

LANDMARK

The newsletter of the Northern Connecticut Land Trust



Number 31

September 2016

Annual Meeting Sunday, Sept. 18

The pot luck dinner and Annual Meeting, open to all members and guests, will be held at the Somers Congregational Church on Rt 190 in Somers Sunday evening starting at 5:30, beginning with a social time followed by dinner starting at 6:00. A short business meeting will follow to elect officers and directors for 2017, followed by a presentation by member Ginny Patsun on her experiences as a Peace Corps volunteer over the past several years. Please bring a dish to share, plus your own plates and utensils and any special beverage you might want.

This year's nominating committee has put forth the following slate of Officers and Directors for consideration. Officers serve for one year, while Directors serve 3 year terms. Additional nominations will be recognized at the meeting before voting.

President – Patrice Carson, Somers
1st V. President – Wes Smith, Somers
2nd V. President – Rick Dewey, Stafford
Treasurer – Jim Gage, Ellington
Secretary – Paul Lagel, Enfield

Directors:

Re-election: Gail Faherty, Vernon Martin Smith, Somers Albert Grant, Melrose
New Director : Ginny Patsun

The following revisions to the bylaws will also be voted on for approval:

Article I, Section 8: Notice. Not fewer than ten days prior to each meeting, notice shall be mailed to all members setting forth the date, time, and place of such meeting and indicating the nature of the business to be transacted.

Article I, Section 8 proposed update: All members shall be notified in a timely manner, and such notification shall show the date, time, and place of such meeting and indicate the nature of the business to be transacted.

Article III, Section 1: Officers. The officers of the Corporation shall be a President, First Vice President, Second Vice President, Recording Secretary, Corresponding Secretary, and Treasurer. All officers shall be elected by a majority of the members present at the Annual Meeting or by the Board of Directors whenever a vacancy occurs. Each officer shall serve until a successor is elected and qualified. The Board may from time to time appoint such other officers as it deems necessary.

Article III, Section 1 proposed update: The officers of the corporation shall be a President, First Vice President, Second Vice President, Secretary, and Treasurer. All officers shall be elected by a majority of the members present at the Annual Meeting or by the Board of Directors whenever a vacancy occurs. Each officer shall serve until a successor is elected and qualified. The Board may from time to time appoint such other officers as it deems necessary.

CT Farmland Preservation Finishes Successful Year

The Connecticut Department of Agriculture managed a record 21 farmland preservations during the fiscal year that ended June 30. Digging deeper into the numbers, the state is on average paying less and handling smaller properties than five years ago, records show.

During fiscal 2016, the state paid out \$9.7 million to preserve 1,636 acres, according to data supplied by the agriculture department. The overall dollar amount was the highest in the past 11 fiscal years for which the department keeps records. The acreage was the second highest, topped only by the 1,706 acres purchased in fiscal year 2011 for \$9.4 million. Records show that the average size of a preserved farm was 78 acres in fiscal 2016, down from 95 acres five years ago. During the past 11 years the program has paid \$61.6 million to preserve 11,186 acres, an average of \$5,507 per acre.

Through its voluntary Farmland Preservation Program, which started in 1978, the state gives money to farmers for the development rights to their properties accompanied by easements guaranteeing the land remains agricultural. The farmers continue to pay local property taxes. Funding comes from a variety of sources including the State Bond Commission, the main organ for handling the state's long-term debt; the U.S. Department of Agriculture; fees collected on registration of land records; and from municipalities and private land trusts. The program is a way to maintain farming and the rural character of some parts of Connecticut while also equalizing competition in the arena of land acquisitions, preservation advocates and participating farmers say. Others say it makes land prices higher than they would be otherwise.

Farmers in the most rural counties are the biggest users of the program. During the past 11 years, New London County leads the state with 32 preservations followed by Litchfield County with 24 and Windham County, also known as The Quiet Corner, in third with 23.

The program's long-term goal is to preserve 130,000 acres statewide, according to the Department of Agriculture's website. As of December 2015, there were 315 farms in preservation totaling 41,500 acres. Figures for what has been spent during the program's 38 years were not immediately available. The department celebrated its 300th farm preservation in 2014.

Meetinghouse Hill Field

Across Route 30 from the Vernon Center Middle School is a field. The field has a red barn at one corner, rows of corn stretching to Cemetery Road and a small herd of beef cattle. Running up the left side of the field from the barn and over a fieldstone bridge is a barely visible cow path. What appears to be a typical farm field is actually one of the most historic properties in Vernon.

Early settlers in 1762 chose to build their first meetinghouse at the top of this hill. Families walked along dirt roads from their farms to church each Sunday. The road they took from the west for 63 years climbed what came to be known as Old Meetinghouse Hill.

The road to Hartford became an official turnpike in 1801 and with improvements was straightened bypassing the field. When the new church at Vernon Center was built in 1826, the road up the hill, still unpaved, was abandoned by the town.

The Strong family bought the field with its red barn about 1900 using it primarily for their herd of dairy cows for over a hundred years. A spring in the field supplied water to the Tolland County Temporary Home for Children near Center Road.

