

Barker's Farm Conservation Project

Summary of Warrant Article 11

Stratham voters will have their say on the future of the Barker's Farm, as the Town Meeting in March 14, 2017 will be asked to vote on Article 11 which would appropriate up to \$400,000 to help acquire conservation easements on the farm. This fact sheet summarizes the project and seeks to provide information to Stratham voters and the general public. The fact sheet was produced by the Southeast Land Trust of New Hampshire and Stratham Conservation Commission.

Where is Barker's Farm?

Barker's Farm is located on busy Route 33 in Stratham and is one of the region's most productive vegetable farms with a long history of serving the region. Undoubtedly many Stratham residents have stopped by at the farmstand for fresh corn or picked up their favorite veggies at the Exeter Farmer's Market. But not many know that the 84 acres that make up the farm and associated forestland abut the popular Gordon Barker Town Forest and Stratham Hill Park area. And mountain bikers and hikers in the area's trails have unwittingly crossed the forestland of Barker's Farm while enjoying the trail network.

It is fitting that the year in which the Barker Family has agreed to permanently conserve the farm is also the 100th anniversary of Barker's Farm. Purchased back in 1917 by Willard Barker, the third generation of Barkers built a small farm stand in the 1960s and primarily operated the farm as a truck farm, growing produce and bringing it to Portsmouth to sell. By 1985, Gordon Barker and his wife Edie built a new farm stand, adding greenhouses and outbuilding, and increasing the farmed land from 10 to 40 acres. Sadly, Gordon, a leader of conservation efforts in Stratham, died unexpectedly in 2009. Edie now manages the farm with assistance from their daughter Forrest.

How will the farm be conserved?

The Barker's Farm will be conserved through two conservation easements held by SELT and the Town of Stratham. The first easement will be on ~50 acres that are the working farm with a second easement on the back ~33.5 acres that are forestland.

Why conserve this farm? What are the benefits of conserving this land?

- **Local foods, local farms:** Barker's Farm is an active, working farm that grows fresh fruit and vegetables for Stratham and the region. It is a vibrant part of the local food system. Local foods need local farmland, and conserved farmland offers the best chance for continued farming.
- **Public access for outdoor recreation:** Barker's Farm abuts the complex of conservation lands associated with Stratham Hill Park, and its forest includes part of the vast trail system enjoyed by visitors. Trails will continue to be open for public use under the

conservation easement. As a working farm, the active farmland may be posted at the owner's discretion to prevent damage to crops or livestock.

- **Wildlife habitat:** The wildlife habitat on the property, including the Appalachian Oak Pine forest, is of statewide importance as identified by the New Hampshire Fish and Game Department's NH Wildlife Action Plan.
- **Water quality:** The property includes 1,500 feet along Jewell Hill Brook, which flows to the Squamscott River and Great Bay.

Project Details

Who will own the land?

The Barker Family will continue to own the land, pay property taxes, and make management decisions subject to the limitations of the conservation easements. The family may sell or gift the land to another party in the future and all future owners will be subject to the conservation easements and restrictions.

What is a conservation easement?

A conservation easement is a legal document that establishes a set of limitations on the future use and development of a property. Conservation easements generally prohibit additional residential, commercial, and industrial development and activities (such as new houses, mining, and extraction activities) while allowing compatible uses such as agriculture, forestry, and outdoor recreation. A conservation easement is perpetual and binding on the current and all future owners. A conservation easement is granted by the landowner and accepted by a qualified non-profit organization or government agency who then agrees to monitor activities and uses of the property and enforce the limitations in perpetuity.

Will the trails on the Barker's Farm continue to be available to the public?

Yes. The conservation easement will allow the continued use and maintenance of trails that cross the forested portion of Barker's Farm. The property may be posted against public access to prevent damage cropland or livestock, or during active forest management.

Funding and Tax Impact

What is the total project cost?

The total cost to conserve the farm is ~\$1.1 million. Many thanks are due to the Barker Family for their agreement to sell the conservation easements for \$675,000 less than their appraised value, a generous act showing their commitment to keeping farmland for the future! The total cost includes the following:

Cost	Amount	Note
Purchase price of Conservation Easements	\$1,000,000	Represents the negotiated purchase price, which is <u>\$675,000 LESS than the appraised fair market value</u> of the conservation easements
Transaction costs and project management	\$76,800	Property survey, legal, title, hazardous waste review, appraisals, project management, etc.
Long-term stewardship	\$33,600	To support annual monitoring and if necessary, enforcement, of the both easements
Total	\$1,110,400	

What are the other costs than the purchase price?

Beyond the purchase price, there are transaction and project management costs and stewardship funds necessary to complete the conservation of the Barker’s Farm. These include property boundary survey, title research, legal services, appraisal fees and more.

How was the purchase price determined?

The purchase price was negotiated after receipt of an appraisal completed by an independent, state licensed appraiser hired by SELT, the Stratham Conservation Commission and the family. The Barker Family has agreed to sell the conservation easement *for \$675,000 less than the appraised value.*

How will the Town’s funds be used?

