

**Memorandum**

**To:** Essex Conservation Committee  
**From:** Greg Duggan, Town Planner GSD  
**Date:** April 6, 2016  
**Re:** Results of Conservation Fund survey

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**Issue**

The issue is whether the Conservation Committee will continue to explore the feasibility of starting a conservation fund, based on the results of a town-wide survey that gathered input on the community's interest in such a fund.

**Discussion**

The Conservation Committee made the conservation fund survey available at Town Meeting and online throughout March. The survey generated 220 responses. Although the survey was not scientific, the respondents represented a good variety of the Essex population: of those who responded to demographic questions, 50 percent were from the Village of Essex Junction and 49 percent were from the Town outside the Village; respondents had a wide range of ages, income levels, and time spent living in Essex.

Generally, respondents were interested in preserving land for all of the listed purposes except for hunting. Top priorities were "River and stream protection" (94 percent said Very Important or Somewhat Important), "Wildlife habitat" (93 percent), and "Public trails" (91 percent). The least popular reasons for preservation were "Parks with sports fields" (67 percent) and "Hunting" (26 percent). All other preservation purposes were deemed Very or Somewhat Important by at least 80 percent of respondents.

The surveys also drew 21 responses for "Other" reasons to preserve land. Those responses are attached.

In terms of financing a conservation fund, 58 percent of those who responded to a question about tax rates would be willing (33 percent) or would probably be willing (24 percent) to see property tax rates increase, compared to 23 percent who would not (14 percent) or would probably not (9 percent) want tax increases to pay for the fund; 19 percent were unsure.

In response to a question about willingness to donate to a conservation fund, 64 percent responded Yes (26 percent) or Probably (39 percent); 14 percent said Probably Not (8 percent) or No (7 percent); 21 percent were unsure.

Even among those respondents who were unwilling or unlikely to want a tax increase or to donate to a fund, most found it important to preserve land for the reasons listed on the survey. Only a handful of respondents said preservation of most of the resources was unimportant.

Consolidated data are attached, as are responses to a question seeking additional comments.

**Recommendation**

It is recommended that the Conservation Committee use the results of the Conservation Fund survey to develop a proposal for a conservation fund.

**SURVEY RESULTS: Essex Conservation Fund**

Survey collection: Town Meeting and SurveyMonkey

Open dates: Feb. 29 - March 31, 2016

Total responses 220

**1. How Important Is it to you that Essex works to preserve land for the following purposes:**

	Very Important	Somewhat Important	Neutral	Not very important	Not at all Important	Don't know	TOTAL	Very or Somewhat important	Not very or Not at all Important
River and stream protection	169	36	6	3	4	0	218	205	94%
Wildlife habitat	160	44	10	2	3	0	219	204	93%
Public trails (hiking, biking, skiing, snowmobiling,	158	38	14	3	3	0	216	196	91%
Parks or green spaces in neighborhoods or other	133	53	20	4	7	0	217	186	86%
Floodplain protection	132	54	21	6	4	1	218	186	85%
Wetland preservation	130	51	21	5	6	1	214	181	85%
Protection of scenic views	114	68	25	7	4	0	218	182	83%
Prevention of suburban sprawl	106	70	27	7	4	3	217	176	81%
Agriculture (working lands)	105	73	28	7	4	0	217	178	82%
Forestry (working lands)	102	72	30	5	5	1	216	174	81%
Parks with sports fields	83	61	45	17	10	0	216	144	67%
Hunting	19	38	50	40	69	0	216	57	26%
Other	see attached						21		

**2. Would you be willing to see your property tax rate increase to support a conservation fund?**

	Yes	Probably	Unsure	Probably not	No	TOTAL
Count	71	52	40	20	30	213
%	33%	24%	19%	9%	14%	100%
	58%			23%		

**3. Would you donate money to an Essex Conservation Fund?**

	Yes	Probably	Unsure	Probably not	No	TOTAL
Count	55	83	46	17	14	215
%	26%	39%	21%	8%	7%	100%
	64%			14%		

