

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

The Town of Belchertown has an important opportunity to acquire a large tract of land—88 acres adjacent to the University of Massachusetts Cadwell Memorial Forest, Quabbin Reservoir and adjacent to existing town conservation areas, Knights Pond, scenic vistas and a popular place for hiking, cross country skiing and horseback riding. The conservation goals for this property are to protect a large tract of contiguous forestland and watershed property. These 88 acres, located at the intersection of Gold St. and Gulf Rd., (see attached map), contains wildlife habitat and connectivity between the 1,200 acre Cadwell Memorial Forest, Pelham Mass and the Quabbin Reservoir. This property is also adjacent to about 72 acres of Springfield's watershed lands, Knights Pond and the Reed Farm Conservation Area, (93 acres). This property purchase will result in a direct link and wildlife corridor to the Quabbin Reservoir, consisting of 38.60 square miles of continuous open space. This project is a collaborative effort between the Kestrel Land Trust, a non-profit land trust, Belchertown, Pelham, Springfield Water District and the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. At the May 14, 2012 Town meeting, residents unanimously supported this land acquisition, (please see attached town meeting warrant article and vote) and the attached budget. The Belchertown Community Preservation Committee has approved \$160,000.00 towards the purchase price. Belchertown has never been in a more favorable climate to complete this land purchase! The property also contains the following natural resource values:

Water Resources: The streams located on this property are contributors to the aquifer recharge area of Knights Pond. Knights Pond is a back-up drinking water supply for the Ludlow Reservoir, providing water for the Springfield Water District, (please see their letter of support). In addition, wetlands located on this property are the headwaters of Scarborough Brook which drains directly into the Lawrence Swamp aquifer. This aquifer services the towns of Pelham, Belchertown and Amherst. Communities are connected by water and this project is consistent with the goals of the Massachusetts Watershed Initiative by helping to protect a critical watershed serviced by three towns and one city, protecting critical forest-land and sharing the responsibility for watershed protection and forest management.

Biodiversity and Resource Protection: These 88 acres, located at the intersection of Gold St. and Gulf Rd., (see attached map), contains wildlife habitat and connectivity between the 1,200 acres of the Cadwell Memorial Forest, Pelham Mass and the Quabbin Reservoir. More importantly, these parcels are Bio-Map 2, Critical Natural Landscape, which is a large road-less area. Rolling terrain of unbroken upland forest including stands of mature oak, white pine, maple and hemlock cover the vast majority of this property, (please see attached photos). As such, the property provides habitat for more common species of wildlife, such as black bear, moose, deer, turkey, otter and bobcat. Residents routinely report moose roaming through the property. **These parcels provide a very active wildlife corridor, connecting the Quabbin Reservoir to the Cadwell Memorial Forest, (Mt. Lincoln) to Springfield Water Districts Lands and Belchertown's Conservation Areas, (please see the attached map).**

Landscape Conservation: The conservation goals for this property are to protect a large tract of contiguous forestland as a town forest. This property is also adjacent to about 72 acres of Springfield's watershed lands and the Reed Farm Conservation Area, (93 acres). This property purchase will result in a direct link to the Quabbin Reservoir, consisting of 38.60 square miles of continuous open space. The University of Massachusetts CAPS analysis recognizes this area of Belchertown at the highest levels of ecological integrity because it is a large road-less area. It also addresses the need for Belchertown to protect the town's productive resources by guiding and directing growth to those areas suitable for development, while protecting agricultural and forest management of groundwater and surface water supply for public consumption, wildlife habitat and recreation.

Recreational Opportunities: The New England National Scenic Trail runs adjacent to this property. The NET originates in Connecticut and provides a continuous route through the Connecticut River Valley to its Northern terminus at Mt. Monadnock in New Hampshire. This property purchase could permanently protect a portion of the New England National Scenic Trail, depending upon the future location of the re-route through the Quabbin Reservoir. This property also contains an existing snowmobile trail which is currently maintained by the

Belchertown Snowmobile club. This property is located in an area of Belchertown that has been known for its rural, scenic and agricultural character and beauty, (please see attached photos).

Threat: The property owner has subdivided this property into numerous building lots. The original farm house and 12 acres have already been subdivided and sold to a private individual. With several thousand feet of frontage on both sides of a public road, this property is highly vulnerable to fragmentation through “subdivision approval not required”, or ANR, development. Belchertown remains a fast growing town, and when the market comes back this landowner will be ready to act, (please see Town Planners letter of support). By protecting this area, we can protect valuable forest land, maintain an important wildlife corridor, and protect drinking water supplies for three towns, while allowing for passive recreation.

Conservation Partnership: This project is an exemplary collaborative effort between non-profit land trusts, Towns of Belchertown, Pelham, State agencies, Springfield Water District and private landowners, all combined to provide a broad range of support for this project. The Kestrel Land Trust has provided a bridge loan of \$5,000.00 towards the Purchase Option and has pledged to assist with any additional fund-raising. Belchertown has worked with the Kestrel Land Trust numerous times and always with a positive outcome for land protection, (please see their attached letter of support). Springfield Water district strongly supports the protection of lands adjacent to their water supply area, (please see their attached letter of support). Protecting this property advances the purposes of regional cooperation and implements directly the principles of smart growth and water supply protection. This proposed open space acquisition by the Town of Belchertown remains consistent with regional plans and policies.

MUNICIPAL OPEN SPACE AND RECREATION PLAN

The rationale for preserving the Meads Corner Conservation Area property is reported in Belchertown’s Open Space and Recreation Plan, which was updated in June 2008. Incorporated in the Open Space plan is a survey entitled “2000 Master Plan Survey Results”. The survey results indicated that 100% of all respondents stressed the need for open space protection, ranking protection of drinking water supplies as the most important value. Goal VII, (page 52) includes, Objective 1, “Protect Unique Habitats”. Additional recommendations from the 2008 Open Space Plan address the need for Belchertown to protect the town’s productive resources by “Guiding and directing growth to those areas suitable for development, while protecting agricultural and forest management of groundwater and surface water for public consumption, wildlife habitat and recreation”, (page 32). Goal V (page #51) also stresses the need to develop and manage town lands for “both multiple use trail systems and passive use”. We strongly believe that this land purchase meets these goals.

Please refer to page 22 for details about Belchertown’s vegetation and forest lands. For problems that have been addressed by the Town, please refer to Section 9, entitled Five-Year Action Plan, (page 53) to review in detail how the Town plans to meet these challenges. Also the 2009 Belchertown Community Plan states that residents identify as priorities the preservation of open space and preserving the Town’s rural character.

SCORP

The proposed purchase of the Meads Corner Conservation Area property would meet two of the top four inferred recreational needs as outlined in the Mass Outdoors 2000 study for the Connecticut River Valley Region. The highest inferred need in the Connecticut River Valley Region is to protect land for public access. The fourth ranked need of new trails and greenways would be satisfied by protecting a section of the New England National Scenic Trail, which is currently threatened by development and a private property owner who demands the NET be re-located off their property. In addition, we would be maintaining an existing snowmobile trail which has been in use for many years. Hunting will also be allowed on this property.