

Lasting legacy

Pascommuck Conservation Trust remembers Terry Blunt



GAZETTE FILE PHOTO

In this photo, taken in 2003, Terry Blunt visits a protected area of riverbank along the Connecticut River in Hadley.

By OWEN BOSS
Staff Writer

EASTHAMPTON — The last time he and conservationist Terry Blunt traveled together on the Connecticut River, John Bator says, "It was like we were both in our own little world."

"We talked about everything from conservation to business," recalled Bator, president of the Pascommuck Conservation Trust. "Terry pointed out so many things about the river that I never knew existed. He knew the Valley so well and he worked to save thousands of acres for all of us to enjoy."

At its annual meeting last week, the Trust took time to remember Blunt, a driving force behind land preservation in the Connecticut River Valley. Blunt, of West Hatfield, died in October at the age of 69.

Blunt trained as a naturalist and conservationist and first worked for the national Nature Conservancy as one of its first land acquisition representatives. It was that work that brought him to the Valley in 1969.

After taking a position with the Connecticut River Watershed Council, Blunt moved over to the state Department of Environ-

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Terry Blunt remembered

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mental Management, where for 25 years he was director of its Connecticut Valley Action Program, focusing on land conservation and natural resource protection.

Through his work with landowners, community groups and public agencies, Blunt developed plans that would become the blueprints for land conservation, management and recreation along the Connecticut River.

At the meeting last week, board member Marty Klein shared some memories and told the group he was speaking as one of Blunt's friends, one who knew firsthand that the work accomplished did during

his lifetime would benefit generations to come.

"We shared not only a common passion for the landscape, but enjoyed things like canoeing and fishing and hiking and looking at nature," Klein said. "His passing was a tremendous loss to the region and to so many people that he touched. Terry touched so many people that if we wanted to put them all together we would need three rooms this size, maybe more than that."

As director of the Connecticut Valley program, Blunt was a key player in the creation of the 35,000-acre Connecticut River Greenway State Park, which connects open spaces, park, scenic vistas and archaeological and historic sites

along the length of the river in Massachusetts. It includes the 12-mile Connecticut River Water Trail from Hatfield to Turners Falls.

Other areas protected from development thanks to Blunt's efforts include land on Mount Tom, the Holyoke Range and Skinner State Park and the French King Gorge.

After describing the various projects near and dear to Blunt's heart, Klein also shared a story.

"The last time that we spent together we took a little canoe trip and put in at the Sunderland bridge and paddled north for a couple of miles. We pulled out on a ledge there and had lunch and looked at some wildflowers and did some fishing,"

Klein said.

While stopped, Klein said he found an interesting piece of fossilized mud in the water nearby and he and Blunt marveled at its apparent age and unique shape. Holding it up at the meeting, Klein said it would always remind him of Blunt and their shared love for the local environment.

"We were both pretty amazed by it. The fact that it was so thin and didn't break up in the river," Klein said. "Terry will be remembered for a long time to come by people all across the Valley and you can all be grateful for the way our landscape looks and for Terry's great work."

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Cities & Towns

AMHERST/EASTHAMPTON/NORTHAMPTON/TOWNS/O

1/6/11

Easthampton council backs Manhan land preservation

By MATT PILON
Staff Writer

EASTHAMPTON — City councilors voted unanimously with one abstention Wednesday to approve spending \$45,000 in community preservation funds to preserve land along the Manhan River.

The 22-acre plot, which members of the Pascommuck Conservation Trust said they have been eyeing for years as a potential link between two of the trust's existing conservation properties, is at the end of Ranch Avenue.

The community preservation dollars, attained through a 3 percent surcharge on property taxes with the

first \$100,000 in value exempt, will be leveraged by \$17,000 that the trust will pitch in toward the effort. The trust will own the property and the city will hold the preservation restriction, said City Planner Stuart Beckley.

Trust member Doug Wheat told councilors Wednesday before the vote that the land would "open up a nice opportunity for passive recreation" in the form of hiking trails.

The property also links to the adjacent 15-acre Pomeroy Meadows conservation area.

"It'll create about a 37-acre area

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Council

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where there can be some hiking trails," Wheat said.

Councilor Donald L. Cykowski told Wheat that several constituents had approached him to express concern that they would not be able to hunt on the property.

Wheat said that none of the trust's other properties in the city allow hunting or fishing and that would likely be the case on Ranch Avenue.

Cykowski, who ultimately abstained from the vote, also said he had been told the land was not developable and that perhaps the city should leave it on the tax rolls.

Wheat replied that the property is currently private and that there would be no recreation opportunities if the city did not preserve it.

Trust member Patty Gambarini told councilors that the land acts as a passage for various wildlife and can be seen as an indicator of how development has pushed wildlife to certain areas, such as

along the river.

"This parcel is another piece of what the trust has envisioned to protect," Gambarini said. "The entire greenway, maybe, someday."

