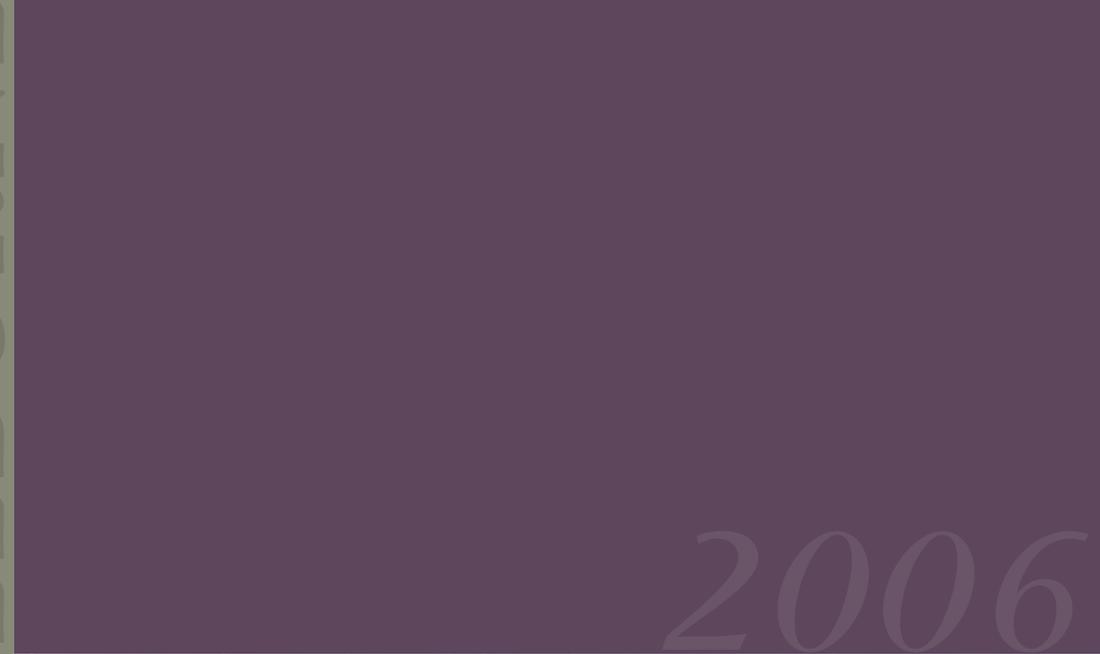




TOWN OF SHELburne



2006

**OPEN SPACE CONSERVATION PLAN**



Shelburne  
Natural  
Resources  
Conservation  
Committee



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# INTRODUCTION

Since enacting its charter in the mid-eighteenth century, the Town of Shelburne has experienced considerable changes in land use patterns. Once a sparsely populated rural farming community, today Shelburne is a rich mosaic of landscapes - from woodlands to residential neighborhoods, from agricultural lands to commercial properties.

## Purpose

The purpose of the Open Space and Natural Resource Conservation Plan is to enhance the Town's ability to protect lands with high natural resource value. More specifically, the Plan aims to:

- Provide the strategies, plans, and guidance that will realize the Town's long-term vision for conserving important open spaces and natural resources;
- Guide use of the Town's Conservation Fund;
- Establish a prioritization (ranking) system for use when evaluating properties in the Town for conservation;
- Inform the public on open space and land conservation issues, policy , process and plans
- Enhance public awareness about the benefits derived from—and threats posed to — Shelburne's diverse natural resources.

The challenge facing the Town today is to balance and maintain current, as well as future, land uses without severing historic links to the past or jeopardizing the quality, integrity, and character of the town. The very factors that have made Shelburne an attractive place to live could be lost if unplanned growth occurs.

## Vision Statement

The natural resources and open spaces that make Shelburne a desirable place to live shall be conserved for future generations to enjoy and appreciate. This conservation shall occur in the context of a community that is also growing and changing.

The character of Shelburne will continue to be defined by the Town's rural, small town, village-centric atmosphere; its natural, recreational, and educational assets; and the more than 40 year tradition of citizen-directed growth.

**Particular importance will be placed on lands whose development would have an undue, adverse effect on water quality, wildlife habitat, agricultural lands, and scenic areas.**

Those areas with high natural resource value and that are important to Shelburne and the State of Vermont will be subject to careful stewardship. These areas include places deemed of local importance as well as those of regional or statewide significance. Particular importance will be placed on lands whose development would have an undue, adverse effect on water quality, wildlife habitat, agricultural lands, and scenic areas.