To preserve this important piece of Vernon's heritage, Meetinghouse Hill, LLC was formed by local residents and purchased the 33-acre property with the intention that the land continue as working farmland and that the public have access to the path and the view over the valley. The LLC is managed independently by one of the Trust members, and the Trust is supporting the effort.

The story of Meetinghouse Hill reminds us of where we come from, where we are today, and what we want for tomorrow. Here you can walk on the same unpaved path used by the Podunks and our Colonial ancestors.

For more go to MeetinghouseHill.org

Trust Finalizes Modisette Property Acquisition

The Northern Connecticut Land Trust scored a considerable victory for local conservation with the addition of a 120-acre Stafford property the last week of June. The parcel, which surrounds Culver Pond off of Gilbert Road, was the residence of Culver Modisette, an outdoor sports business owner, author, and former president of the land trust. "He very much wanted the property to be protected," said Jim Gage, treasurer for the land trust. Gage added that, during his time as president, Modisette was instrumental in helping the group grow and acquire new land. "Culver came in with experience in environmental groups," Gage said. "He came in and really changed the organization. He inspired the board to greater things."

To avoid the appearance of any conflict of interest, Modisette's heirs conducted a bargain sale. The property had an appraised value of \$560,000, but was sold for \$420,000. The purchase was funded by the Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection "Open Space and Watershed Matching Grant" program, the Cox Family Fund at the Boston Foundation, the Bafflin Foundation, the Fields Pond Foundation, and friends of the land trust. The land trust's purchase does

Nearby Town Land Preservation Efforts Get Headlines

The Town of South Windsor recently decided to pursue a \$2 million purchase of development rights to farmland along old Main Street. A town council member noted that over the last 25 years every referendum regarding open space and farmland protection has passed by large margins, making these efforts a high priority. A survey conducted by the town also showed 76% of respondents said the town should preserve more farmland. Under this effort, farmers maintain ownership of their properties but become limited in what they may do with the land in the future as related to development or sale for development plans, in hopes of keeping farmers in town and maintaining their agricultural activities.

In Glastonbury, the town council voted unanimously to acquire 718 acres from the Metropolitan District for \$15 million, with the intent of keeping a majority of it open space. The Town plans to empty its acquisition fund of \$2.3M and supplement it with general fund dollars to combine with a Ct DEEP grant for the acquisition. Most of the land has been viewed as potential open space since the 1970's, with the largest portion a 540-acre parcel off Hebron Rd and Keeney St along the Manchester

border. Also included is 100 acres along Cold Brook Road, including Cold Brook Reservoir.

not include the house and several buildings on the northern end of the pond.

The newly acquired territory contains upland forest, a piece of the pond's shoreline, and a section of Rockadundee Brook, which feeds the Scantic River. A marsh on the property is home to a variety of ducks, great blue herons, otters, muskrats, and beavers. A parking area will be set up in a cleared, flat area on Gilbert Road to provide access for passive recreation like hiking and bird watching. Land trust volunteers plan to convert the property's existing woods roads into a network of trails. Fishing would be allowed in the stream, where brook trout can be found, but not in the pond.

The addition of the Culver Pond plot brings the total acreage owned by the Trust to over 1500 acres, and makes it the third land trust holding in the town of Stafford. The others are the wooded, 2-acre Scott property on the east bank of the Willimantic River and the White farm, a conservation easement on the land of resident Robert White.

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MassConn Receives Forest Legacy Grant

This year, the MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership received a forest Legacy grant of \$1,430,000 from the US Forest Service. This will add to the \$2,505,000 Forest Legacy grant received last year for a total of \$3,935,000.

The grants are for the purchase of development rights on 1,500 acres of upland forest in Stafford, CT. The development rights will be held by the CT DEEP to ensure that the land will be protected in perpetuity. The MassConn Sustainable Forest Partnership serves 38 towns in northeastern CT and south central MA. It is a partnership of 26 local, regional and national conservation organizations and is dedicated to the preservation of forest land and for outreach to forest owners to encourage sustainable forest stewardship and preservation. www.opacum.org/massconn.

The NCLT is a charter member of the MassConn partnership and has been represented on the MassConn Steering Committee since it began. We worked with the partnership to encourage landowners to protect large forested properties that are now part of this project. The project is of special importance to the NCLT since Stafford, CT is one of the towns we serve.



LANDMARK: *Newsletter of the*
Northern Connecticut Land Trust
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2nd V. President

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Gail Faherty, Vernon

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George Grant, Somers

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Don Smith, Somers

Paul Lagel, Enfield

Richard Bailey, Somers

Martin Smith, Somers

If you have a friend interested in joining the Trust and supporting the work of protecting our natural resources, please pass this newsletter on to them. Contributions are tax deductible.

MEMBERSHIPS:	Individual	\$25	Family	\$35
			Sustaining	\$50
			Patron	\$100
			Benefactor	\$1000

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

PHONE: _____ **E_MAIL:** _____

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If you would like to volunteer to work projects such as fund-raising, trail maintenance, newsletter, or others, please check **YES** ___ **NO** ___