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Squamscott Project Newfields Open Space Committee

Tracy Degnan

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Squamscott Project
Newfields Open Space 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 Newfields Open Space Committee

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Executive Summary

Through the Newfields Open Space Committee (NOSC) the objectives under the Squamscott Project were to educate the citizens of Newfields on conservation options and estate planning, the goals and objectives of the NOSC, and to finalize a natural resource prioritization for critical areas in town in need of protection efforts. The NOSC contracted with the Rockingham County Conservation District to assist with these efforts, and to provide assistance with the coordination of conservation projects and the preparation of funding applications to leverage the existing open space bond fund.

Two brochures were developed to increase public awareness of open space issues in Newfields. Numerous press releases have been written publicizing the NOSC's accomplishments, workshops, highlighting the benefits of open space, landowners protection options, and encouraging citizens to get involved in conservation issues.

As a result of these activities, the NOSC initiated four conservation projects and applied for two federal grants for two of these properties. Conservation Easements will be the protection option used for the four projects that were initiated under the Squamscott Project. Public support for open space increased noticeably with attendance at workshops and added phone calls expressing interest to several of the NOSC members. Most of this was due to the continuous public relations efforts and the NOSC brochures available to all residents.

As a result of the public outreach efforts of this project, a number of landowners have contacted the NOSC to get additional information about land protection options. It is anticipated that another couple of land protection projects will soon be underway.

Introduction:

Using funds from this grant, the Newfields Open Space Committee (NOSC) worked with the Rockingham County Conservation District to plan, promote, and present a couple of public workshops. These workshops were designed to educate decision-makers and residents about the economic, aesthetic, and environmental benefits of open space. In addition, the NOSC developed two brochures to publicize the Newfields Open Space Committee and to encourage further citizen participation.

Project Goals and Objectives:

Project Goals

- To educate the citizens of Newfields on the mission of the Newfields Open Space Committee and on conservation options and estate planning
- To finalize a natural resource prioritization for critical areas
- To prepare funding applications to leverage the open space bond fund
- To develop public relations information for the community

Project Objectives

- Educational workshops on conservation options and estate planning will increase landowners understanding of land protection options
- Coordination of conservation projects assists Committee members in ensuring appropriate & necessary information is provided to all parties involved
- Educational information provided to landowners and town residents on general conservation information, the NOSC and its mission and accomplishments increases the residents understanding and knowledge of open space issues
- Implementing a natural resource prioritization 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 Newfields to extend the use of the existing open space bond fund.

Activities

1. **Prepare GIS Resource maps to complete resource prioritization (with support from the Rockingham Planning Commission)**

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 Newfields Open Space Plan (2001) 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 NOSC and other members of the public to review the resource maps and to complete the draft prioritization. The GIS focus areas were then digitized and the corresponding spreadsheet was finalized in March of 2003 (see attached).

2. Hold a workshop on conservation options and estate planning

RCCD developed a draft brochure for a conservation options and estate planning workshop that could be mailed out to all residents (see attached). NOSC decided that RCCD should print in house, and the NOSC would mail the brochure to every household in town to hope for a successful turnout. 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). The workshop was very well attended with over 35 individuals participating.

RCCD coordinated with Joyce El Kourti on public relations related to this task. Additional news releases to print and online media and PSAs to broadcast media were provided regarding both the upcoming workshop and the successful attendance of the workshop (see attached).

3. Coordinate conservation projects with NOSC and willing landowners

Four conservation projects were initiated during the Squamscott Project, with three of those projects now very close to having Purchase and Sales agreements drafted and signed. It is anticipated that all of the conservation projects will involve conservation easements, although one project involving 25 acres, may be an outright purchase initially. The other two conservation projects, both of which were project proposals for the Federal Farmland Protection Program, involve the permanent protection of 15 and 83 acres. Both of these conservation projects will likely involve additional funding source proposals.

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

Requested quotes from appraisers; offered recommendations to NOSC regarding appropriate steps to be taken; met with landowners on grant application requirements; participated with UNH Cooperative Extension on providing information to landowners on conservation options and grant requirements;

worked with NOSC members dealing with landowners to provide information on funding applications 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 and attorneys with estate planning knowledge with landowners and NOSC members; interacted with town attorney on funding source information, and information to include in possible letters of intent and draft purchase and sales agreements; continued to interact with NOSC on progress of conservation projects.

4. Create a conservation brochure with general conservation information, the mission of NOSC

RCCD helped the NOSC develop a draft mission statement (see attached). Joyce El Kourti developed a draft conservation brochure with input from the NOSC and RCCD. The final conservation brochure was professionally printed (1000 copies) and was available for all residents at the 2003 Town Meeting. This brochure has also been used for several of the funding applications that were submitted (see attached).

5. Develop funding applications targeting specific resource areas

RCCD developed an eligibility application for the NH DES Water Supply Land Grant Program for one of the conservation projects, which was subsequently selected. RCCD also developed a final NH DES Water Supply Land Grant application for the same conservation project, which was not submitted due to a last-minute vote taken by the NOSC to wait for the fall round.

RCCD developed two Federal Farmland Protection Program applications for two individual conservation projects, which were 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 applications were not provided for this report. Several copies of each report were provided to the funding agency (eight copies each) and to the Town of Newfields. The outcome of the funding applications is not yet known but is expected within a few 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 NOSC 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.

In June of 2003, RCCD completed a Coastal Watershed Land Protection Transaction Assistance Fund Application to request assistance in partially funding a land survey, needed for one of the conservation projects. The outcome of this application is not expected for another few weeks.

