

Cornish Conservation Commission Land Conservation Guide for the Town of Cornish

Adopted April 25, 2007

1. Statement of Intentions

- a. We seek to protect Cornish's rural character, natural environment and working landscape through encouraging and supporting land conservation efforts, public education and careful town planning.
- b. We seek to protect in perpetuity a minimum of 25% of Cornish's land through the use of conservation easements.
- c. We seek to raise or leverage funds to assist private landowners' efforts to conserve their land in agreement with the priorities identified below.
- d. We seek to protect wild habitat for plants and animals, not only for human enjoyment, recreation or other use, but also for the sustainable health of our ecosystem.
- e. We seek to retain agricultural land as the foundation of the townspeople's food security.
- f. We seek to work in collaboration with other conservation-minded organizations to achieve our goals.

2. Town Conservation Planning Process and Guidelines for the Use/Disbursement of Conservation Commission Funds

We recognize that the Commission cannot financially support every land conservation opportunity that may be brought to the Commission or the Town. In addition, it may not always be in the town's best interest to own property or conservation easements that must be maintained, monitored or enforced using town funds and other resources. Therefore, we must designate the Commission's limited resources to the most important projects. With this in mind, we have developed the following process to guide our land conservation work, and the use or disbursement of any Conservation Commission funds.

- a. Create a list of attributes (see below) of properties in town worth protecting.
- b. Using the list below, look at the town maps to determine which areas/properties meet these criteria.
- c. Identify broad areas and specific properties that meet three or more of the established criteria.

- d. Determine whether there are any significant, special, or hidden costs of protecting and maintaining property in its current or conserved state that would outweigh the benefits of conserving it.
- e. Prioritize above areas/properties to focus our land protection efforts:
 - Determine areas that are vital to conserve and actively work to support protection of these areas through the use of Commission members' time, the commitment of Conservation Commission funds, and any other support the Commission may be able to provide.
 - Determine areas that are of secondary importance to conserve, and work to support conservation efforts of these areas as opportunities arise.
 - Determine areas that are not currently a priority to protect, and not to actively work on protecting these areas or spending Commission funds on projects in these areas.
- f. Maintain open and continual communication with the Selectboard to ensure their support of the Commission's identified areas of conservation priority.
- g. Educate the townspeople about the land conservation protection priorities with the intention of fostering town-wide support of the Commission's efforts to protect these areas. This will include disseminating information about conservation easements in general, about the above priorities, and about Conservation Commission support available to landowners who wish to permanently protect their land.
- h. Work towards having a conservation plan for the town, with mapping layers representing the attributes listed below. As much as possible, this information will be shared among all town boards, any interested resident, and regionally in order to support our land protection intentions.
- i. Encourage incorporation of land protection in the town's master plan and zoning ordinance.

3. Attributes to Guide Land Conservation Efforts

The Commission should use the following attributes (underlined and listed in no particular order) to determine our conservation priorities. Following each attribute are some questions to help clarify how the Commission intends to examine the presence or absence of each attribute for a particular parcel of land.

- a. Property size
 - Is the land of a sufficient size that its significant attributes remain intact, even if adjacent properties are developed?
 - Does the land contain larger lots likely to be subdivided?

b. Agricultural Use and Value

- Does the property have agricultural value because of its size, past or present use, availability of water, type and quality of soil or slope?
- Does the land have the potential to contribute to the food security of Cornish residents?

c. Historic Importance

- Is the property worth preserving because significant events occurred there in the town's past history?
- Does the land contain structures of historic value such as a church, barn, cellar hole, etc., and are those structures viewed by the public?
- Are any of these structures worth preserving for future use, such as a mill site?

d. Scenic Value

- Does the land provide significant scenic value because of its own characteristics (i.e. river frontage, unmanaged forest, etc.)? Does it offer extraordinary views of other locations?
- Does the land contain frontage on a scenic road?

e. Keystone Properties

- If protected from development, might the property help to leverage further land conservation projects because it is located near already conserved lands or prioritized conservation areas?
- Would conservation of this property discourage development of a nearby area?

f. Ecological Significance

- Does the land provide diverse or unique natural animal habitat or wildlife corridors?
- Does the land protect a public water or recharge area?
- Is the forest in a natural state of growth?

g. Public Benefit

- Will or do these lands provide opportunities for public recreation and education or other open space benefits?
- Can it be reached by public access?