In other business, councilors decided to postpone a vote on a zoning amendment that would allow chickens in more residential areas.

Councilor Joy E. Winnie pointed out that the change, which would allow residents with 15,000 square feet or more of land to keep up to six chickens (no roosters) could also take away the right of some residents to keep a riding horse.

"I have a problem with that," she said.

Councilors, several of whom said they didn't realize the ordinance would have such an effect, voted to send the matter back to the Ordinance Subcommittee for further review. They set a continuation of the public hearing for Feb. 16.

Matt Pilon can be reached at mpilon@gazette.net.

Praise for Dahlberg, area land projects

To the editor:

I am writing to express my appreciation on two fronts: Your recent article on Janet Dahlberg's retirement as church organist at the First Churches reminded me of what a tireless and devoted recruiter, trainer and supervisor she has been for the Decisional Training Program at the Hampshire County House of Correction (and since the 1970s).

A lesser-known accomplishment of Janet's was paddling with her family on a number of major canoe voyages. She is a quietly amazing, and truly inspiring woman.

Also, I would like to thank the Pascomuck Conservation Trust for its recent generous contribution to the Westhampton portion of the Mineral Hills conservation project. The trust expanded its range of activity by supporting the purchase of these beautiful 57 acres. It includes a portion of Turkey Brook, which feeds into the north branch of the Manhan River.

Major kudos are also in order for Wayne Feiden of the Northampton planning office, the Valley Land Fund (especially David Herships), the Highland Community Initiative (of the Trustees of Reservations), Kate Parsons of the Westhampton Open Space Committee and the other individuals and organizations who have provided expertise, energy and funds to support this project.

At this time, \$7,500 still needs to be raised to purchase this land, which will be part of a nearly 400-acre parcel of conserved land on the Northampton/Westhampton border. For more information on how to support this effort, visit www.westhampton-ma.gov, and click on Open Space Committee.

Sheila Marks
Westhampton

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Conservation

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OPEN SPACE



KEVIN GUTTING PHOTOS

Pascommuck Conservation Trust board member Doug Wheat talks Tuesday about the recent purchase of a 22-acre parcel of land while his sons Zackary, left, 8, and Davis, 6, explore a tributary of the Manhan River. The trust has embarked on its "Save Open Space in Our Neighborhoods" campaign to support this expansion of the Pomeroy Meadow and Brickyard Brook conservation areas.

Easthampton land group bids to save 28 neighborhood acres

By REBECCA EVERETT
Staff Writer

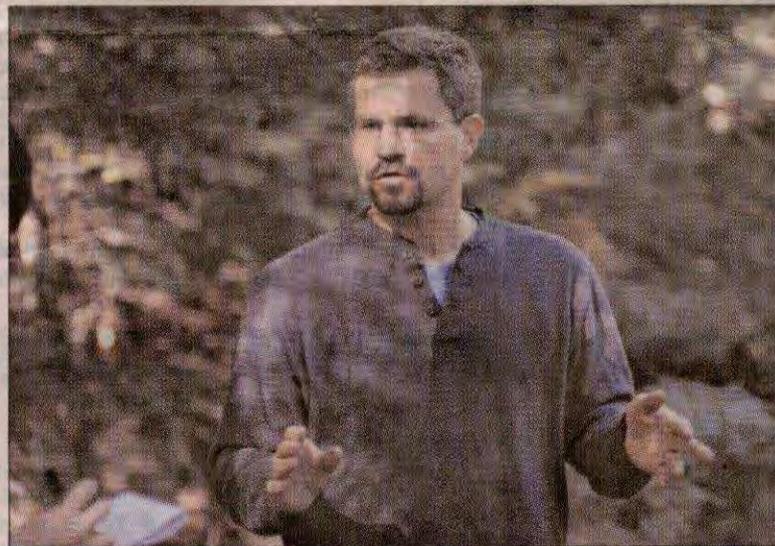
EASTHAMPTON — When most people think of conservation land, they envision huge expanses of preserved acreage, such as the 2,161-acre Mount Tom State Reservation, said Doug Wheat, a board member of the city's Pascommuck Conservation Trust.

But as the trust embarks on its biggest fundraising campaign ever, leaders hope that city residents will think smaller and consider how nice it would be to have conservation land in their own backyards.

"Mount Tom is a huge resource that a lot of people drive to," Wheat said. "But for us, we're looking more to conserving land that you can walk to. This project provides accessible open space to these people in the neighborhoods."

The trust's "Save Open Space in Our Neighborhoods" campaign seeks to raise \$133,000 to support the purchase of two properties totaling 28 acres that will add onto two existing conservation areas.

Standing in the leafy woods off Ranch Avenue that now belong to the Pascommuck Conservation Trust, Wheat explained that the campaign is necessary to replenish the trust's savings after the purchases cost



them \$105,000.