The Town’s requested funds represent ~36% of the total cost. The Town’s requested funding will only be spent if the project occurs and will be used to support the purchase price and associated costs of the project.

What are the other sources of funding?

SELT is confident that, with the Town of Stratham’s commitment, matching funds from private and public sources will be secured. To date, SELT has submitted a proposal to the US Natural Resources Conservation Service’s Agricultural Land Easement program for \$500,000 (decisions are likely by June 2017). SELT anticipates submitting an application to the NH Land and Community Heritage Investment Program (LCHIP) with decisions in November. Private donations and foundation grants will also be sought to close the gap.

What happens to the Town’s money if the rest of the funding is not raised?

The Town’s funds will only be spent if the project is funded and completed. The appropriated funds will remain in possession of the Town until the closing date of the conservation easements. In the event the easement purchases do not occur, the Town’s appropriation would be transferred in full to the Town’s unrestricted fund balance, available to reduce the Town’s tax rate in future years.

How much money does the warrant article request?

Warrant Article 11 requests \$400,000 in total funding from the Town of Stratham, including \$25,000 from the Conservation Fund and the remainder from general taxation.

How much will it impact the tax rate? What will it cost me?

If the proposed warrant article passes, the estimated tax impact is \$0.30 per \$1,000 of assessed value. This is a one-time tax impact for one year. You can determine the estimated cost for you by dividing the Town's assessed value of your property by \$1,000 and multiplying it by \$0.30. For a home in Stratham assessed at \$350,100, the proposed appropriation would have a one-time impact of approximately \$104.85.

If this passes, what are the Town's long-term obligations and costs?

Under the proposed structure, the Town of Stratham will hold an executory interest in both conservation easements. An executory interest is a permanent legal interest that provides the Town with the choice, but not the obligation, to enforce the terms of the conservation easement should SELT fail to do so. SELT, as the holder of the easement, has the perpetual responsibility to monitor and enforce the conservation easement and report back to partners. Therefore, the Town would have no annual costs or obligations.

How are conservation easements monitored?

SELT conducts monitoring of conservation easements using two methods: 1) review of aerial photographs; and 2) physical ground inspections. Each year SELT purchases aerial photographs of the easement properties that are taken in April when trees and shrubs have not leafed out and snow cover has melted, allowing an unobstructed view of the ground. These aerial photographs are reviewed in at the SELT offices to determine if there have been encroachments by abutters, inappropriate land activities, or potential areas of concern. Ground inspections occur with SELT staff or volunteers, and include walking the property with the owners (if interested) and reviewing boundaries, trails, and areas under active management (such as a timber harvest). For each monitoring activity, SELT creates a written report that is shared with partners. The Town of Stratham will receive copies of the annual monitoring reports.

What happens if there is a violation of a conservation easement?

SELT seeks to resolve easement violations through open dialogue with the landowner or encroacher. However, if necessary, easement violations can be addressed through litigation. SELT also purchases insurance to support the cost of legal defense of its conservation easements.

Wouldn't additional development increase our tax base and reduce our property taxes?

In general, studies of NH communities show that residential development does not produce sufficient revenue to offset the costs of providing community services. Cost of Community Service studies are a well-known methodology for estimating the fiscal impact of different land uses within a municipality. The studies evaluate the cost and revenue from residential, commercial, and industrial use of property. Numerous communities in southeastern NH,

including Stratham, have completed such studies, and all have demonstrated *that residential properties consume more in services than in revenues generated*. Conversely, commercial and open space lands (undeveloped lands) consume less in community services than the revenues provided from such land uses.

Community	Municipal Cost per \$1.00 of Revenue			Date of Study
	Residential	Commercial	Open Space	
Brentwood	\$1.17	\$0.24	\$0.83	2002
Deerfield	\$1.15	\$0.22	\$0.35	1994
Dover	\$1.15	\$0.63	\$0.94	1993
Exeter	\$1.07	\$0.40	\$0.82	1997
Fremont	\$1.04	\$0.94	\$0.36	1994
Hooksett	\$1.16	\$0.43	\$0.55	2008
Lee	\$1.11	\$0.48	\$0.51	2004
Milton	\$1.30	\$0.035	\$0.72	2003
Stratham	\$1.15	\$0.19	\$0.40	1996
Windham	\$1.05	\$0.28	\$0.57	2010

Numerous reports are available for download and review by Googling “Cost of Community Services studies”.

Who is the Southeast Land Trust of New Hampshire?

Founded in 1980, the Southeast Land Trust (SELT) is a membership-supported, non-profit organization whose mission is to protect and sustain the significant lands in our communities for clean water, outdoor recreation, fresh food, healthy forests, and wildlife. Based in Exeter, we work with landowners and communities in 52 communities of southeastern New Hampshire to permanently conserve important lands for the benefit of today and future generations. In Stratham, SELT has partnered with the Town to successfully conserve the Scamman Farm and Short property. SELT holds conservation easement on nearly 200 properties and has conserved more than 15,000 acres for public benefit. Learn more at www.seltnh.org.