

**Community Preservation Act Proposal
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**Conservation and Planning
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Brunelle Project

Purpose of Acquisition

The Town of Amherst is partnering with the Kestrel Land Trust to purchase 16 acres of woodland, wetlands, and open field as an addition to the adjacent Plum Brook Conservation Area. This acquisition would enhance the conservation and recreation values of this local municipal conservation area. This is phase one of a two-part project to purchase the entire 26 acres owned by the Brunelle Family. If phase one is successful, additional funds would be requested next year for the remaining parcel.

Organizational Characteristics

Kestrel Land Trust and the Town of Amherst have been partnering on conservation projects for 42 years. Through this strong partnership, we have protected several thousand acres in Amherst, with funding from state, federal, and municipal programs. This grant proposal is our second joint grant application to the Mass Conservation Partnership Program.

Natural Characteristics and Ecological Values

The Brunelle's entire 26-acre property, which the Town of Amherst and Kestrel Land Trust seek to conserve, contains woodlands, wetlands, and a hayfield. It is bounded to the west by Muddy Brook. The 16-acre portion in Lot 2, the subject of this proposal, includes low-lying wet woodlands and a portion of the field, which flow into Plum Brook. The entire parcel is recognized by BioMap2 as Core Habitat and as Living Waters Critical Supporting Landscape. The property is adjacent to the Plum Brook Conservation Area and would link a corridor of conserved land from Mount Holyoke Range State Park to the Norwottuck Rail Trail. This project also serves larger regional conservation interests by protecting land along these two tributaries to the Fort River. The Fort River watershed connects the towns of Pelham, Amherst, and Hadley, and it is a primary area of focus for the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge. The Fort River also contains the Dwarf Wedgemussel, which is a federally endangered species protected by the US Fish and Wildlife Service.

Agriculture Potential

The agricultural field, which is partially included in phase I of this project, and entirely in phase II, is comprised of Amostown fine sandy loam, which is classified as prime farmland. The Town of Amherst intends to maintain the field for haying, and has developed an agricultural leasing program designed to protect the sensitive ecological values, including wetlands, by limiting agricultural use to farmers who use sustainable best practices.

Recreation Opportunities

The property includes a portion of one of Amherst's major long-distance trails —the KC Trail, which is named after Ken Cuddeback, an avid outdoorsman who chaired the Amherst Conservation Commission. The KC Trail is a six-mile footpath running from Old Farm Road near Route 9 in Amherst to Rattlesnake Knob on the Holyoke Range. Purchasing this land would guarantee public access for this portion of the trail along to the Plum Brook Conservation Area in South Amherst. From the woodland, one can view the Mount Holyoke Range, attributing sought after scenic values for those seeking outstanding opportunities for walking and hiking.

Open Space and Recreation Plan

The Town of Amherst's OSRP identifies thirteen unique areas that help define the character of Amherst, including the "Fort River Corridor, including Muddy Plum and Hop Brooks," where this property is located.

Amherst is tremendously diverse in its flora, landscapes, wildlife, and land use. Open space in the form of conservation land and farmland helps maintain that diversity in the face of mounting development pressures. Public conservation land also serves as an important amenity for those who do not have sufficient private land of their own on which to recreate and directly experience the outdoors.

The Town of Amherst is committed to protecting more land, which will help to preserve the community's open space and recreational opportunities even as new growth occurs. The Conservation Commission, with help from various town staff and departments, and through a valuable public input process, has determined the following to be Amherst's most urgent resource protection needs:

- To expand large blocks of existing preserved lands
- To make an interconnected trail system through innovative land use policies and zoning
- To acquire property for the protection of wetlands, the Town's drinking water supply, and to provide areas for the flood storage; and
- To manage Town land and facilities to maximize their value for wildlife habitat, recreation, scenery, natural resource preservation, and the enhancement of the Town's appearance.
- To support the local farming community

This project meets all of Amherst's OSRP goals.

Project Funding

Total Project Costs	\$163,000
Partnership Grant	<u>\$ 81,500</u>
CPA request	\$ 81,500

The Town and Kestrel Land Trust have submitted a Partnership Grant request for \$81,500 to the Department of Conservation Services and expect to receive a response to our application in October. If we are successful in covering all project costs we hope to complete the acquisition outlined in phase one by January 15, 2013.