The trust purchased for \$67,000 a 22-acre area between Paul Street and Ranch Avenue, which will expand the existing Pomeroy Meadows Conservation Area to 37 acres and allow public access to that formerly "landlocked" parcel.

For \$108,000, the trust also bought a 6-acre parcel between East Street and East Green Street, allowing the trust to expand the well-used Brickyard Brook Conservation Area to 17.4 acres.

The total cost of the properties

was \$175,000, but \$70,000 in Community Preservation Act funding from the city brought the total land cost down to \$105,000.

Trust board members hope to raise an additional \$28,000 to add hiking trails to the expanded Pomeroy Meadows Conservation Area, which brings the total campaign goal to \$133,000.

Mayor Michael A. Tautznik, a founding member of the trust, said he is pleased the city could assist the

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organization in the expansion. "That's the reason the trust was created; to carry on those conservation activities that sometimes cities and towns don't have the wherewithal or focus to do," he said.

While hiking the property Tuesday with his two sons, Zackary, 8, and Davis, 6, Wheat said that although the campaign is a massive undertaking, it is just a part of the trust's goal of preserving land in every city neighborhood.

The new 22-acre property near Ranch Avenue was offered to the trust by Southampton developer David Garstka, who plans to build a nine-home subdivision off the end of Paul Street, but had no use for the undevelopable land behind the building site.

The area will be accessible both from the end of Ranch Avenue and from the subdivision on Paul Street.

"It's a really big deal because Pomeroy Meadows has not been accessible to people before," Wheat said, explaining that access was blocked by private properties abutting the land. "This land has always been in these people's backyards, but now it will be more accessible public open space with trails."

The Pomeroy Meadows land has "spectacular" hemlock and red pine forests and almost a mile of frontage along the Manhan River, Wheat said. "Land along the Manhan is one of our prime acquisition targets," he said. "It's prime habitat for wildlife."

Hikers using trails in the new addition will also be able to enjoy a 3-acre field and hilly forests.

"The property has a lot of these deep ravines," Wheat said, watching his sons clamber up the steep bank of a gully. "Areas like these will definitely need stairs." Trust members and volunteers will be able to do some of the trail work, he said, but professionals will construct the stairs, bridges and viewing platforms.

The trust purchased the 6-acre parcel near the current Brickyard Brook Conservation Area from Robert and Mary Ann Donais this spring.

"Brickyard Brook is one of our most used properties... and this will make it even more accessible," Wheat said. "In terms of providing open space, we think of it as kind of a model of the kind of conservation we do, because a lot of neighbors use it."

Hikers and walkers have used paths on East Street and Mount Tom Avenue to access the property, but now they can also get to it from new points on East Green Street and East Street, he said.

The land also includes a mix of wooded areas, meadows and streams.

Although it will not be funded through the "Save Open Space in Our Neighborhoods" campaign, the trust has future plans to create a trail system on the new parcel to connect with the current one at Brickyard Brook.

Campaigning for conservation

Over its 30-year history, the Pascommuck Conservation Trust has helped protect more than 600 acres of land in Easthampton, including its 19 conservation areas.

Wheat said the trust ran smaller campaigns to purchase some of those properties and assisted in the Trust for Public Land's \$2.85 million campaign to purchase Echo Dale Farm on Park Hill Road in 2006. But this campaign is its largest solo effort to date.

"It's a big campaign, it's a big task," he said.

The trust hopes to raise \$57,500 in local donations and \$75,500 in grants. "We've raised a little more than \$10,000 in donations so far, and we're very happy about that," he said. Most of those donations, he said, came from city residents. The trust is also applying for grants from private foundations, he said.

As part of the campaign, the trust gave out "We Support Open Space in Our Neighborhoods" lawn signs, sent out mailers to sympathetic residents and is holding hikes at the new properties to raise awareness about the effort.

The next hike is Sunday at Pomeroy Meadows, starting at the end of Ranch Avenue at noon. On Oct. 7 at 1 p.m., hikers can meet at the end of Mount Tom Avenue to tour Brickyard Brook.

Soon, the trust will launch a series of neighborhood fundraising house parties, hosted by residents in the area of Pomeroy Meadows. Neighbors can get together, learn about the project and donate, Wheat said.

The trust is also using its Facebook page to inspire people to support open space.

"We're asking people to post stories about growing up with open space in their neighborhoods," he said. "It lets people share their experiences and learn about the importance of open space like this."

Trust board member and artist Martin Klein is donating 15 percent of the proceeds of the sale of any of his nature prints, currently on display in the City Hall Gallery at 50 Payson Ave., to the campaign.

The organization's annual fall plant sale will also help them raise much-needed funds, Wheat said. The sale takes place in the Big E's Supermarket parking lot Saturday from 8 a.m. to noon.

For more information, visit the trust's website at www.pctland.org or its Facebook page at www.facebook.com/pctland.

