

TOWN OF BETHLEHEM

Albany County - New York

Conservation Easement Review Board

445 DELAWARE AVENUE
DELMAR, NEW YORK 12054

(518) 439-4955 x1157

Fax: (518) 439-5808

laxford@townofbethlehem.org



David VanLuven
Town Supervisor

Francis Sheehan
Chair

MEMORANDUM

TO: David VanLuven, Town Supervisor
& Town Board Members

FROM: Francis Sheehan, Chair, and Conservation Easement Review Board Members

DATE: July 19, 2022

SUBJ: **Conservation Easement Review Board Positive Recommendation to the Town Board for use of the Farms and Forests Fund to purchase the Milltowne Plaza Farmland Preservation project.**

On behalf of the Conservation Easement Review Board, I am conveying the recommendation of the Board with respect to the use of Farms and Forests Capital Reserve Fund for the purchase of the Milltowne Plaza Farmland Preservation Project.

The Farms and Forests Fund Resolution, dated September 25, 2019, requires the Conservation Easement Review Board to make a recommendation for the Fund's use after reviewing the submitted Conservation Project Landowner Application (see attached) and evaluating whether the proposed Conservation Project would protect at least one of the four Conservation Values categories from the Town's Open Space Plan (2017):

1. Community Character;
2. Recreation and Greenways;
3. Forests, Fields, and Wildlife Ecosystems;
4. Natural Water Systems- (streams, wetlands, and the Hudson River).

The subject parcels owned by Milltowne Plaza were reviewed for consistency with the aforementioned Town Conservation Values (see attached). This conservation project will protect each of the four Conservation Values categories from the Town's Open Space Plan (2017) and will additionally advance objectives outlined in the recently adopted Comprehensive Plan Update (2022).

Community Character: These parcels have been a working [agricultural] landscape for over 250 years. Best known by locals as the successful Heath's Shady Lawn Dairy Farm, which encompassed 450 acres and 225 head of "Shawlawn" Holsteins. Heath's included glass bottle home delivery service of pasteurized and raw milk, a farm store onsite where the public could see the milking parlor, as well as a garden plot rental option (community gardens) that served up to 260 gardeners. The large 122-acre parcel on Clapper Road housed the farm's poultry operation. 5 of the 9 subject parcels are located at the gateway to the Town of Bethlehem at the intersection of Wemple Road and Route 9W- an area that has already lost much of its pastoral character. This project will help to preserve the Town's rich agricultural history and legacy of Bethlehem's farming community.

Recreation and Greenways: The subject parcels include areas suitable for passive recreation, such as walking trails, and have the potential for future public access. Several parcels are either adjacent to, or contain tributaries (such as the Dower Kill and Vloman Kill) and there are 2 parcels which are adjacent to public/private recreational facilities. The majority of the parcels are located on roads within the Town of Bethlehem Bicycle and Pedestrian Priority Network and several of the parcels were highlighted in the Town's 2017 Scenic Photo Survey. Furthermore, this project will conserve contiguous lands that serve as viable wildlife greenways and travel pathways.

Forests, Fields, and Wildlife Ecosystems: The subject parcels contain not only agricultural land, but also forests and woodlands, some of which are larger than five acres. These areas provide critical habitat for both flora and fauna. Parcels adjacent or containing streams feature vegetated buffers to filter pollutants and reduce downstream flooding to the Normans Kill, Dowers Kill, and Vloman Kill. The subject parcels also contain several federal emergent wetlands and additional areas of potential wetlands which provide important ecological services while maintaining the integrity of the Town's wildlife ecosystems.

Natural Water Systems (Streams, Wetlands and the Hudson River): This conservation project involves lands important for the protection of water quality and flood attenuation - wetlands (especially those not already protected under state or federal wetland law), ponds, streams, groundwater recharge areas, vernal pools, and various tributaries. Keeping these lands protected from residential, commercial, or industrial development will ensure the ongoing permeability of the land, allowing for filtration of pollutants, limiting runoff and erosion.

In addition to each of the four Conservation Values previously noted, the subject parcels also contain areas of prime farmland soils.

The Conservation Easement Review Board discussed the subject parcels at its July 18, 2022 meeting and unanimously (5-0) voted to make a positive recommendation for the use of the Farms and Forests Capital Reserve Fund and to provide a Resolution (see attached) to the Town Board documenting the land's consistency with the Town's conservation criteria.

Sincerely,



Francis Sheehan, Chair
Conservation Easement Review Board