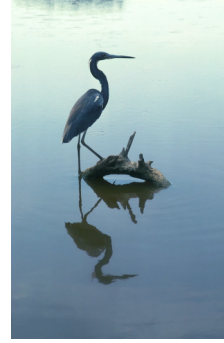


***South
Amherst
Conservation
Association***



**Re: Proposal for CPAC funds for an additional \$50,000-\$100,000
for the purchase of the old Rock Farm on South East Street**

December 4, 2012

Dear Community Preservation Act Committee,

We are writing to propose that the CPA Committee consider setting aside funds totally \$100,000-\$150,000 for the purchase of the old Rock Farm: 7.4 acres of land located at 650-652 South East Street. We write in support of the \$50,000 being requested by the Conservation Commission for this land and urge that the CPA consider increasing that amount to \$100,000-\$150,000. This land used to be the site of a dairy farm owned by the Rock family. The South Amherst Conservation Association, which has been trying to preserve this land for more than eight years, is pleased to be part of a broad coalition of groups working together to try to save this land at this critical juncture in which the land will be up for public auction on December 17, 2012. For more information and photos of the land, please visit our website at: <http://www.filbert.com/saca/>

This land has been under threat of development for three generations, first by developer Otto Papparazzo; next by developer Jeffrey Flower; and most recently by Scott Nielsen. We now working on a scenario that could involve one or more conservation buyers buying a lot to build on, with the remaining land, which has the most environmental value, being preserved for conservation and recreation. Since this property abuts the Norwottuck Rail Trail, there is the possibility of considering part of this funding as a recreation project, possibly with a little pull-off next to the Rail Trail with benches.

Conservation Value of the Land

1. **Listed as Priority Habitat:** The Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program (NHESP) maps show part of this land as being within a “Priority Habitat” zone entitled to protection by the NHESP.

2. **Valuable Wetlands and Vernal Pool:** This area contains wetlands, including a certified vernal pool, see map at this link:
<http://www.filbert.com/saca/WetlandsDelineation.pdf>

A vernal pool is a body of water entitled to special protection under state and local law since it is home to certain species that can only survive in the fragile vernal pool ecosystem. Numerous wood frogs, painted turtles, and spotted turtles have been spotted in this vernal pool, the latter being a species that was, until recently, listed as a species of Special Concern by the Natural Heritage and Endangered Species.

3. **Wildlife Habitat:** Wildlife spotted on this parcel of land include milkweed snake, coyotes, voles (which are the staple food of red-tailed hawks, bobcat and coyotes), and short-tailed weasel. A moose and wildcat were also seen near this area at the Hop Brook. There are also federally endangered dwarf wedge mussels in the nearby Hop Brook
4. **Beautiful views:** This parcel of land has beautiful views of the Holyoke Range. The Open Space Plan for the Town of Amherst documented that views at the confluence of the Fort River and the Hop Brook (very near this parcel of land) were targeted for preservation. The views from the Rail Trail are also valuable, particularly since preservation of this piece of land would complete a greenway bordering the Rail Trail which extends for miles in each direction.
5. **Potential Farming:** If the Town acquired this parcel, it could be leased for haying or other farming purposes. (For many years, this parcel of land was a working dairy farm and in more recent years it was hayed.)
6. **Protecting contiguous farmland:** This parcel borders the Thistle Bloom Farm (formerly the Mad Woman Farm) which consists of APR land, land the town has invested in preserving as available farmland.

7. **Recreation Value of the Land:**

8. **Supporting recreation on the Rail Trail:** The Pioneer Valley Chapter of MassBike has said they support CPA funding to preserve this land. This land directly abuts the Rail Trail at the point where Mill Lane intersects South East Street. Acquiring this land for conservation would help complete the greenway of miles of protected land abutting the Rail Trail running from Rt. 116 to the Amherst town line. Thousands who use the Rail Trail every year would benefit from this acquisition. (Below is a link to a map showing how all the lands abutting the Rail Trail are protected for miles in each direction, except for this piece of land: <http://www.filbert.com/saca/greenway.htm>)
9. **Hiking, dog-walking and skiing:** There is an old dirt road on this land, labeled the Old Farm Road on older maps, which leads from South East Street to the

Brickyard Conservation area on the other side of the Rail Trail, directly across from this parcel of land. That road was used for decades by Amherst residents (--hikers, skiers, dog-walkers, hunters, and children running to put pennies on the old railroad tracks).

10. **Bird-Watching:** The biodiversity of this area is recognized by long-term birders in the area who have spotted the following species at or around this land: red-tailed hawks, cardinals, mocking birds, meadowlarks, Carolina wrens, bar owl, bobolinks, rose-breasted grosbeaks, Baltimore orioles, and hooded mergansers. This land is also a nesting area for birds.

11. **Hunting:** Hunters used the old dirt road that used to cross this land as the access to 89+ acres of the Brickyard Conservation Area which, some decades back, had been stocked with pheasants by the Town during hunting season.

This land is under urgent threat of development and the Town now as a unique opportunity to acquire it for conservation and/or recreation at an auction where it will likely sell for significantly less than appraised value. The hope is that CPA funds could be used to leverage other funds from the community, from the Department of Conservation and Recreation, from private buyers of one or two lots, and from the community. There have been meetings with all these parties discussing fundraising efforts to acquire this land. The funding picture is tight but with between \$100,000-\$150,000 in CPA funds, this project is doable and would be a valuable parcel of land for the Town to acquire.

Please do not hesitate to contact us if you have any questions or would like additional information.

Sincerely,

Janet McGowan & Carol Gray
On behalf of the South Amherst Conservation Association