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5/20/13

Moose on loose visits Easthampton

By REBECCA EVERETT
@GazetteRebecca

EASTHAMPTON — Jaws dropped and heads turned Saturday when a young moose trotted through backyards and down sidestreets in the area of Holyoke and Clark streets for about half an hour just after noon.

Though police and neighbors said the moose was not fully grown, photographs and videos taken by residents show that the leggy animal was as tall as the SUVs he passed by, and Carrie Hague of Mount Tom Avenue said she watched it step eas-

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Moose

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ily over a 4-foot fence in her neighbors' backyard.

"I've been all over New England but I've never seen a moose, so to see it here was a shock," Hague said Sunday.

Police Sgt. Dominic Serino said he has responded to calls for escaped horses, cows and other large animals, but this was the first time in his nearly 30 years on the force that he has dealt with a moose.

For a video of the moose in action, see this story on GazetteNET.

He said the department received the first of several reports about the moose at 12:21 p.m. "We got a call that there was a moose running down Franklin Street so I and a couple other officers went and tried to get it moving away from the center of town," Serino said.

In the half-hour that followed, it walked through yards and streets including Briggs, Maple, and Clark streets and Mount Tom Avenue. Finally, at the end of Mutter Street, the moose headed into the woods that are part of the 9-acre Brickyard Brook Conservation Area. On the other side of the conservation area is East Street and then Mount Tom, from where Serino guessed the moose had come.

Hague said she was driving to her home on Mount Tom Avenue Saturday afternoon when she saw the street was blocked by a police cruiser and an officer. "He said, 'there's a moose loose,'" she said.

She got to her home by looping around Cherry Street and said she



CARRIE HAGUE

Carrie Hague said she was surprised to see a young moose trot through her neighbor's yard on Mount Tom Avenue Saturday afternoon.

could see the moose between the houses and trees in her neighbors' yards. She and her neighbors were curious to check it out, but police warned them to stay back so the large animal wouldn't run them over.

"I went back to my house and then he was right in my neighbor's backyard," she recalled. "He stepped over their fence and headed to Clark Street."

According to the state Division of Fisheries and Wildlife, May is one of the best months for moose sightings because it is when the year-old moose leave their mothers before they give birth again.

The moose spotted in Easthampton appeared to have no antlers. The division's website said male moose start to grow antlers in March. A full-grown moose averages 6 feet tall at the shoulder, with legs 3½ to 4 feet in length, the website said.

Serino said the moose looked healthy and was not too bothered by the police officers trying to herd it out of the residential neighborhood.

Local Hero Awardees



Pascommuck Conservation Trust

Posted in: 2013

2013 Local Hero Awardee

Pascommuck Conservation Trust was named for Easthampton's earliest known settlement in the late 1600s. The Native American word "Pascommuck" means "where it bends," a reference to the nearby oxbow of the Connecticut River.

Founded in 1982, Pascommuck's mission is to protect important land and other natural resources in Easthampton for the public benefit. Pascommuck's early priorities included establishing a greenbelt along the Manhan River. As the major tributary flowing through Easthampton to the Connecticut River, the Manhan continues to be a focus area for the organization. Preservation of Easthampton's farmland has also been a priority, given the importance of local agriculture throughout the town's long history.



Local Hero Awardees

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Echodale Farm, Easthampton (Marty Klein photo)

Recently, Pascommuck helped protect **Echodale Farm**, a Local Hero farm and 165-acre property in the Park Hill area of Easthampton that is the largest farm in Easthampton and has gorgeous views of Mt. Tom. Formerly a dairy farm, Echodale is now part of a 400-acre block of agricultural and forestland preserved in perpetuity. It was a priority to ensure that Echodale would remain an active farm, provide public access to the scenic Park Hill area, and protect habitat for both plants and animals along Bassett Brook, which runs into the Manhan River.

Pascommuck led a successful effort to generate broad community support for the Echodale project, raising \$300,000 toward the \$2.85 million needed. The Trust for Public Land, the City of Easthampton, and the state's Agricultural Preservation Restriction Program were critical to Echodale's preservation, which was completed in 2008.

Gail Flood and Rodney Britt, who purchased the 140-acre farm, farmhouse, and outbuildings in 2008, are raising bees and heritage livestock breeds as well as vegetables and flowers for retail sale. As part of Echodale's preservation, 25 acres across the road from the farm was protected

as a City of Easthampton conservation area, which includes 40 community garden plots. Walking trails are planned through the conservation area and around the perimeter of Echodale Farm.

Currently, Pascommuck stewards 18 properties in Easthampton, comprising approximately 225 acres. As an all-volunteer land trust, Pascommuck attributes its success to good working relationships with the City of Easthampton and larger conservation organizations such as the Trust for Public Land and the Trustees of Reservations. With an active membership of about 125 people, led by a 14-member board of directors, the group is always seeking to connect with others who are passionate about land conservation.



