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Resource preservation is goal of new land trust

By LINDA HIRSH
Courant Staff Writer

EAST WINDSOR — Twelve residents representing three of the four towns in the Four-Town Land Trust agreed Monday that they should strive to preserve any natural resources, whether along stream belts or in woodland or farmland.

The newly formed group's certificate of incorporation supports preserving for the public any land or water that may contain plant and animal life in scenic, natural and historical sites, said acting Chairman George Grant of the Melrose section.

Calling that designation "awfully big," Grant asked the residents what specific type of land they would pursue for preservation.

Grant said he favored setting farmland aside. Jerry Stage of Stafford Springs, however, cited niches of woodland along the border of the Shenipsit State Forest that are in danger of being taken over for development.

Elizabeth Grant of the Melrose section said the group should maintain broad-based goals to "get the most support from the most people."

Somers resident William Reynolds, one of the group's incorporators, agreed. "We should strive for two things — conserving farmland and woodland," he said.

There are more than 90 trusts already functioning in the state,

most of them single-town groups, according to a land steward from the Nature Conservancy.

Andy Zepp, who set up the Middlesex Land Trust in Middlesex County, told a group of 30 participants at a June meeting that in 1986 land trusts in the state owned a total of 16,000 acres and another 11,200 acres were protected by conservation easements.

The land is received by gift, purchase or conservation easements, in which the owner retains the land but cannot subdivide because the trust is granted development rights, Zepp said.

At Monday's meeting, the participants also approved the name Four-Town Land Trust, to encompass East Windsor, Enfield, Ellington and Somers, although residents from other towns could join the group and land from other towns would be considered for acquisition.

In addition to the goals, the group also discussed the uses of the land that would be acquired.

Stage said he was concerned with a potential conflict in using acquired land to preserve wildlife and plant species and using it for recreational purposes.

But Grant said the two uses can be compatible.

"You can preserve rare species and have a trail to look at the plants and animals," he said, distinguishing between active and passive recreation such as hiking.