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The Boxborough Conservation Trust is a non-profit, tax-exempt, 501(c)(3) corporation with mailing address at 462 Hill Road, Boxborough, MA, 01719, Telephone: (978) 264-0113 ; Web address: www.bctrust.org

This Newsletter is an infrequent publication of the Boxborough Conservation Trust, Boxborough, Massachusetts

From the President

Environmental Impact of Proposed Littleton RR Station

The MBTA has proposed moving the Littleton railroad station from its present site on Foster Street to a new site further east, to be accessed from Route 2. The new site will provide more parking space to encourage greater use of the commuter rail by residents of the region. This is a laudable objective, but the proposed Route 2 site has a number of drawbacks.

Foremost among these is that the site is an environmentally sensitive area, a small part of which is in Boxborough, abutting the heron rookery. The site contains several vernal pools, is home to two endangered or rare species, and would require the blasting of a considerable amount of ledge. The only access would be from Route 2, thereby precluding local residents from reaching the station by foot or by bicycle. The peace of mind and safety of individuals arriving on late trains is certainly reduced in comparison with the present location. The expense of developing the site and access roads would be great, in excess of \$10 million.

The present station is close to the intersection of Routes 2 and 495, and readily accessible from both highways. All it lacks is adequate parking, which could be provided with minimal environmental impact and at much less expense than the Route 2 site. Traffic congestion is bound to get worse as Cisco expands employment here, so this issue is of keen interest to Boxborough residents.

For further information: Contact David Koonce of the BCT at 263-1052.

BCT Annual Meeting

Sunday, March 23rd, 2-4:00pm

Boxborough Town Hall

Guest speaker: Bob Wilber

Director of Land Protection, Massachusetts Audubon Society

"Land Conservation: Conceiving and Achieving Success"

Bob Wilber has served with the state Department of Environmental Management and with The Nature Conservancy in Massachusetts, and has been directly involved in the permanent protection of more than 20,000 acres throughout Massachusetts during his eighteen years working in land conservation.

We will also review Annual Reports and conduct elections.

Mark Your Calendar:

Tuesday, March 13, 7-9:00pm

Blanchard Elementary School Library

Wildlife Slide Show with Sue Morse of Keeping Track

Presented through a collaboration of local land trusts

Keeping Track is a non-profit organization headquartered in Jericho, Vermont. It teaches volunteers how to become wildlife stewards by monitoring the fields, woods, and wetlands of their town. Come learn about the wildlife in New England and how you can know and protect the wild animals living in Boxborough.

Free to the public.

Collaborative Effort Conserves Guilford Transportation Land

The combined efforts of the Boxborough Conservation Trust and the Boxborough Conservation Commission recently saved about 7 acres of land formerly owned by the Guilford Transportation Corporation. The property was purchased by the Boxborough Conservation Commission for \$15,000. One-third of that amount was funded by the Massachusetts Department of Environmental Management, in the form of a "Year 2000 Greenways and Trails Demonstration Grant." The BCT obtained a \$5,000 grant from the Wharton Foundation, and the remaining \$5,000 came from Conservation Commission funds. Several local organizations, including the Sudbury Valley Trustees, the BCT, the Acton Conservation Commission, and the Acton Water District contributed in the form of a letter of support for the DEM grant. The property, which abuts the 35 acre Rolling Meadows Conservation Land owned by the Town of Boxborough, is about 2/3 wetlands, and contains a significant vernal pool.

Frances Clark Lectures on Biodiversity: An Overview

Part 1 of a 3 part series. . .

Boxborough residents who attended the Jan. 11 lecture conducted by Frances Clark were treated to an inspirational talk and slideshow on "Saving Biodiversity in the SuAsCo (Sudbury Assabet Concord) Watershed." Clark, a botanist and environmental consultant, presented the results of a study designed to empower grass roots organizations, individuals and town governments to "conserve and restore natural biodiversity in the watershed by protecting and managing natural communities and focal species' habitat."

Biodiversity is defined as the number and types of species living in a particular habitat. It is threatened by massive development occurring throughout eastern Massachusetts and the world. Housing developments, roadways, commercial buildings and parking lots are consuming our natural landscape. This development is responsible for habitat loss and fragmentation [see Fig. 1] – tiny islands of green in a sea of development. This leads to what is known as the 'edge effect.' Edge habitats receive more sun and wind, which impairs pollination and germination. Exposure to predators, toxic substances and spread of invasive, non-native plants is significantly increased. Species that require large tracts of land to survive migrate or die. In some cases, human recreational activities are incompatible with and destroy wildlife habitat.

