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Bethlehem Town Board Approves Purchase to Preserve More Than 300 Acres of Historic Farmland

One of the most significant farmland protection efforts by a town in the Hudson Valley.

BETHLEHEM, NY – On June 8, the Bethlehem Town Board approved an agreement for the purchase of more than 300 acres of historic farmland in the town. Wednesday night's authorization was the first step towards the Town protecting two farms that have been in continuous agricultural operation since the Revolutionary War.

Led by Supervisor David VanLuven, the Town has been working with the landowner on this purchase for 3 years because preserving open space along with the conservation of iconic farmlands and agriculture is good for our community and protecting our environment. Residents from every corner of Bethlehem have stated in nearly every meeting for the Comprehensive Plan Update that preserving green spaces and farmland is a priority.

The properties being purchased have been appraised at \$4 million. However, the seller (Milltowne Plaza, Inc.) agreed to sell the lands for only \$3 million. The Town will draw \$2 million from their Farms & Forests Fund to cover 2/3 of this historic purchase, which is exactly the kind of conservation initiative the fund was created for. The remaining funds will come from capital accounts. The vote to approve the option agreement draws \$30,000 from the Farms & Forests Fund to begin the process of due diligence on the parcels, including environmental assessments.

Eight of the nine parcels currently are actively farmed, and it is the Town's intention to have this continue. The Town Historian has traced farming in the historic Heath Dairy Farm back 250 years, and believes the land has been cultivated even longer.

"Farms are part of Bethlehem's culture and landscape," said **Bethlehem Town Supervisor David VanLuven**. "We are committed to working in partnership with interested landowners to keep our farms growing crops and food rather than subdivisions, and I am so proud of the work of our great Town staff and the commitment of the Town Board to keep these lands in agriculture for another 250 years."

“The Town of Bethlehem is making a bold move to protect open space and farmland with the acquisition of the Milltowne Plaza, Inc. properties. So often the desire to preserve important landscapes is expressed in plans and meetings while development marches on,” said **Mark King, Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy Executive Director**. “Bethlehem is turning intentions into action. The Hudson Valley has a rich agricultural and natural history that faces unprecedented pressures. We hope other communities will adopt programs like the Farms & Forest Fund and Conservation Easement Program to address this critical issue.”

“Preserving open space in New York State is critical to meet our goals of protecting 30% of public lands by 2030,” said **Julie Tighe, President of NY League of Conservation Voters**. “With more than 300 acres of farmland proposed for protection as well as acreage for a future potential park, and a parcel adjacent to a mature forest, this is a significant purchase. The League is excited to see the Town of Bethlehem protect local habitats from overdevelopment that can damage the ecosystem, and we applaud this effort.”

“The Nature Conservancy congratulates the Town of Bethlehem and commends Supervisor David VanLuven and members of the Town Board for establishing forward-looking policies and local funding programs that allow for the strategic conservation of open space and working farmland. This historic project, and Bethlehem’s robust conservation programs more broadly, will benefit future generations with clean water and access to nature and local, fresh food,” said **Jessica Ottney Mahar, The Nature Conservancy’s New York Policy and Strategy Director**.

“Scenic Hudson congratulates the Town of Bethlehem for taking steps toward protecting these magnificent and historic agricultural properties, made possible through the foresight of Supervisor VanLuven and the Town Board in creating the Farms & Forests Fund,” said **Andy Bicking, Scenic Hudson’s Director of Government Relations and Public Policy**. “Lands conserved with these funds will forever benefit the entire community — by providing fresh, nutritious food, sustaining Bethlehem’s cherished heritage and rural charm, and supporting its economy. I also applaud residents for their overwhelming support of this project, which signals their commitment to the town’s healthy and thriving future.”

“This action speaks strongly to why the Town of Bethlehem was so wise to create the Farms & Forest Fund. Protecting open space for current and future generations will keep the town at the forefront of sustainability and ensure that it remains a wonderful place to live, work, and play. We applaud the leadership of Supervisor David VanLuven and the Town Board and the willingness of Milltowne Plaza, Inc. for this partnership which allows these lands to be protected from being developed,” said **Patricia Beeler and Peter Iwanowicz, co-chairs of Bethlehem Tomorrow**.

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About the Farms & Forests Fund

Established in 2019, the Farms & Forests Fund helps interested landowners keep farms, forests, and fields in Bethlehem. Bethlehem partners with landowners, conservation groups, and agricultural nonprofits to ensure that our community's rich landscape of farms and forests, meadows and creeks, persists alongside our residential neighborhoods, commercial districts, and industries. Find out more about the Farms & Forests Fund and other conservation projects on the [Town website](#).

