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Squamscott Project Stratham Ad Hoc Conservation Bond Subcommittee to the Conservation Committee

Tracy Degnan

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Squamscott Project

Stratham Ad Hoc Conservation Bond Subcommittee to the Conservation Committee

A Final Report to

The New Hampshire Estuaries Project and New Hampshire Coastal Program

Submitted by

Tracy Degnan
Rockingham County Conservation District
110 North Road
Brentwood, NH

In conjunction with the

Town of Stratham Ad Hoc Conservation Bond Subcommittee

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Executive Summary

Through the Stratham Ad Hoc Conservation Bond Subcommittee to the Conservation Committee (Ad Hoc Committee) the objectives under the Squamscott Project were to educate the citizens of Stratham on conservation options and estate planning, and to create a natural resource prioritization and criteria ranking for critical areas in town in need of protection efforts. The Ad Hoc Committee contracted with the Rockingham County Conservation District to assist with these efforts and to provide assistance with the preparation of funding applications to leverage the existing open space bond fund.

A brochure was developed to increase public awareness of open space issues in Stratham and to update residents on the progress and accomplishments of the Ad Hoc Committee. The Ad Hoc Subcommittee hosted a workshop on Conservation Options and Estate Planning in May of 2003.

As a result of these activities, the Ad Hoc Committee initiated several conservation projects and applied for two state grants and one federal grant for three separate properties. Two conservation projects were brought close to concluding during the Squamscott Project and conservation easements will be the protection option used for those two conservation projects.

As a result of the efforts of this project, a number of landowners have contacted the Ad Hoc Committee to get additional information about land protection options. Additional appraisals are in progress for other properties and it is anticipated that another couple of land protection projects will soon be underway.

Introduction:

Using funds from this grant, the Stratham Ad Hoc Conservation Bond Subcommittee to the Conservation Commission (Ad Hoc Committee) worked with the Rockingham County Conservation District to plan and present a couple of public workshops. These workshops were designed to educate residents and decision-makers about the economic, aesthetic, and environmental benefits of open space, critical natural resources in town, and about conservation options and estate planning. In addition, the Ad Hoc Committee developed a brochure to offer a 2003 Town Meeting progress report on the Ad Hoc Committee and to encourage further citizen participation.

Project Goals and Objectives:

Project Goals

- To educate the citizens of Stratham on conservation options and estate planning
- To complete a natural resource prioritization and criteria ranking for critical areas to protect
- To prepare funding applications to leverage the open space bond fund

Project Objectives

- An educational workshop on conservation options and estate planning will increase landowners understanding of land protection options
- Educational information provided to landowners and town residents on the progress of the Ad Hoc Committee and its accomplishments increases the residents understanding and knowledge of open space issues
- Implementing a natural resource prioritization and criteria ranking focuses protection efforts on resource values and provides another appropriate planning tool for potential funding applications
- Submission of state and federal funding applications with willing landowners increases the ability of the Town of Stratham to extend the use of the existing open space bond fund.

Activities (please note that individual activities as described in the original proposal have been combined where it is most effective)

1. Develop Criteria Ranking with Ad Hoc Committee (with support from RPC)

With support from the Rockingham Planning Commission, RCCD and members of the Ad Hoc Committee met and reviewed several criteria ranking templates provided from other communities. RCCD then drafted the Open Space Prioritization Criteria Ranking for the Town of Stratham to be used in conjunction with the GIS maps to complete this task. Once the Ad Hoc Committee decided upon the criteria, a workshop was held to complete the resource prioritization (see below & attached).

2. Prepare GIS Resource maps to complete resource prioritization (with support from the Rockingham Planning Commission) & hold a workshop on completing resource prioritization.

Tracy Degnan, Conservation Specialist at RCCD, served as the Project Leader and met with the GIS staff at the Rockingham Planning Commission to determine which natural resource maps would be appropriate to complete the natural resource prioritization. Existing maps produced for the Town of Stratham Master Plan (1998) and other resources were reviewed to determine which maps and what scale would be most appropriate for prioritization and for upcoming funding applications.

In February of 2003, the RPC completed the GIS maps and RCCD completed a draft resource prioritization form to be used in conjunction with the GIS maps. A workshop was held with the Ad Hoc Committee and other members of the public to review the resource maps and to complete the resource prioritization. The GIS focus areas were then digitized and the corresponding spreadsheet was finalized in February of 2003 (see attached).