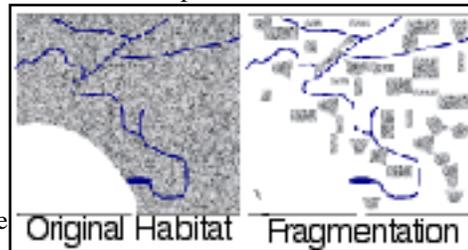


Fig. 1

A proposed solution is to (1) "protect large core areas [that currently support a healthy biodiversity], and buffer and link them,"

[see Fig. 2]

(2) "protect stream quality," and
 (3) "steward protected areas...lands are at risk due to edge effect and incompatible public uses."

To identify land to protect, the task force inventoried "focal" species – species whose presence indicated a healthy ecosystem – in a variety of habitats (woodlands, meadows, wetlands, rock outcrops, etc.). From the inventory, a plan was created that maps lands in the SuAsCo watershed that are ideal for preservation and can be buffered and linked to other lands. The plans identifies 46 sites in 24 towns ranging in size from 75 to 5000 acres, of which 45% are currently protected (the map will available on-line at www.sudburyvalleytrustees.org in the near future). Two such parcels, Delaney Wetlands and Heath Hen Meadow, extend into the southern portion of Boxborough. Another local area identified is the heron rookery on Rte 2, which is the controversial, proposed site of the new train station in Littleton. Clearly, biodiversity spans town boundaries and will require regional efforts—cooperation and partnership with other towns and organizations to reduce future loss.

(continued next column)

Our health and spiritual well-being depend on a healthy ecosystem and biological resources. What better place to start protecting the environment than in our "own back yard?" By preserving different types of habitats, and, therefore, the species that live there, we in turn save the habitats that humans need in order to survive.

Part 2: Identifying strategic parcels to protect in Boxborough.

Part 3: Being stewards of Boxborough land.

- Tara Zantow

Land Use Group "Fortifies Dam"

Stemming the tide of uncontrolled development and preserving Boxborough's rural character is what Boxborough's ad hoc Land Use Acquisition Group (LUG) is all about. Several town boards—including the Board of Selectman, Planning Board, Affordable Housing Board, Economic Development Committee, School Committee, Conservation Commission, and Recreation Commission—have a vested interest in Boxborough's exercising its right-of-first-refusal to purchase land under Massachusetts statute. Although the LUG will propose multiple options in Town Meeting for acquiring these properties, the common denominator is to protect the quality of life for future generations, to ensure responsible growth, and to maintain long-term tax stability.

Bold initiatives are required at this critical time in Boxborough's history, and the LUG is up to the task. As much as we welcome CISCO and want to be neighborly, we cannot realistically accommodate many of its 4000 employees and their families who will want to live here. If we do nothing to prevent the flood of suburban sprawl, the cost will not be merely a long-term tax liability, but a major impingement on our way of life. Increased traffic, infrastructure improvements, exploding school debt, a search for aquifer sources, and town water and sewage are inevitable outcomes. We are just too small a town to move in that direction.

The LUG cannot act alone, and needs citizen support. To protect Boxborough from a torrent of unparalleled development, each citizen must plug a hole in the dike by voting to buy land which preserves the unique character of this lovely town.

- Dan MacPhail

Community Preservation Act Will Help Boxborough Attain Open Space Goals

Boxborough residents will vote at the March 26 Special Town Meeting to implement the Community Preservation Act (CPA). This Act, signed into law on Sept. 14, 2000 after 10 years in the making, enables local communities to levy a property tax surcharge of up to 3% to create a Community Preservation Fund and qualify for state matching grants.

Adoption of this CPA will assist Boxborough in attaining its long-term goals of protecting open space, creating affordable housing, providing recreational opportunities and preserving the historic nature of our town. The timing is critical – increased commercial and residential development is consuming open land at an astonishing rate. We need to act while there is still time and land available.

Adoption Process

1. Town meeting must approve a warrant article accepting the terms of the CPA.
2. If approved at town meeting, we must then pass a ballot question at the town election by a simple majority. (May 21, 2001)
3. The town must also approve a by-law to establish a Community Preservation Committee made up of 5 – 9 members representing various boards and residents at large. Their responsibility is to make recommendations on how the money in the fund should be spent or to set it aside for future spending.

Provisions of the CPA

- The CPA remains in effect for 5 years, but the town has the option to adjust the surcharge and exemptions at any time.
- Any property acquired by the CPA must be subject to a permanent deed restriction.
- Expenditures from the fund will be based on recommendations by the Community Preservation Committee or citizens, but must be approved at Town Meeting.
- The state disperses proportionally matching funds on October 15 of every year in a series of two or three rounds.