View of Mount Tom from Echodale Farm, Easthampton (Marty Klein photo)

For information about Pascommuck's current projects, as well as descriptions and maps of eight conservation areas in Easthampton, visit pctland.org.

Tags: [Echodale Farm](#)

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5/4/13

Easthampton blaze linked to campfire

Firefighters struggle to locate source of smoke in wooded area

By **REBECCA EVERETT**
@GazetteRebecca

EASTHAMPTON — Fire Chief David A. Mottor blamed a campfire for an early-morning brush fire that burned four acres of woods in the Edward J. Dwyer Conservation Area off Terrace View.

It took firefighters hours to locate the fire, deep in the woods on the banks of the Manhan River, but once they did around 6:45 a.m., they had it out within 30 minutes, according to Capt. Dennis Peck.

At 9 a.m., firefighters were still pumping water from the river to spray “hot spots” on the blackened forest floor to make sure leaves and sticks were not smoldering.

Peck said the department first received calls from Pleasant Street residents smelling smoke at 4:30 a.m., but after searching the neighborhood they couldn't find any trace of a fire or smoke.

After dawn, residents and a police officer saw a plume of smoke coming from the wooded area. Peck said firefighters searched for the source of the smoke, trying to access the woods from Industrial Drive and Lovefield Way, but couldn't find the best way to get to it.

Firefighters found the fire in the Edward J. Dwyer Conservation Area, about a five-minute walk from where the trail begins on Terrace View near Pleasant Street. There was no way to get a fire truck close to it, Peck said.

“It was a pretty good wall of fire. We had one water extinguisher and used our shovels to throw dirt on the fire,” Peck said. “We had it pretty well out before we got the hose in here, but it kept flaring up.”

Police officers helping with the search kicked dirt on the fire, too. “I'm glad they were here to help,” he said. He acknowledged that if there hadn't been a nearby river to pump water from, extinguishing the fire would have been much trickier. In the burned area, the ground cover and low bushes were destroyed, but most of the larger trees were just charred at their bases. A few dead trees were dry enough to burn up and Mottor said he would call state forestry workers to cut down one that seemed hazardous.

Mottor said the campfire that started the fire may have belonged to a homeless man that police say spends a lot of time there. He said brush fires are pretty rare in Easthampton. “We probably only have ones like this once or twice a year,” he said.

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REBECCA EVERETT

Easthampton firefighters pumped water from the Manhan River to extinguish “hot spots” after a brush fire burned four acres of woods off of Terrace View early Friday morning.

Buy: Farmers' fare abounds in winter

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gional Middle School from 10 a.m. to 2 p.m. and at Greenfield High School from 10 a.m. to 1 p.m.

The markets accept SNAP benefits, and in honor of Winter Fare, CISA will be matching the first \$10 of all SNAP purchases.

In addition to purchasing local foods, shoppers can attend educational workshops at each market. Topics include simple cheese-making and canning, growing grains and herbal medicine. Workshop leaders are area residents who use these skills at home. The workshops are free and do not require pre-registration.

In addition, there will be a farmers' panel discussion, "Looking Forward, Looking Back Changing Agriculture in the Pioneer Valley," on Thursday from 6 to 8 p.m. at the Northampton Center for the Arts. The focus will be on what the local food movement means for farmers in the Pioneer Valley.

Farmers Michael Docter, of Winter Moon Farm, Nate L'Ettoile, of Four Star Farms, and Carolyn Wheeler, of Wheel-View Farm, will share their stories and talk about how their businesses have changed

over the years, and what they see as the biggest opportunities and challenges facing them in the years to come. This panel discussion and the reception to follow are free and open to the public.

The Winter Fare markets and other events are opportunities for communities to gather around food and farming, Korman said. "The farmers are growing and harvesting for us and will be selling. We have to show up," he said.

This will be the fourth year for the Springfield winter market offered on the second and fourth Saturdays of each month. It's a way for people buy the locally-raised and grown food they value, and "that's something a lot of people are plugged in to," Belle-Rita Novak, market manager, has said. "It tastes better and you can find out what's put in your food. A lot of people are more interested in what goes into your body."

Because some farmers have built greenhouses, they can bring to market produce like greens, spinach, carrots and radishes. "It's just terrific," Novak said.

For a complete list of winter farmers' markets and details about workshops, go online to www.buylocalfood.org.

cessation programs are diverted to offset budget deficits. UNION NEWS, 1/27/13

staggering with smoking-related deaths topping 400,000 or the millions awarded annu-



Staff photo by MICHAEL BESWICK

Kristen Wilmer, of Wild Sky Farm in Easthampton, sells produce to customers recently at the Farmers Market in the Thornes Market Basement in Northampton.