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

NOSC used the GIS resource maps to post at Town Meeting. Joyce El Kourti worked with the NOSC to compile a list of NOSC accomplishments that were included in the Newfields Town Report (see attached). The NOSC conservation brochure was also available for all residents participating in the Town Meeting.

7. Hold additional smaller scale workshops explaining basic conservation options for interested landowners

RCCD with assistance from UNH Cooperative Extension and NOSC members met with several different landowners to explain basic conservation options and funding application processes and requirements. During the Squamscott Project, there did not appear to be a need for separate meetings at individuals' homes that would involve several different families; instead, time was spent with individual landowners.

Results and Discussion/Conclusions:

The overall goal of this project was to assist the Newfields Open Space Committee in the coordination of conservation projects, public education workshops on conservation options and estate planning, general public relations, and preparing funding applications to help leverage the open space bond article passed in March of 2002.

Project objectives included:

1. To finalize the natural resource prioritization that assisted in targeting specific resource areas for appropriate funding opportunities
2. To coordinate conservation projects to assist members of the Newfields Open Space Committee (NOSC) in obtaining the correct information, and to discuss land protection and funding opportunities with individual landowners
3. 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
4. To assist the NOSC 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 finalize the natural resource prioritization that assisted in targeting specific resource areas for appropriate funding opportunities

GIS natural resource maps were produced from the Newfields Open Space Plan (2001), and other natural resource attributes to determine which maps and at what scale would be most appropriate to complete the resource prioritization. The Rockingham Planning Commission (RPC) completed the GIS maps, which were reviewed during a workshop with the NOSC. In conjunction with review of the natural resource maps, in a workshop, RCCD completed a resource prioritization 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 spreadsheet was completed in March of 2003. Both of these maps were utilized for several funding applications.

Results Under Objective 2:

To coordinate conservation projects to assist members of the Newfields Open Space Committee (NOSC) in obtaining the correct information, and to discuss land protection and funding opportunities with individual landowners

Following letters originally sent out to all individuals in town with land in current use, several of those landowners initiated contact with NOSC.

During the Squamscott Project there were several requests for assistance in coordinating conservation projects from NOSC members individually, and the entire group, and described under Activities # 3 description listed above. The main result of offering assistance to coordinate conservation projects is that NOSC members had someone to contact to help obtain information and/or appropriate resources that would either be provided to them or for individual landowners. Additionally, NOSC members could request assistance in meeting those landowners to discuss that information further. In most cases information and/or resources were provided to individual NOSC members who then met with landowners. When more detailed information was necessary to explain potential funding applications, a one-on-one meeting often took place with individual landowners, and sometimes those meetings were frequent.

Four conservation projects were initiated during the Squamscott Project, with three of those projects being very close to having Purchase and Sales agreements drafted and signed. RCCD provided coordination on conservation projects where requested, and when appropriate. However, RCCD did provide information and recommendations at times that was not followed. It is recommended that additional time and resources be made available to the NOSC, and that some type of technical assistance continue to be offered to NOSC with both finalizing the existing conservation projects and in developing future conservation projects.

Results Under Objective 3:

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

With the Newfields Open Space Committee Brochure, Newfields Open Space Committee Accomplishments provided in the 2003 Town Report, the variety of extensive 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 Newfields Open Space Committee.

Individuals in town have been able to actively follow the work of the NOSC on almost a monthly basis through much of the public relations efforts due to the work of Joyce El Kourti, and this has kept the initial success and hard work of this program in everyone's mind.

The Conservation Options and Estate Planning Workshop was very well attended, with several residents and others asking very appropriate and timely questions. The result of this workshop ended with several residents having additional discussions with NOSC members about conservation options for their properties.

The NOSC brochures are available for anyone visiting the Newfields Town Hall, and these continue to foster awareness of open space issues in Newfields.

Information and education received through the workshop, along with the extensive media coverage and brochures, has maintained the issue of open space protection in the resident's minds. This has allowed many of the town's residents to continue to actively support the work of the NOSC in protecting open spaces in Newfields.

Results Under Objective 4:

To assist the NOSC 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 eligibility application for the NH DES Water Supply Land Grant Program for one conservation project, which was subsequently selected. An almost final NH DES Water Supply Land Grant application was prepared, but will wait for the fall grant round for submittal.

Additionally, RCCD developed two Federal Farmland Protection Program applications for two individual conservation projects, which were submitted in May of 2003. RCCD also completed a Coastal Watershed Land Protection

Transaction Assistance Fund Application to request assistance in partially funding a land survey, needed for one of the conservation projects.

RCCD coordinated all necessary aspects to organize and complete these funding applications as described above, 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 NOSC members were enthusiastic about. The NOSC 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)

The Newfields Open Space Committee will continue to work with interested landowners to identify land protection options, and, where appropriate, initiate conservation projects.

The Newfields Open Space Committee will finalize at least three conservation projects within the next several months, and will likely initiate additional conservation projects in the near future.

The Newfields Open Space Committee recognizes the importance of the outreach provided during the Squamscott Project regarding open space and land protection information, and will attempt to continue with this public awareness campaign.

The Newfields Open Space 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 Newfields

Appendix B

- Land Protection and Estate Planning Workshop flyer
- Handouts
- Attendance Sheet

Appendix C

- Newfields Open Space Committee Brochure
- NROC Mission Statement
- Public Relations/Media Information

Appendix D (digital)

- NH DES Water Supply Eligibility Grant text
- Federal Farmland Protection Program Application text – Daley
- Federal Farmland Protection Program Application text – Libby
- Coastal Watershed Land Protection Transaction Assistance Fund Application