State Matching Funds – Community Preservation Trust Fund (CPTF)

Income to the CPTF, generated through fees collected by the Registry of Deeds and Land Court, is expected to exceed \$25 million per year. In round one, 80% of the CPTF will be distributed to all towns participating in the program. All towns will receive the same percentage – a minimum of 5% up to a maximum of 100% match -- based on the total funds collected by all towns. In round two, the remaining funds are awarded only to towns who collect the full 3% surcharge on property taxes. The amount awarded will depend on the size of the town's economic base and/or population. If any money is remaining in the Trust, a third round will take place using round two criteria.

By supporting the adoption of this Act, we will be helping to protect the beauty and rural character of our community. Finally, let us not forget that it will take more than funding to be faithful stewards of that which is precious and irreplaceable – our hard work and commitment will leave a lasting legacy for future generations.

BCT's Board of Directors supports the goals of the CPA. However, the Board emphasizes that the CPA alone will not meet all conservation funding needs. One year's revenue from this source would preserve approximately one acre of land at current market values in Boxborough. While the CPA is an important first step, we clearly need to develop other sources of funds for preserving land in Boxborough.

- Tara Zantow

Local Land Trusts Share Resources

On January 25, Acton Conservation Trust hosted a first-ever meeting of representatives from area land trusts to explore the ways in which we could help each other achieve our land preservation goals. Twenty five individuals representing Acton, Boxborough, Carlisle, Concord, Littleton, Stow, and Westford, along with Sudbury Valley Trustees and Mass. Audubon, gathered to identify common interests and discuss ways in which we could share resources.

Members discussed collaboration to preserve border properties and to address cross-town development. A joint role was envisioned for regional conservation challenges, such as the Littleton train station, golf courses in Acton and Westford, and development stemming from Cisco's arrival. Some suggested that programs begun by one trust could be enlarged to include surrounding communities; trail connections and tracking programs would benefit from this cooperation.

The largest gain might come from sharing information and experience. Members were hopeful that local trusts could pool knowledge and expertise about the Community Preservation Act, conservation restrictions, cluster development, and affordable housing. Older land trusts might share basic resources on trust operations, including the hard-won knowledge that comes from experience with taxes and accounting, mailing lists, publicity, insurance, and land stewardship.

We can begin by sharing information on our events, co-sponsoring programs, or considering complementary membership across all organizations. Representatives left the meeting hoping we could build on our collaboration and so magnify our efforts at local and regional land preservation.

- Mary Fuhrer

Wildlife Tracking Continues...

Time: 1:30 - 4:00 p.m, 1/5/2001.

Conditions: 4 inches of new snow, on top of 8 inches of snow from 12/30/2000

Location: Beaver Valley Preserve, Nature Conservancy, Boxborough. Eight people attended.

Sightings: very active mice tracks and holes; beautiful print of a sparrow-sized bird landing in the snow with wing marks; red squirrel activity in the hemlock stands; grouse tracks--strutting, take-off, and landing; fresh cottontail rabbit tracks and scat. On the undisturbed trail on the top of the esker, we found a distinct side trot and stride length that fell in the range of red fox, 14" to 19". We concluded that a red fox had been through here before the last snow storm.

Marcus Property Vote at March 26 Town Meeting

Affordable Housing and Open Space

At the March 26 Special Town meeting we will be asked to approve \$900K to purchase 27 acres off Rte. 111 known as the Marcus property. The parcel, spanning two zoning districts – commercial and residential, was under Chapter 61 and the town has exercised its right of first refusal to acquire the property pending town meeting vote. If the town does not purchase the property, the buyer intends to develop the residential portion into anywhere from a planned 8 lots, or much higher given a comprehensive permit.

The selectmen are acting on the recommendation of the *ad-hoc* Land Use Group, who have carefully studied the property and identified it as desirable for several reasons. They consider it ideal for affordable housing and open space. It could also become a site for a small municipal building. It abuts the town center district, has good wildlife habitat, trail access and is part of the beautiful tree canopy on Rte. 111. It is also contiguous to other undeveloped and desirable properties that may become available in the future.

Your support for this purchase will accomplish two goals of the Conservation Trust – (1) to conserve open land and (2) to protect wetlands and other environmental treasures, which might be compromised by comprehensive permits that bypass Boxborough's strict zoning by-laws

- Tara Zantow

BCT Needs You Now!

The next 12 months are a critical time for preservation of open space in Boxborough. If you have time to lend a hand with one of these activities, please call 264-0113 to help out.

- Education programs
- Fund-raising
- Trail maintenance
- Stewardship of conservation land
- Identification of rare species

The Boxborough Conservation Trust

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Preserving and Protecting Boxborough's Undeveloped Land