Farmers' fare abounds in winter

By CORI URBAN

DEERFIELD - Yearning for summer? Dreaming of produce picked fresh from the fields? Need a little comfort?

Community Involved in Sustaining Agriculture has been growing in the valley for 20 years, and to kick off its milestone anniversary celebration, it's presenting Winter

Fare, a celebration of the winter bounty, this week in collaboration with regular winter farmers' markets across the region.

After a 2008 debut in Greenfield, "Winter Fare created a demand," said Philip S. Korman, executive director of the organization. "Farmers did incredibly well at that event."

The Greenfield model was

copied in Northampton in 2010 with about 2,000 shoppers in about four hours, he said, and as more and more people realized they could "eat local" in the winter, demand continued to grow for winter farmers' markets.

According to the state Department of Agricultural Resources, there are 39 ongoing winter markets across the

commonwealth. In 2009, when the first ones were recorded, there were six. The number rose to 18 in 2010 and to 35 last year.

Several events will celebrate year-round local eating and the anniversary of CISA. They include upcoming markets on Feb. 2 at Amherst Re-

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Republican, 1-13-15

EASTHAMPTON - A fully accessible nature trail at the Brickyard Brook Conservation Area could soon become a reality if the Passacommuck Conservation Trust meets its fundraising goals.

Members of the trust are scheduled to appear before the city's Community Preservation Act committee Thursday seeking \$185,000 for the Mutter Field Accessible Trail project. The entire project is estimated at around \$253,000; Passcommuck last June won a \$47,000 state recreational trails grant; the group has launched a capital campaign to fund the balance.

The 1,800-foot loop through a six-acre meadow would be accessed via ramp from a small parking area off East Street. An accessible picnic area would offer stunning views of Mount Tom that aren't currently available to the public, according to application materials.

The universally-accessible trail would provide a tranquil place in nature for the entire community to enjoy, said executive director Marty Klein. Anticipated users include the elderly, wounded veterans, people with wheelchairs, and members of the general public.

A similar trail was constructed last year by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service in Hadley.

As part of the plan, the East Green Street entrance to the 18-acre Brickyard Brook area would be improved as well. An extensive repair of a culvert and stream crossing in that area is currently underway. The entire trail project could be completed within the 2015 calendar year.

The Brickyard Brook Conservation Area features open fields, towering red oaks and white pines, meandering streams, and hiking trails. The streams converge to form Brickyard Brook, which eventually flows into the Lower Mill Pond near Pleasant and Ferry streets. The area is contiguous with Mountain View Farm, a protected spread of farmland, and located a short walk or bike ride from the city's downtown.

The state's Community Preservation Act, adopted by Easthampton in 2001, lets cities and towns fund open space, housing, historic preservation and recreation projects through a three percent property tax surcharge. The application cycle is year-round; funding decisions are made by a nine-member local committee.

The Pascommuck Trust, founded in 1982 and run by volunteers, maintains eight conservation areas in and around Easthampton that are free and open to the public.

The CPA committee meets Jan. 15 at 6:30 p.m. at the city's 50 Payson Ave. municipal building. Thursday night it will also consider a request from Easthampton Parks & Recreation for funding for a new soccer field at Nonotuck Park.

Updated on October 31, 2017 at 12:00 PM
Posted on October 31, 2017 at
8:00 AM

By Mary C. Serreze <<http://connect.masslive.com/staff/mserreze/posts.html>>

Special to The Republican

EASTHAMPTON -- The Passcommuck Conservation Trust recently asked Easthampton mayoral candidates Joy Winnie and Nicole LaChapelle for their views on environmental issues.

In responding to the land trust's questionnaire, each candidate said they value the city's natural beauty and would work to protect the environment.

Easthampton has "remained resilient and adapted to the changing times while protecting our open space and water supply for future generations," wrote Winnie, who noted that grew up on her grandfather's farm at 157 Holyoke St., where she still resides.

LaChapelle said she hiked and played on Mount Tom as a child in Holyoke, and now lives near the mountain as a homeowner in Easthampton. "Mt. Tom is my hometown mountain, and when I see it, I see home," wrote LaChapelle.

Winnie's answers tended to be short, while LaChapelle's responses were more discursive.

Asked to identify Massachusetts' and Easthampton's most pressing conservation issues, Winnie identified water protection. "We must protect our aquifer and our farm lands," she wrote.

LaChapelle said Massachusetts' biggest issues are "air and water, water and air," and wrote about rising sea levels, threats to public funding under President Donald Trump, and problems with Gov. Charlie Baker's Department of Conservation and Recreation, saying the state agency has used poor judgment "over and over again" while real priorities languish.

As for Easthampton's most pressing conservation issue, LaChapelle asserted there is growing interest in properties "once deemed too complicated and expensive to develop," and said "local, regional, state, and national agencies" must be pulled in with developers "to make sure these properties are developed with urgent diligence" because they "border fragile land and water under protection now and/or connect to land in conservation."