The Town will protect and conserve its working farms, forestland, core habitat areas important to flora and fauna, and corridors that link these core areas. Because personal connections with nature are important to maintain Shelburne's heritage and sense of community, low-impact recreational opportunities that do not alter natural areas will be encouraged. The Town will be a place of natural beauty and uninterrupted views.



## Definition of Open Space

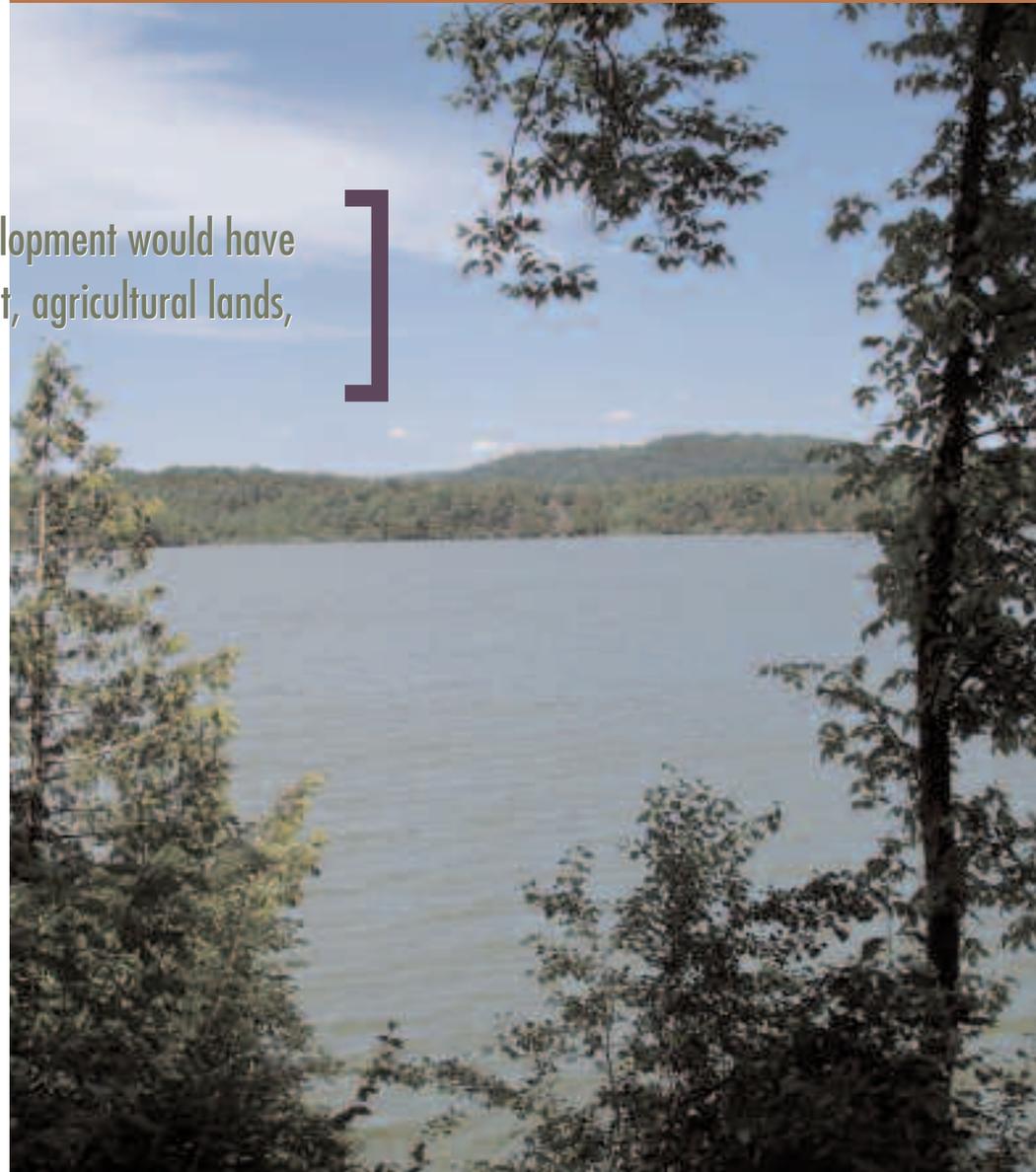
For the purposes of this Plan, open space is defined as an area of Shelburne's landscape that is essentially undeveloped, such as ridges, streams, woodlands, wetlands, shorelines, and agricultural lands. Open space lands typically have no buildings or other complex human-made structures in current service, except for active farms with barns and other agricultural structures. These lands may be in their natural state, serving important environmental and/or aesthetic functions, or they may be used for agriculture, forestry, and/or low-impact recreation. Either way, they help maintain the condition and function of Shelburne's natural resources, which are essential to the Town's outstanding quality of life.

