



MSMCP NEWSLETTER

MASSACHUSETTS SOCIETY OF MUNICIPAL CONSERVATION PROFESSIONALS

C/o MACC Lincoln-Filene Center
Tufts University Medford, MA 02155

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FALL 1984

FARMLAND PRESERVATION - THE AMHERST EXPERIENCE

Pete Westover, Amherst

On the surface, Amherst is like many other towns that have made progress in protecting their remaining farmland, but this year's development boom and a fast rise in land prices has brought some questions to the front.

Amherst has about 5,000 acres of agricultural land left, of which some 2,000 are wooded or wetland portions of active farms and the remaining 3,000 are actually in production for dairy, orchard, or vegetable crops. Nearly 600 acres in town are now under agricultural preservation restrictions (APR's) funded by the state with some town assistance, and applications have been received for over another 350 acres. About 4,000 acres are classified under Chapter 61A, the Farmland Assessment Act, with resultant property tax reductions averaging 80 percent. The Conservation Commission rents out half a dozen parcels of once-abandoned land to local farmers, operates community gardens on three other conservation areas, and has an active inventory of 113 farmland owners of down to 5 acres each.

The town, in other words, has endeavored to use most of the currently available tools to try to protect the farm parcels that remain. But farmland is still being pecked away, and we now know that these tools alone are insufficient. As part of a series of joint discussions on the future of open space in town, the Commission and the Planning Board have recently tried to address the following questions:

1. Is there a practical way to save land that is taken out of Chapter 61A in small pieces, as individual building lots? The town is pondering the establishment of an

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STAFF PARTICIPATION IN MACC FALL MEETINGS

This fall at the MACC meetings there will be some strange people walking around with red flowers. These are not displaced flower children (although some may be), they are the MSMCP Board of Directors and they are looking for new members. So when you see a red flower don't look the other way, go up and introduce yourself and ask them what MSMCP is all about and what it can do for you. The following people will be holding special meetings during each gathering to recruit new members. Remember membership is only \$10!

Oct. 13 Concord - Barbara Whiting
Lynn Abbott

Oct. 20 Brockton - Caroline Stone

Oct. 20 Bolton - Brian Monahan

Oct. 27 Cambridge - Jim Mazik

Nov. 3 Easthampton - Pete Westover

Nov. 17 Brewster - Michael Gagne

Hope to see you there!

INTRODUCING THE MSMCP NEWSLETTER

Barbara Whiting, President, MSMCP

The MSMCP Board of Directors is pleased to provide you with a complimentary copy of the first issue of our new seasonal publication. The newsletter is just one of the ways we will be serving you and reaching chairmen of each commission throughout the Commonwealth. We hope you will enjoy the articles and features. QUESTION? ANSWER! is a forum where you have a chance to air your views and burning questions. If you have a project which you would like to share, please send in your ideas!

Also, please note on page 3, the description and application form for membership. We invite you to join the 40 "charter" members in our growing network.

FARMLAND PRESERVATION (cont)

emergency farmland fund that would allow quick purchase of parcels withdrawn from 61A, for which the town has the right of first refusal, but there are questions: might such a fund be misspent on non-emergency parcels; how could such a fund be misspent on non-emergency parcels; how could such a fund be regularly re-funded; and is the point of 61A withdrawal too late because by then the price has been set at development levels? Land sold as a single building lot commands a high per acre price, and even a 6-figure emergency fund could be quickly depleted without saving more than a few acres.

Self-Help reimbursements could lessen the impact, and purchases can be made within the 60 day first refusal period without a prior Town Meeting vote with jeopardizing Self-Help approval provided that Joel Lerner first approves the required appraisals and gives the go-ahead. But even so, town funds would not go far. It may be necessary to consider a local real estate transfer tax, already instituted by towns on the Cape, to provide continuing revenues for emergencies.

2. Is agricultural zoning out of the question? Amherst is exploring ways by which to minimize agricultural land depletion where development does take place. Agricultural zoning itself is not yet allowed by Massachusetts zoning enabling laws, but some creative thinking on the subject is being done at the regional planning level. The Pioneer Valley Planning Commission in particular is hoping for funding in the near future that will establish pilot projects in a few valley towns in this direction.

3. How can a town deal best with the farm owner who refuses to apply for an APR? There will probably always be those farmers who for their own reasons - sometimes because they just don't want to work with "state bureaucrats" - will not apply for the state development rights program. The Massachusetts Farm and Conservation Land Trust (MFCLT) has established valuable precedents for these cases by successfully purchasing options on threatened farms, applying for agricultural preservation restrictions, completing the APR transaction with the state and selling the restricted land at its new, low price to a farm buyer found in advance. The MFCLT does not now act in towns or areas other than those in which its parent organization, The Trustees of Reservations, holds land. For that reason it is important that other local trusts gear up their resources to play this role, so that full advantage can be taken of the APR program and critical farmland not be lost.

Amherst is looking for ways to help its local trust, the Kestrel Trust, explore this possibility. A new publication that addresses these and other questions is Farmland Protection Strategies for the Connecticut River Valley of Massachusetts (still in draft form), prepared by Suzanne Sutro for the National Park Service, Mid-Atlantic Regional Office, Div. of Park and Resource Planning, Philadelphia, PA (128 pgs.)