3. Evaluate existing protected areas with undeveloped resource areas & review development patterns for development threats

While developing the draft Open Space Prioritization Criteria Ranking and reviewing the natural resource GIS maps, and in discussion with members of the Ad Hoc Committee, it was fairly clear evaluating the currently protected areas and adjacent areas with significant natural resource values. Moreover, with assistance from the Town Administrator and former Stratham Planning Board members, the current development patterns and possible development threats were also visible.

4. Develop funding applications targeting specific resource areas

RCCD developed two eligibility applications for the NH DES Water Supply Land Grant Program for two conservation projects, both of which were subsequently selected. RCCD also developed two final NH DES Water Supply Land Grant applications for the same conservation projects. Although both of these projects would have likely received favorable responses from the NH DES Water Supply Land Grant Program, only one was able to move forward with the required appraisal and other information in a timely manner.

RCCD developed two Federal Farmland Protection Program applications for two individual conservation projects. The appraisals for these two conservation projects came in rather late, and one of the landowners decided not to move forward with this application round. One Federal Farmland Protection Program application was then submitted in May of 2003. The text of the final application is attached and a list of the appendices. Due to the amount of additional paper incorporated within these applications, the full application was not provided for this report. Several copies of this report were provided to the funding agency (eight copies) and to the Town of Stratham. The outcome of the funding application is not yet known but is expected within a couple of weeks.

RCCD coordinated all necessary aspects to organize and complete these funding applications that include initiating letters of support; explaining in great detail the application requirements and process to both Ad Hoc Committee members and individual landowners; gathering the information necessary on the specifics and history of each parcel and the general area; and in writing the documents.

Four conservation projects were initiated during the Squamscott Project, with two of those projects now very close to having Purchase and Sales agreements drafted and signed. It is anticipated that these conservation projects may come to conclusion within the next year or two, and will involve conservation easements.

These conservation projects, one of which was a project proposal for the Federal Farmland Protection Program, and one of which was a proposal for the NH DES Source Water Supply Program, involve the permanent protection of 27 and 20 acres. Both of these conservation projects may likely involve additional funding source proposals.

RCCD provided coordination on conservation projects where requested and necessary, and included the following:

Interacting with appraisers; meeting with landowners on grant application requirements; providing information to landowners on conservation options, grant requirements, and steps to be taken; provided information to assist the town with support letters and recommendations for interacting with agents and/or landowners; discussed possible conservation easement holders with landowners

and Ad Hoc Committee members; continued to interact with Ad Hoc Committee members on progress of conservation projects.

4. Hold a workshop on conservation options and estate planning

RCCD developed a flyer for a conservation options and estate planning workshop that was provided to the Town of Stratham to post throughout the community (see attached). The Ad Hoc Committee decided not to mail out fliers to all residents, nor was any public relations campaign initiated for this workshop. RCCD coordinated with speakers and provided packets for all attendees. RCCD also included the *Conservation Options A Landowner's Guide* (LTA, 2002) booklet in the packet along with additional handouts (see attached). Unfortunately, the workshop was not very well attended with only a few individuals participating (see attached). This workshop did however provide ample opportunity for the Ad Hoc Committee members to ask a variety of questions on both estate planning and conservation options, and this was a very good education process for all.

5. Develop conservation package to be handed out at Town Meeting regarding initial success of the program.

RCCD developed a draft brochure on the accomplishments of the Ad Hoc Committee for the 2003 Town Meeting. The final Progress Report brochure was printed by RCCD (approximately 200 copies) and was available prior to the 2003 Town Meeting. This brochure has also been used for several of the funding applications that were submitted (see attached). The Ad Hoc Committee also had the GIS resource maps available to post at Town Meeting. The Progress Report brochure was available for all residents participating in the Town Meeting.

6. Provide information for Conservation Commission and Board of Selectmen on progress

When requested, RCCD provided assistance to either members of the Ad Hoc Committee or directly to these Boards on progress of pending conservation projects and other activities that took place during the Squamscott Project for the Town of Stratham.

Results and Discussion/Conclusions:

The overall goal of this project was to support the Stratham Ad Hoc Committee in assisting with conservation projects, natural resource prioritization and criteria ranking, public education workshops on conservation options and estate planning, and in preparing funding applications to help leverage the open space bond article passed in March of 2002.

Project objectives included:

1. To complete a natural resource prioritization and open space prioritization criteria ranking to assist in targeting specific resource areas for appropriate funding opportunities
2. To provide educational materials and opportunities for residents to learn about conservation options, and increasing their understanding of estate planning, conservation easements, and other options to protect their land
3. To assist the Ad Hoc Committee in the preparation of appropriate funding applications with willing landowners for both state and federal programs that will help to leverage the existing open space bond authority.