**4. Do you have any additional comments?**

See attached

DEMOGRAPHIC DATA		
	Count	% of respondents
<b>5. Where do you live?</b>		
Village of Essex Junction	106	50%
Town of Essex outside the Village	103	49%
Other	2	1%
TOTAL	211	100%
<b>6. How long have you lived in Essex?</b>		
Less than 1 year	13	6%
1 - 4 years	37	18%
5 - 9 years	19	9%
10 - 20 years	43	20%
20+ years	96	46%
n/a	2	1%
TOTAL	210	100%
<b>7. What is your annual household income?</b>		
Less than \$25,000	5	3%
\$25,000 - \$49,999	27	15%
\$50,000 - \$74,999	35	20%
\$75,000 - \$99,999	41	23%
\$100,000 - \$149,999	36	20%
\$150,000 - \$199,999	25	14%
\$200,000 or higher	8	4%
TOTAL	178	100%
<b>8. How old are you?</b>		
Under 18 years	0	0%
18 - 24 years	4	2%
25 - 34 years	21	10%
35 - 54 years	70	34%
55 - 64 years	53	25%
65 years or better	60	29%
TOTAL	208	100%

1. How Important is it to you that Essex works to preserve land for the following purposes:

Other:	Level of importance	Overlapping category
1 Development	Not at all important	
2 Protect Forest - Keep BIG parcels		Wildlife habitat
3 Control Development		Prevention of suburban sprawl
4 Bike trail extension/Improvements	Somewhat important	Public trails
5 Forestry - Preserving Forests as carbon sinks to prevent global warming		Forestry
6 Urban trees		
7 Wildlife protection	Very important	Wildlife habitat
8 Toxicity testing + cleanup		
9 Protecting America ....	Very important	
10 Providing enough space for Tree-lined streets	Very important	
11 Essex owns some great forests - you need to do a better job of developing trails in them, having footbridges over the streams and promoting them to residents.		Public trails
12 large contiguous forest lands for wildlife and water retention		Wildlife habitat
13 Safe walking areas in the town and less congestion.		
14 Areas of un-developed unlogged forested land included within and between neighborhoods is what has made Essex Junction a good place to live on the past. These areas need to mostly be accessible to the public for walking, biking, etc, but their main benefit is as a visual, sound and air quality shield from roads and buildings. A lot of our patches of trees are disappearing especially near the 5 corners area where they are needed the most. The new development needed to include more than a couple of widely spaced trees on a very narrow strip of land to have an adequate effect		
15 Staff and committee members must find creative ways to support all landowners' needs, not just developers' ventures.		
16 No homes in conservation zone C1		
17 Stop trying to drive out big businesses, start providing tax incentives for them instead of driving them out with our excessively high tax rate! I can't believe this is even a debate, having the prospect of raising our taxes again!		
18 upgrading and maintaining our existing parks and rec areas (ie Indian brook res)		
19 stop manure spreading on flood plains		
20 a) Preservation of large land tracts (50 acres plus) for future and equally b) zoning to allow use of ag buildings with small lots		Wildlife habitat
21 Wi-Fi diner, coffee shoppe, adult yoga & adult meditation		