As for the use of city funds to buy, maintain, or preserve existing conservation land, neither gave any guarantees. Municipal budgets "are always a challenge," said LaChapelle, a sentiment echoed by Winnie.

"Each parcel should be assessed depending on its importance to our aquifer, agriculture, biodiversity and history," wrote Winnie. "I believe this must be addressed on a case-by-case basis," wrote LaChapelle.

"Again, I am committed to preserving our rich history in agriculture and protecting our natural resources, especially our water," said Winnie.

Difference emerged with a question about "working with landowners, land trusts, and state agencies" to preserve land on Mount Tom, much of which is protected by the state, but some of which remains in private hands and unprotected.

"Because my family owns some of the property to which you refer, I will legally and ethically recuse myself from this particular question," wrote Winnie. "However, as a city councilor I have always supported the efforts to protect our agricultural and open space lands."

LaChapelle said preserving the mountain would be a priority.

"A better protected Easthampton side of Mt. Tom is the best billboard for the city -- showing the high value we place on our history, environment, and city culture," LaChapelle wrote.

Each said they would support city funding for a staff position to enforce wetlands directives from the Conservation Commission. Winnie displayed knowledge that Easthampton recently entered into a municipal hiring agreement with Southampton for a shared conservation agent to do just that.

"A regional approach in this situation is a perfect match as Southampton shares our aquifer," Winnie wrote, saying she expects the agent will equitably enforce laws and regulations.

LaChapelle said she favors a conservation agent, and that the city "would benefit from having a dedicated person to support all our environmental efforts."

Winnie, who has been a Precinct 3 city councilor for 21 years, said she has voted to use Community Preservation Act monies to preserve conservation land and protect water resources. She said she enjoys gardening, and that her family likes to go camping, fishing, and hunting.

LaChapelle, who served on the Zoning Board of Appeals for nine years, noted that she has been endorsed by the Environmental League of Massachusetts, said her family likes to walk on the bike trail with their rescue dogs, and said she enjoys gardening.

"Few things are more humbling than cultivating, sharing and eating food you grow for yourself and others," LaChapelle wrote.

Marty Klein, a longtime member of the Passcommuck Trust board of directors, said the organization won't endorse a candidate, but wanted to learn more about their conservation views.

Klein said he hopes whoever is mayor will follow recommendations put forth in the city's master plan and open space plan. He said the plans identified certain parcels as high priorities for preservation.

"We're not against development," Klein said. "But there are certain properties that should be preserved for future generations."

The Passcommuck Trust stewards nearly 200 acres of land in Easthampton within more than a dozen conservation areas.

Winnie is a longtime city councilor and transportation manager for the Northampton public schools. LaChapelle is a local lawyer and former administrator of the Center for School Crisis Intervention and Assessment, a school for students with special needs.

The two are competing for the mayor's seat now held by Karen Cadieux, who is not running for a third two-year term. The election is set for Nov. 7.

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8/9/18

City eyes land buy for trail system

Plans afoot to purchase East Street property for trails leading up to top of Mount Tom

By **LUIS FIELDMAN**
Staff Writer

EASTHAMPTON — A long-held desire of the city to provide accessible trails leading up to a scenic view at the top of Mount Tom begins with the acquisition of a privately owned 12-acre land parcel on East Street.

The city is seeking a \$400,000 grant from the state to purchase a portion of land owned by Kay Burnett's estate that would be permanently protected as part of the overall Mt. Tom Trailhead Partnership Project. The land parcel, along with an adjacent 10-acre parcel, would be used for public recreation with handicap accessible trails as well as provide a lookout with views over the Oxbow Marina, according to City Planner Jeffrey Bagg.

"This would allow hikers looking for the New England Scenic Trail to park and go into Mount Tom and access the trail," Bagg said on Wednesday. "We want to provide access to a wider range of people along with avid hikers to get onto the trail... This is special and unique because you will be able to access Mount Tom."

The city worked in partnership with the Kestrel Land Trust, Pascomuck Conservation Land Trust, and the private landowner to secure an option agreement for the property that would allow the city one year to acquire the necessary funding to pur-

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chase it no later than September 2019.

"This is really a terrific project and represents a rare opportunity where the city, conservation groups, and the property owner have found common ground to work towards protecting a highly desirable piece of land and provide new access to recreational opportunities for the people of Easthampton and the region," Bagg said.

Currently, the city's Finance Subcommittee is reviewing a plan to use Community Preservation Act money to buy the property contingent on the grant being awarded. The City Council would have to approve it after the subcommittee, but the city will not know if it is awarded the grant until December.

"There will be no other action until the grant is awarded," Bagg said. "Then we enter the process of closing on the purchasing of the property over the winter, and then the city would formally take ownership next spring or summer ... It would not happen immediately, the trail building and parking lot building are contingent on grants from the state."