Results Under Objective 1:

To complete a natural resource prioritization and open space prioritization criteria ranking to assist in targeting specific resource areas for appropriate funding opportunities

GIS natural resource maps were produced from the Stratham Master Plan and other natural resource attributes to determine which maps and at what scale would be most appropriate to complete the natural resource prioritization. The Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC) completed the GIS maps, which were reviewed during a workshop with the Ad Hoc Committee and the public. In conjunction with review of the natural resource maps, with assistance from RPC in a workshop, RCCD completed an open space prioritization criteria ranking table that was completed with review/analysis of the GIS resource maps. The areas that were delineated were then digitized on a final GIS map – titled *Conservation Land and Focus Areas for Future Conservation Land*, and the final corresponding Open Space Prioritization Criteria Ranking for the Town of Stratham was completed in February of 2003. Both of these resources were utilized for several funding applications.

Results Under Objective 2:

To provide educational materials and opportunities for residents to learn about conservation options, and increasing their understanding of estate planning, conservation easements, and other options to protect their land

With the Stratham Conservation Bond Ad Hoc Subcommittee Progress Report provided for the 2003 Town Meeting, media coverage in local papers, and the workshop on conservation options has kept the issue of open space in people's minds. This information has also served to increase the public's understanding of the values associated with open space protection and of the resources available to them through the Ad Hoc Committee (see attached).

Individuals in town have been able to actively follow the work of the Ad Hoc Committee through the Progress Report and coverage in local papers, and this has kept the initial success and hard work of this program in everyone's mind.

Although the Conservation Options and Estate Planning Workshop was not very well attended, many of the Ad Hoc Committee members were able to ask very appropriate and timely questions. The result of this workshop ended with several Ad Hoc Committee members having additional discussions with the speakers and with individual landowners about conservation options for their properties.

Results Under Objective 3:

To assist the Ad Hoc Committee in the preparation of appropriate funding applications with willing landowners for both state and federal programs that will help to leverage the existing open space bond authority.

The results of this objective during the Squamscott Project included the development of two eligibility applications for the NH DES Water Supply Land Grant Program for two conservation projects, which were subsequently selected. Two final NH DES Water Supply Land Grant applications were also prepared. One of those projects is now moving forward. The other applicant decided not to move forward at this time due to constraints with timing for the appraisal, and general funding requirements.

Additionally, RCCD developed two Federal Farmland Protection Program applications for two individual conservation projects, although only one was submitted in May of 2003. The other Farmland Protection Program application was withheld due to the appraisal being delayed and an agreement not being reached with the landowner.

RCCD coordinated all necessary aspects to organize and complete these funding applications and finalized each of these the applications in a timely manner. During the Squamscott Project, this portion of the project was a new aspect of conservation project planning that the Ad Hoc Committee members were enthusiastic about. The Ad Hoc Committee members were also educated during this process about some of the information and/or details necessary to pull these applications together.

As a result of at least partial success from submittal of the funding applications, the RCCD may be requested to continue with technical assistance for this particular aspect completed under the Squamscott Project.

Recommendations (for future work or management strategies)

With initial success, the Stratham Ad Hoc Committee will continue to work with interested landowners to identify land protection options, and, where appropriate, initiate conservation projects.

The Stratham Ad Hoc Committee will finalize at least two conservation projects within the next several months, and will likely initiate additional conservation projects in the near future.

The Stratham Ad Hoc Committee has now completed a large amount of the planning necessary to continue with a well thought-out conservation plan. The Ad Hoc Committee is now initiating additional appraisals to be completed for upcoming conservation projects.

The Stratham Ad Hoc Committee recognizes that their Open Space Bond is finite and will likely request additional technical assistance to complete applications for state and federal funding opportunities.

Appendices

Appendix A

Conservation Land and Focus Areas for Future Conservation Lands GIS
Open Space Prioritization Criteria Ranking for the Town of Stratham

Appendix B

Conservation Options and Estate Planning Workshop flyer
Handouts
Attendance Sheet

Appendix C

Stratham Conservation Bond Ad Hoc Subcommittee Progress Report

Appendix D (digital)

NH DES Water Supply Eligibility Grant text
NH DES Water Supply Final Application text
Federal Farmland Protection Program Application text – Sanderson