4. Do you have any additional comments?

1	Thank you!
2	Save Saxon Hill forest <u>27 acres</u> There should be <u>no</u> sand extration in the center of Saxn Hill Forest!!!
3	Public outreach! No new tax!
4	More clarity as to what the "deliverables" of this committee/fund would be. Similar clarity could be sought via a simple mission statement.
5	Thanks for your efforts!
6	Keep going - good job! Use land trusts
7	must also consider protections @ pollution & toxins
8	While I am 100% for Vt agriculture, its too late for Essex.
9	Indian Brook has become a very popular place for all of us to enjoy the outdoors, but I am greatly concerned for our safety. On more than one occasion my husband & I have heard gunshots while walking around the reservoir. Our population has grown tremendously. Will we have to lose another townsperson before we change a law that is obviously outdated? Thank you.
10	I like the idea of public trails in the Saxon's Forest developing plans.
11	An ounce of prevention is worth a pound of cure! This is core to good living In Vermont. I have lived in places where precautions weren't taken + consequences dire. Once the land is lost, environment destroyed it is difficult if not impossible to repair
12	There are already too many taxes, taxes are too high, there is not enough business. Homeowners are already paying too much. I would oppose a taxpayer fund. Maybe add a fee onto new construction projects above a minimum factor. Developers have more funds than homeowners.
13	Standing water, ponds in/near developments. Water quality should be protected
14	If I found out that 50% or more funding went to purchasing Land for preservation and not toward other services I would donate and/or advocate for your services moving forward.
15	Green spaces + Tree-line streets have a calming influence on people and are especially important in areas with congregant housing (ie. Lots of people)!
16	Create clear standards about how and when money from a fund will be used.
17	I would be willing to pay a little more in property taxes and donate to a fund IF it was used to make the best use of the forests and lands Essex already has (and possibly to preserve some incredible view and/or build more bike paths). These are the things that make Essex a more livable community.
18	Please restrict development and acquire the land at Osgood Hill before the last good remnant of forest land and wildlife habitat in the town is lost.
19	This sounds like another slush fund. We pay enough in property taxes.
20	Essex is sadly behind most other communities when it comes to resource preservation largely because the Town staff do not make this a priority and would instead prefer to quietly settle legal matters and curry favor with developers.
21	Would Mr Senecal consider working with the Vermont Land Trust to protect the central forest of the Saxon Hill Forest and prevent destroying the contiguous tract of forest land?
22	All around VT, towns are making conserving land a priority. However in Essex, we get the "back down" on the Saxon Hill project. Little creativity was used to try to save that important and well-loved land. I am very sad to live in a community that espouses the conservation of land with pretty words (Leavy's note in the Town Plan), when the reality was a poorly designed retreat. I also don't agree with making Indian Brook an area just for Essex residents. I am thrilled to be able to recreate at such a beautiful place and I understand the overuse and the pollution by the huge amount of dog residue left in the woods near the water. However, it is very elitist to basically allow passes only for Essex residents and not allow visitors from other areas no admittance to this special place. This is not a global sharing.
23	Better to sollicite donations than impose taxes.
24	Sorry to see Town drop the ball on being able to preserve Saxon Hill. Plan to mine sand and then call it conserved land.
25	I think such a fund is important to have available so when there is need or opportunity for the Town to purchase significant land parcels, there are some resources. Such a fund also makes planning for our community more thoughtful and viable.
26	It's funny that you're looking to start a conservation fund when you continue to allow the development of the five corners into a downtown area and put more rental properties In an already congested area.
27	We need more significant undeveloped public forest space like the way Saxon Hill used to be. Also, a complete off the road bike path along rt 15 and 117 from Winooski, Burlington continuing thru 5 corners to Richmond would be great.
28	Could this fund also include housing. The State fund is the "Housing and Conservation Trust Fund", I believe.
29	The Comm. Development Dept. needs a equal, check-and-balance counterpart -- a Community Conservation Dept. -- to ensure that decisions aren't just made in favor of those with the most money or the loudest voices.
30	I find it interesting that you are asking about preservation of all these important things, while you are so irresponsibly allowing the development at the 5 corners by the Handy's and other commercial developers. If you want to have some sense of village center, that's no way to go about doing so. That new building is an eye sore and should've never been permitted. It doesn't fit in with any buildings at the 5 corners. And now you've already permitted Handy's conceptual plan for even more apartments, overcrowding the buildings at the 5 corners and increasing the traffic problems there. I'd be interested in knowing if this great traffic study that was done for the bypass by Flanders Building included this new apartment building and Handy's plans for even more apartments. Why on earth are you continuing to approve more and more apartments around the 5 corners?? That traffic light at the Park Street intersection by where Loretta's was has only caused more backups....and more apartments going in there too. Good lord.....use your heads.
31	I'd want RN know more about conservation fund oversight
32	I would donate to the fund if it was working specifically towards maintaining our amazing public trails (hiking, biking, skiing, snowmobiling, horseback riding, etc.) ESPECIALLY snowmobiling and ATVing. Also, the views!
33	This is NOT an area that local government should be funding

34	Stop raising our taxes! Support business!
35	We had seen rabid skunks and possums in July 2014 - we need to do a much better job killing rabid animals quickly
36	Yay Conservation!!! Thanks for working on this!
37	Community members need to preserve our beautiful resources (ie parks and rec areas) so that they don't fall into disrepair and become unsightly.
38	Hunting should not be allowed in Essex. Discharging firearms in the Town and Village should be illegal. Houses are too close together and developments wrap around each other. It is irresponsible and dangerous to hunt in these locals.
39	I'm afraid it's too late!
40	I'm strongly in favor of green spaces for neighborhoods, including places to play sports, bike, hike, and picnic. Wetlands and Wildlife habitat should be preserved for the generations to come.
41	So many towns have saved land through conservation funds or other funds. It's way past time for Essex to do this.
42	We have supported the Jericho-Underhill Land Trust for several years, since we have nothing similar in Essex.
43	Zoning does not reflect the conservation desires of the voters and has a realty bias and tax receipts bias. Best use is not highest tax opportunity.
44	Keep Essex Junction the hamlet which attracted us all here to live. More adult activities through Brownell library