### Typology

Open space can be publicly or privately owned and may or may not be legally protected. It includes agricultural and forest land, undeveloped shorelines, scenic lands, nature parks and preserves. It also includes water bodies such as lakes and bays. Land defined as open space depends in part on its surroundings. In Shelburne, someone's backyard or a narrow corridor surrounded by developed areas is not considered open space, even though the same property might be considered as such in a larger city. However, size is not a limiting factor of open space. Whatever the size, ownership

status, or landscape context, open space always serves to protect sensitive ecosystems, scenic landscapes, water resources, and other important features of the natural and human environments.

Finally, protection of open space may not always include public access. Indeed, public access might be incompatible with other open space uses such as wildlife habitat, fragile plant and animal communities, flood control, or water supply. Also, public access might be incompatible with an individual property owner's right to privacy.



**Net gain for Town budget** – Several studies, including one by Deb Brighton, have concluded that maintenance of open space saves the Town money by reducing the growth in demand for local services, such as sewage treatment, schools, fire, police, and roads. Conservation easements can cause a reduction in tax revenues. However, some studies indicate that if the open space land were developed into residential properties, the tax revenue generated for the Town typically would be **less** than the cost of the additional services required by the new development – resulting in a net loss for the Town.

**Enhanced property values** – Property values within a community tend to remain steady or increase where communities place a high value on preserving their environmental and scenic resources.

**Protection of water quality** – Maintenance of open space, such as forests and fields, protect surface and ground water resources by acting as a natural filter for removing chemicals, debris, and other pollutants before they enter our water system, reducing the need for expensive filtration systems. Shelburne relies on Shelburne Bay and Lake Champlain for its drinking water. Water resources located in Shelburne, including Shelburne Pond, Muddy Brook, the LaPlatte River, and the McCabe Brook, all affect these watersheds and thus the quality of our water for drinking, farming and recreation.

**Habitat conservation** — Open spaces often provide critical habitat for a wealth of animals and plants, including rare, endangered and threatened species. These habitats can include intact ecosystems or corridors that permit movement and dispersal. Conservation of natural open spaces maintains habitat diversity, which in turn is essential for biological diversity. These areas thus preserve a legacy that is passed from one generation to the next.

**Agricultural production** — Working farms (including dairy, corn, apple, wine, and other commodities) enhance the economic vitality of the local community. They contribute to the local economy by providing income for farmers and creating demand for products and services. They not only offer residents the opportunity to eat locally grown food but, by producing an enticing product, help “brand” Shelburne. This “brand” or recognition creates a market for other goods and services produced in the community and also entices people to visit.

**Vitality of farming lifestyle** – As development, economic, and demographic changes precipitate a decline in the number of working farms, the conservation of these lands becomes a more important priority. Communities can help maintain farmland as open space by developing incentives that provide an economic safety net for farmers.

**Economic opportunities** – Open land, pastoral landscapes, scenic vistas and the availability of lands for low-impact recreation are important to the Town’s quality of life and sense of community, making them an important factor in attracting and maintaining economic investment. Visitors from in and out of state come to Shelburne to enjoy our historic sites and picturesque countryside. The considerable economic activity generated by tourism suggests that the Town receives a healthy return on its investment in open-space conservation.

**Physical benefit from low-impact recreational opportunities** – People use open space for a variety of physical activities that do not require alteration or degradation of the landscape, such as walking, hiking, cross-country skiing, biking, or canoeing.

**Psychological benefits of tranquility and stress reduction** — Nature is an effective stress reducer because it provides a kind of “cognitive quiet,” reducing physiological arousal and preventing “information overload.” Studies show that direct or vicarious experience with natural areas reduces stress, and anxiety. Even the passive viewing of natural environments has both physiological and psychological benefits, and most people can recount an experience where time spent in a natural space created a feeling of peace or revitalization.

