms. The other is the Davies Farm on Florence Road.

"As we lose farms, we lose the rural character Easthampton is known for," Tautznik said. "It's a shame to lose one of the oldest farms in the valley."

Hines said dairy farming in Massachusetts is steadily declining. He said recent statistics show

290 dairy farms currently operating in state down from 308 in June of 1998.

Death

■ Continued from Page 1

isn't perfect and I suspect you isn't either," she said.

"Unfortunately, we have many tales to tell of people who have been wrongfully convicted murder," she said.



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Pascommuck Trust growing

Conservation group marks 16th anniversary today

By JASON CARPENTER
Staff Writer 2/22/99

EASTHAMPTON — In its 16 years, the Pascommuck Conservation Trust has had a hand in preserving more than 250 acres, while its membership has continued to increase.

"People are waking up finally" to the importance of preserving farmland and scenic acres, John Bador, the trust's acting president, said in an interview this week. "It's grown tremendously, (but) we've got a long ways to go yet."

The trust will celebrate its 16th anniversary today with a public meeting and a slideshow of its local holdings. The annual meeting will be held at 7 p.m. at the Sunrise Manor Meeting Hall on Clark Street.

Bador, who has been associated with the trust since its inception, said it has 130 members, mostly Easthampton residents, whose occupations range from laborers to doctors and lawyers.

"The general mission of the trust is to preserve open space, and to provide conservation education," Bador said. "People on a whole are more conscious of the environment. The whole conservation movement is growing, and people are getting involved."

Mayor Michael A. Tautznik, a founding member of the trust, said it deserves the public's support. "Not only are they looking at direct land protection, but they're also providing direct public service," by constructing trails and allowing for recreation on the trust's land, he said.

Some of the trust's major acquisitions include 40 acres off Pleasant Street, acquired in 1985; 63 acres — mostly farmland, off Plain and Strong streets, added in 1994; and 18 acres along Hannum Brook, secured in 1996.

Much of the land held consists



CAROL LOLLIS

Bill Burgart, one of the founding members of the Pascommuck Conservation Trust, is shown in John Bator Park off of Lake Street in Easthampton. The trust is in its 16th year.

The trust will celebrate its 16th anniversary today with a public meeting and a slideshow of its local holdings.

of flood plains and wooded areas.

According to Gerrit Stover, a member of the trust, the 13 land acquisitions the organization has made since 1983 have been donations.

In its most recent project, the trust teamed up with the Valley Land Fund to purchase an Agricultural Preservation Restriction on 124 acres of orchard property on Park Hill Road owned by Lawrence Sena.

The trust collected more than 1,000 signatures on a petition to save the land from development and pledged along with Valley Land Fund to contribute \$21,500 to help purchase the development rights. The two groups have raised \$15,000 to date.

Tautznik said the trust "fills a void that exists in the government's ability to preserve and protect open space. I think they've done an excellent job managing the resources under

their care and promoting a spirit of preservation and protection in the community."

Bador said the organization will continue maintaining its land, adding footbridges, and nature trails.

In the past, Bador said the group has worked with the schools to promote conservation education by offering hands-on field trips studying Nashawanuck Pond. The group halted the school programs, but Bador said it will look to connect with the schools again, and is currently setting up scholarships for high school students that will amount to several \$100 awards.

Town Planner Stuart Beckley, who has served on Pascommuck's board of directors, calls the trust's work "very important" as more and more land is subject to development pressures.

"We don't have much left," he said.