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**COMMUNITY PRESERVATION ACT COMMITTEE**

**COMMUNITY PRESERVATION ACT COMMITTEE (CPAC)  
REPORT TO FALL SPECIAL TOWN MEETING NOVEMBER 2013  
ADDITIONAL RECOMMENDATIONS FOR FISCAL YEAR 2014**

The Community Preservation Act Committee is pleased to present this report to Fall Town Meeting.

At the Annual Town Meeting there was \$602,483 recommended, approved and voted. This project was brought to CPAC in September 2013, which was recommended in addition to the FY2014 funding year. The opportunity to match grant or gift funds with local CPA dollars makes this very compelling proposal.

**ARTICLE 11**

**Community Preservation Act – Open Space Acquisition**

**A. SAUL PROPERTY, \$41,785 (from CPA Fund Balance) (CPAC Vote 4-1-3)  
(Conservation Commission voted 6-0-0)**

**Purpose of Acquisition**

The Saul property is in the East Amherst Village Center in close proximity to the Fort River Elementary School, densely populated neighborhoods, and near public transportation (see attached maps) . This center is a priority for revitalization, with the Town making significant public infrastructure improvements in recent years as well as helping to develop affordable housing. A significant component of this vision is to integrate open space—community gardens, walking trails, space for passive recreation—into the village center.

The approximate 19-acre property is centrally located and within walking distance of much of the village center. The land is not permanently protected or in Chapter 61 and part of the property could be developed in the future. With more than 1,400ft of frontage along the Fort River these parcels present a unique opportunity for preservation and public access. The Fort River is home to the federally endangered dwarf wedge mussel and many state-listed species of fish and turtles. To the east, north and south of the property are farms protected through the APR program totaling 120 acres. The property and one immediately to the south are the only unprotected working landscapes in this section of town.

The Town of Amherst envisions active community engagement with this property, taking advantage of its proximity to the school and village center and adapting its agricultural heritage to create an outdoor learning center. A new model for the community garden

would be implemented on the property where there are no individual plots, rather a larger tillable area that all residents could help tend. Grow Food Amherst has already expressed support for this effort and is willing to assist with the community outreach and project development. Experienced farmers, professionals and educators (from the local colleges and UMass) could serve as mentors to help interested citizens in this demonstration garden, and would also hold educational workshops to teach young farmers about crop production, working with natural habitat, and how to grow a business.

A second component of the Town's vision is a series of incubator farm spaces established to assist younger and/or new farmers in the area. The Amherst Conservation Commission would enter into license agreements with start-up agricultural ventures for 1-2 acre plots. Experienced farmers would also volunteer to mentor these individuals for a period of time (perhaps the length of the license, which could have a 1-3 year term) to show them sustainable organic farming techniques. The benefits of such a program ensure that those participants who reach the end of their license are more likely to have success when establishing their own farms elsewhere in the region.

A third component of the outdoor education will be the design of an interpretive trail around the property that has informational stations to help residents learn about farming and the value of the wetland and river resource areas. Included in this phase would be the installation of a footbridge over a stream on the northern property boundary to connect the site with the Fort River Elementary School. School-aged children would then have direct access to a living classroom, just as young and new farmers would have the opportunity to learn from experienced professionals.

Because much of the property is in Biomap 2 Core Habitat and Critical Natural Landscape, Priority Habitat for Rare and Endangered Species, the 100-year floodplain, the Rivers Protection Act buffer and a section in the southeast corner over a medium-yield aquifer, it provides a very relevant example how modern farming practices can be used to avoid negative impacts to wetlands and rivers. There are also two vernal pools on the interior of the property that could be used to teach farmers about wetland regulations and the school-aged children about the different habitats and ecosystems.

These uses would further many goals from the Town's Master Plan and Open Space and Recreation Plan (OSRP), and would achieve one of Amherst's sustainability goals, and the main goal of Grow Food Amherst-- creating greater access to local, fresh produce for all members of the community. The property would have activities that could be enjoyed by all ages and abilities, attracting residents of the village center and beyond; it would be the only trail and off-road path within walking distance of the village center. East Amherst is home to a large portion of low- and moderate-income residents and Environmental Justice populations who would be within walking distance of the property, and would be one of a few opportunities to get outside to garden, take a walk or have a picnic.

The acquisition of the Saul property is consistent with the OSRP and the Conservation Commission has voted to recommend the project for CPA funding. A Local Acquisition for Natural Diversity (LAND) Grant has been submitted to the Executive Office of

October 18, 2013

Energy and Environmental Affairs and the Town should receive word on our application in October. The project has the support of the Superintendent of Schools and The Kestrel Land Trust.

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**Respectfully submitted:**

Peter Jessop (Chair)	Housing Authority	549-1440
Mary Streeter (Vice Chair)	at Large	253-2441
Ellen Kosmer	at Large	253-7690
Jim Brissette	LSSE Commission	
Sandra Anderson	Planning Board	695-8969
Vacant	Historical Commission	
Paris Boice	Conservation Commission	687-2048
Jim Oldham	at Large	
Marilyn Blaustein	at Large	253-5963