**Community cohesion** – The natural and historic landmarks of the Town are a common heritage. They serve as a common ground, acting as a social center and encouraging community cohesion.

**Education** — Forests, fields, marshes and other natural areas offer unique opportunities for educational events. These experiences may involve direct interaction with the natural environment or simply serve as the setting for these educational programs. Providing this type of access helps build the understanding and respect that inspires future generations to conserve these resources.



## Focus on Lands with Conservation Value

The definition of open space provided above suggests four key land types—

### Natural Areas

Unique or irreplaceable features of the natural landscape, including (but not limited to) areas supportive of wildlife habitat, unusual plant species, geologic features, and wetlands.

Shelburne is rich in natural resources that benefit the community, the state and beyond. Core habitat areas provide living areas for diverse populations of native aquatic and terrestrial species, including rare fish and plants. Wetlands provide multiple functions, including wildlife habitat, flood protection, and natural filtration of harmful contaminants and excess nutrients. Cliff areas provide scenic vistas and a snapshot of the geologic history of the region as well as unique wildlife habitat. Exemplary sites such as Shelburne Pond, the LaPlatte River Marsh Natural Area Nature Conservancy, and the Allen Hill portion of Shelburne Bay Park provide critical protected habitat for rare species and natural communities and should be buffered against encroachment.

### Working Landscapes

Lands which directly contribute to the ecological and economic health of the region through active management for cultivation or harvest, or which is open and is used for purposes directly supporting public health, security, and well-being.

Working lands in Shelburne are those areas supporting farming (dairy, food and alternative products) and forest production activities. These properties contribute to the local economy, offer a sustainable source of food and wood products, and form a link to our Town's cultural heritage. They also provide other benefits, such as wildlife habitat, scenic open space, and a buffer to sprawl development that can affect the quality of life in the Town.

### Low-Impact Recreation Areas

Areas which promote the physical, social, and spiritual well-being of the Region's people by helping to meet their needs for recreation, community, and/or connection to the natural landscape.

Low-impact Recreation Areas offer places for Shelburne residents to gather, commune with nature, and enjoy physical activity, such as walking, hiking, or snowshoeing, without significantly altering or degrading the natural environment. Important examples in Shelburne include Shelburne Falls, Lake Champlain, Shelburne Pond, Shelburne Bay Park, LaPlatte Nature Park, and the Ticonderoga Rail Trail. In the context of this Plan, the values provided by Low-impact Recreation Areas are largely an advantage of or secondary benefit provided by Natural Areas and Working Landscapes.

### Viewscape Areas

Areas that significantly contribute to the aesthetics, scenic integrity or overall character of the landscape.

The visual surroundings of any community are generally a key part of its sense of identity and heritage. Landscape viewing can be evaluated at different distance zones (e.g. foreground, middleground, background) or in terms of focal points (i.e. elements of view that tend to draw or capture the eye). Set within a broad valley on the edge of Lake Champlain, with rolling farmlands and woodlands, the Town has a rich diversity of viewscape areas. These give our town its character, provide a sense of place and peace, and help connect residents to their environment. Examples include the viewsapes across the undeveloped portions of Shelburne Museum and Shelburne Farms.



Fishing by the boat access at Shelburne Pond

## Need for Additional Open Space

With its proximity to Burlington and unique combination of natural beauty, attractive neighborhoods, and commercial amenities, Shelburne is a dynamic and highly livable community. Its many natural resources include rolling fields and woodlots, valuable lakeshore, noteworthy riparian and wetlands habitats, and rare animal and plant species. It also has a strong historical and cultural identity, emphasized institutionally by Shelburne Farms and Shelburne Museum but also by working farms that continue to produce important agricultural commodities such as milk, cheese, apples, and wine. In addition to these environmental and cultural features, the town's commercial infrastructure permits convenient access to many essential businesses and services that concentrate economic activity in the local community.

Shelburne thus permits its residents to live and work in an attractive and fulfilling natural environment while simultaneously remaining close to places of work and business.

Yet, Shelburne's very desirability is an agent of change that could diminish the characteristics that define the town and make it appealing as a community. During the previous 40 years, agricultural fields and other desirable sites have been steadily subdivided and converted into residential development, a pattern of suburbanization that has occurred throughout Chittenden County.