The Mt. Tom Trailhead Partnership Project would consist of a total of 23 acres across two parcels of land, the second being an 11.5-acre parcel that the Kestrel Land Trust is simultaneously trying to acquire.

With the purchase of the property being phase one of the project, the next phase

"We want to provide access to a wider range of people along with avid hikers to get onto the trail... This is special and unique because you will be able to access Mount Tom."

**JEFFREY BAGG, EASTHAMPTON
CITY PLANNER**

would be to acquire funding to create a parking area, a trailhead gathering area, informational kiosks, and access from the city to the State Reservation trail system and the New England National Scenic Trail. From the parking area up to a scenic viewpoint, the route will be accessible to users of all abilities.

This would fulfill several goals of the city's Open Space and Recreation Plan and master plan, Bagg said.

"(The project) is within the city's long-term vision," Bagg said. "People have been interested in the parcel for the past two decades, and although securing funding for trail access will take some time, we wouldn't be able to do it without getting the land acquisition first."

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Mt. Tom trail project moves ahead

City, trust close on land buy to create public access

By MICHAEL CONNORS
Staff Writer

EASTHAMPTON — A vision to have an official public access point to trails on Mount Tom in Easthampton has cleared a major hurdle as the city and Kestrel Land Trust acquired a total 23 acres of land for a park project.

The two separate parcels of land off East Street were purchased with a \$400,000 state grant, \$380,000 in Community Preservation Act funds and another \$85,000 from a state Conservation Partnership grant on June 24. The city purchased a 12.2-

acre parcel, while Kestrel purchased an adjacent 11.5-acre plot of land.

"I think the acquisition was a super-critical step," said City Planner Jeffrey Bagg, who noted that the area has been identified by the city for a recreational space for years.

Called the Mount Tom North Trailhead Park Project, the city is now moving toward securing funds for the design of the park. According to Bagg and Mark Wamsley, conservation and stewardship manager at Kestrel, the park is planned to include a new parking area on East Street, handicapped-accessible trails and a lookout area.

The park would serve as the city's

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STAFF PHOTO/KEVIN GUTTING

Easthampton City Planner Jeffrey Bagg looks over what he calls his "dream board" picturing two parcels of land that were recently saved from development to form the proposed Mount Tom North Trailhead Park.



STAFF PHOTO/KEVIN GUTTING

This is one of several towering oak trees on land recently saved from development between East Street and Mount Nonotuck in Easthampton.

Trail gets boost

FROM A1

first official trailhead to the Mount Tom State Reservation and the New England Scenic Trail, Bagg said. In addition to the accessible trail, another course on what's known as Little Mountain, situated on the Kestrel land, would be available for those looking for a more moderate hike.

As of now, hikers looking to gain access to the New England Scenic Trail have to park on the side of Underhill Avenue to hike.

"It's often that you see a lot of people, from Holyoke, too, parking on the sides of the road so they can't get in and they're putting themselves in a dangerous spot," Wamsley said. "So to have one more access point where they can pull over and be safe ... this was kind of a no-brainer."

The original landowner planned a residential subdivision on the land. However, the city, with help from Kestrel and the Pascommuck Conservation Land Trust in 2018, managed to secure an option agreement that allowed the city until September 2019 to purchase the land.

CPA funds were allocated to the project in October 2018 and, soon after that, the city was reimbursed in January by the state PARC grant.

"The state saw our commitment," Bagg said of the city's monetary contribution.

Kestrel's parcel is now protected and will not be developed. Wamsley said that, originally, Kestrel was denied the Conservation Partnership grant — prompting the organization and city to scramble to close an \$85,000 gap in funding for the site's purchase.

In early May, the state came back and told Kestrel that it would receive the much-needed funds if it could close on the property by June 30, because another project dropped out of the grant program.

"Suddenly it was 'Run to

Now the city is looking for avenues to raise funds for the design of the project's parking area and accessible trail.

get everything done to close on two properties on a huge project in a month and a half," Wamsley said, noting that the transaction was closed days before the deadline.

Now the city is looking for avenues to raise funds for the design of the project's parking area and accessible trail. The city had originally applied for a \$40,000 MassTrails grant this year to fund that design study, which was declined. Bagg believes the grant was not awarded because the city had not yet officially owned the property.

When the city does find money for a design consultation, Bagg said he is planning to have outreach meetings to get public input on what should go into the park. One area of the land could lend itself nicely to a pavilion area for people to sit and relax, he said.

In all, Bagg said the park project would not be finished for a few more years. There are even some short-term hurdles the city needs to face, namely securing required conservation restrictions approved by the City Council and the state. However both Bagg and Wamsley are confident attaining these will not be an issue.

"We were in the first phase of acquiring," Bagg said. "Now it's definitely an investment of time and effort on a longer view to make this become something that people can envision ... This is not immediate."

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