QUESTION? ANSWER!

Each issue this column will pose questions about wetlands and open space issues. We would like to hear answers from anyone who has a solution, whether they have implemented it or not. Responses will be printed in the next issue. Please send us your suggestions about the following questions.

WETLANDS: What does your commission require on a Determination of Applicability application?

OPEN SPACE: How do you publicize your conservation lands?

P.S. If you have any questions, send them along, too.

JOBS...JOBS...JOBS...JOBS...JOBS...JOBS...JOBS

Looking for a conservation professional? We may be able to help. Send us a brief description of the job and we will print it and announce it at MSMCP meetings.

RENT-A-STAFF

The Board of Directors of MSMCP are offering their experience and expertise to Conservation Commissions in need. For only \$25/meeting, plus travel, a Commission can RENT-A-STAFF and help themselves and MSMCP. The proceeds will go to MSMCP.

EDITORIAL BOARD:

EDITOR: Lynn Abbott, Acton
ASS'T EDITOR: Jim Mazik, Gloucester
CONTRIBUTORS: Pete Westover, Amherst
Barbara Whiting, Brookline

DRAWINGS: Lynn Abbott, Acton

MEMBERSHIP DRIVE

The MSMCP is looking for new members. The organization was formed on April 10, 1984 when the Charter and Bylaws were approved by the new membership. The Charter states that the purpose of the MSMCP is:

To serve and support municipal conservation staff in order to raise the level of professionalism by meeting these objectives:

- Providing a forum for professional information exchange.
- Sponsoring technical and scientific seminars and conferences.
- Fostering cooperation among contiguous or regionally related Conservation Commissions and their staffs.
- Promoting the advancement of professional staffing
- Providing a directory of staff members.

These goals can only be achieved through the cooperation and energy of all staff of conservation commissions in Massachusetts. We were the first to have conservation commissions and we are the first to have a professional organization. All staff is welcome, paid and unpaid; part and full-time; secretary and administrator. We are all professionals. This is your organization and it can help you. Please send in the MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION today.

MEMBERSHIP CATEGORIES

1. REGULAR MEMBERS: are employed full-time as conservation staff for town/city conservation commissions or other related units of local government, with training in natural resource management, natural sciences, land use planning, and/or public administration.
2. SPECIAL MEMBERS: meet the same requirements as regular members except that they are employed less than full-time.
3. VOLUNTEER MEMBERS: are commission members or other unpaid professionals with responsibilities and/or training similar to those of regular or special members.

MEMBERSHIP APPLICATION

NAME _____ TITLE _____

POSITION CATEGORY: Full-time ___ Part-time ___ Volunteer ___

MAILING ADDRESS _____ PHONE _____

CITY/TOWN _____ ZIP CODE _____

PLEASE RETURN THIS FORM WITH \$10 DUES TO: MSMCP C/o MACC
Lincoln Filene Center
Tufts University
Medford, MA 02155

To help us promote professional staffing, please indicate your salary range:
\$ _____.

THE SEVENTH COLUMN

Each issue a member of the Board of Directors will share some of their ideas with us. This issue we would like to thank Barbara Whiting, President of MSMCP for her contribution.

BROOKLINE "FRIENDS" GROUPS TAKE ROOT

One of the most satisfying aspects of working in the conservation field at the local level is protecting land for use and enjoyment of all citizens, for the present and future. In an urban community like Brookline, protecting open space includes fostering and coordinating community advocacy groups for existing public land.

When the Commission acquired its first conservation area, the Town declined to provide an annual budget for maintenance. We did find a silver lining in that ominous black cloud, through establishing a group of volunteers. Started with the neighbors, the Friends of Hall's Pond has become an incorporated organization with over 100 members town-wide, and it has served as a model for citizens concerned about open space near them.

Over time, with a record of accomplishments in saving the Town money, co-sponsoring natural history tours and events, the concept of "adopting" a green space has flourished to 12 new organizations specifically addressing an open area. Their emphases range from arranging a contract for maintenance, investing funds for long-term tree preservation and replacement, to on-going clean-ups, educational projects and

general maintenance and care. Every year it's good to celebrate the accomplishments and bring all the groups together for a special party.

Just as important as tapping your human resources for natural resource support, is being a part of MSMCP!

ONE OF US

This column is an opportunity to get to know each other and the staff who contribute to each Commission. This issue we begin with Barbara Whiting who is the President of MSMCP. Barbara has served the Brookline Conservation Commission for the past 6 years; 3 years as Assistant and 3 years as Administrator. She holds a Bachelor of Sciences degree from the University of Massachusetts (Amherst) having graduated with honors following studies in Environmental Sciences. Her affinity with conservation began with an internship through the Northampton Conservation Commission where she developed a resource inventory and plan, and a fond familiarity with woodland wildflowers.

Barbara manages 80 acres of urban conservation land has been instrumental in forming 7 local "friends" of parks and conservation advocacy groups. In addition, she has taught classes and led field trips in the sanctuaries.

Administering grants such as DEQE water quality diagnostic/feasibility study and EPA noise control program are part of her job, and she has implemented a Water Quality Testing Program in the public schools.



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