According to a study completed by the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission, current zoning in Shelburne would permit construction of an additional 1800 units in the community. Greatly expanded residen-

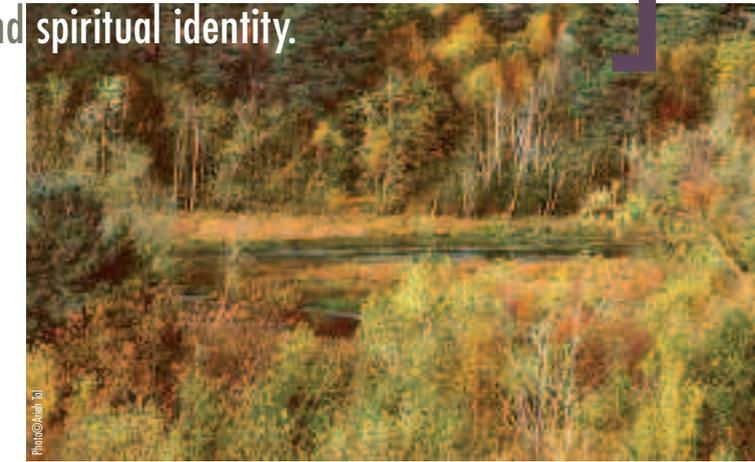
tial development, with its inevitable increase in population, has prompted a related expansion of the commercial and municipal services generally expected in suburbs. Ultimately, these changes have translated not only into a rapid and direct loss of undeveloped land but also the parcelization and degradation of remaining open spaces. Many farmlands, wetlands, and remnant forest patches have been eliminated or fragmented, and each year new proposals are submitted for additional residential development, further reducing the extent and quality of undeveloped lands and their component natural resources.

The unavoidable reality is that much development is occurring in Shelburne and will likely continue well into the future. A corollary truth is that development will fundamentally affect the town's character. While the advantages and disadvantages of these changes can be debated at length, there is much sentiment in Shelburne that the town's unique characteristics should be preserved to the fullest extent possible. Action is needed now to ensure that Shelburne's most valuable open spaces remain a vibrant and integral part of the town's economic, cultural, and spiritual identity. This plan helps identify specific priorities and the conservation methods that can be used to attain them.

To accomplish this goal, some undeveloped lands that offer high-quality natural resources must be permanently protected.

(Without such protection, there is no guarantee that existing open spaces will remain in their current state, and indeed there is much evidence indicating that remaining undeveloped lands will ultimately be converted into residential and

**Action is needed now to ensure that Shelburne's most valuable open spaces remain a vibrant and integral part of the town's economic, cultural, and spiritual identity.**



Lower LaPlatte River marsh

commercial development.) Protection can be achieved by the acquisition of easements, which are legal rights in land that may restrict development, preserve a view, etc. Easements are attractive when the owner of a property wishes to continue some level of activity or use of that property, such as when a farmer continues to grow crops on farmland. Easements allow property to remain in private ownership. Therefore they allow families to transfer conserved property from generation to generation. Alternatively, conservation can be achieved by "fee simple" purchase, which transfers ownership of the land to a municipality or land trust.

## Organization of the Open Space Conservation Plan

As part of town-wide planning efforts, the Natural Resources and Conservation Committee guided the development of this comprehensive and community-based Open Space Conservation Plan focusing on protection of open space with significant natural resource values. (See Appendix 1 for a description of this process found at the Town Planner's office). The first section, the Introduction, begins by defining open space and its benefits and the need for additional open space.

The sections Existing Open Space Lands through Conservation Priorities address the overall process for the acquisition of open space including land inventories, prioritization tools and cost scenarios. The last two sections, Action Plan and Process for Using Conservation Fund, focus on the execution of the plan with its attendant strategies and actions.

This plan will evolve and must be regularly updated. Finally, as the scope of this plan is limited (i.e., it focuses on protection of open spaces with significant natural resource values as opposed to, say, open space valued solely for recreational use), future plans may need to look more broadly at open space.



## Open Space versus Protected Lands

A critical, often overlooked distinction is that lands commonly viewed as open space may or may not be legally protected against permanent alteration. As already described in this plan, open spaces are quite varied and serve many different functions. Over time, many open spaces become important features of a town's landscape: a farmer's field, a nearby woodlot, a scenic vista, an undeveloped shoreline. Depending on the actual ownership, public access to the properties encompassing these features may be encouraged or implied, further deepening the community's perception of undeveloped land as a community resource. However, a common and unfortunate assumption from this collective consciousness is that such properties will always remain in their current state of ownership, management, or public access. In reality, assurances are rare. Unless a specific legal protection such as a conservation easement or deed restriction is in place, or unless a property is owned by a public or private entity with a demonstrated long-term commitment to conservation, there is absolutely no guarantee that a property will remain in an undeveloped state. Furthermore, municipal, state, or federal planning requirements cannot be considered absolute deterrents to development of important or sensitive properties. These requirements incorporate standards that directly influence the character and extent of development, but they generally do not prohibit it.

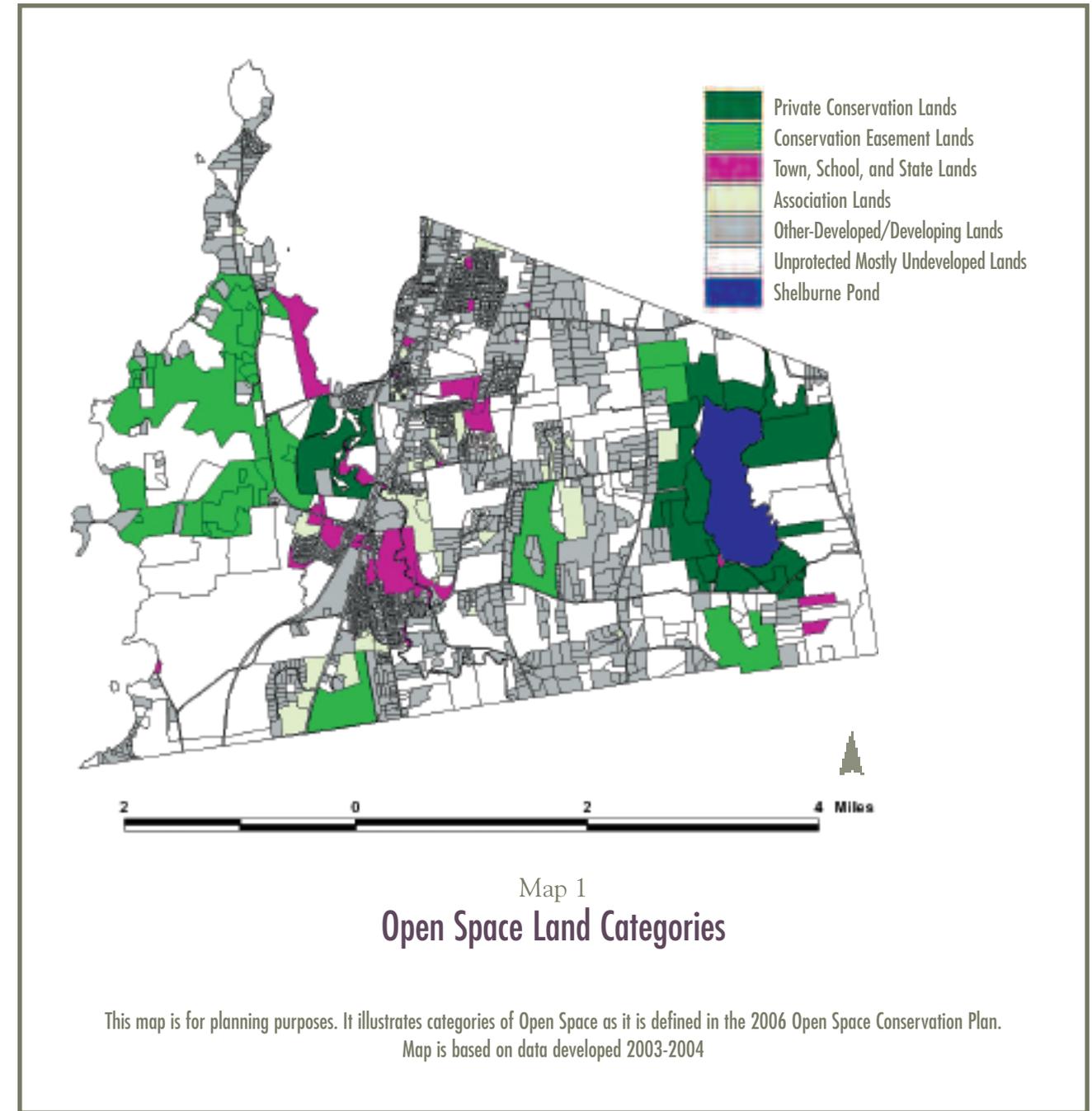
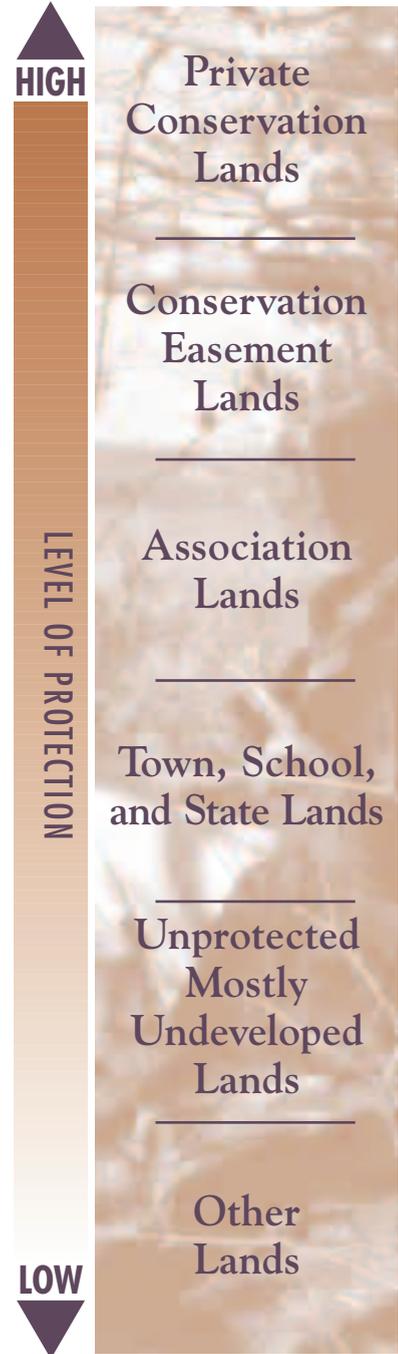
It is thus imperative to avoid assumptions about individual properties. For example, permanent protection does not necessarily exist because: a landowner has seemingly always permitted people to hike or cross-country ski on his/her property; a family seems committed to keeping their property undeveloped from one generation to the next; a business or institution has existed for many years and has always chosen to leave part of its property in a natural condition; a municipality owns undeveloped property (e.g., a town forest) and encourages access; and many other possible scenarios. Landowners, attitudes, and motives change, and previous use or management does not convey future protection.

Similarly, it is short-sighted to assume that a property will be protected because it: (1) has a wetland or some other unique or sensitive feature; (2) is immediately adjacent to already-conserved land; (3) lies within a restrictive zoning district; (4) is isolated from town services; (5) is near active farmland that possesses features generally considered unattractive to non-agricultural neighbors (e.g., manure pits, noise, flies, animal crossings on busy roads); (6) has unusual or difficult topography; (7) is land-locked by other parcels; (8) and other circumstances. Variances from existing by-laws may allow development of seemingly unbuildable properties, and legislative and regulatory mandates may change over time.

In establishing priorities for conservation, this vital distinction between open space and protected lands must be carefully considered: which open space lands in Shelburne are legally protected from development and which have no protection? Potential threats to important natural resources can then be evaluated on an individual basis, and available time and money can be devoted to those projects deemed most pressing, cost-effective, or rewarding. However, it is also possible that some lands will receive high priority even when no imminent development pressures exist. If an opportunity arises to conserve a property with significant natural resources, it may be advisable to pursue the project when circumstances are favorable. In a town like Shelburne, where development pressures are high and will likely remain so indefinitely, limited time and money must be directed to the highest-value open space lands that have no form of protection, capitalizing on opportunities when they exist but keeping in mind that optimal circumstances may never arise.

### Open Space Categories

As shown in Map 1, which depicts the location of “open space” lands and their juxtaposition to residential areas and other use types, open space is distributed throughout Shelburne. It is important to note, however, that the open spaces depicted on this map are not homogenous; lands shown are maintained for a variety of different reasons and have varying levels of legal protection. Some lands are permanently protected by easements held by a non-profit organization dedicated to land conservation while other lands could be converted to alternative land uses such as intensive development.



As used in this Plan, the categories above indicate the level of legal protection afforded individual properties. The first category, **Private Conservation Lands**, has the highest possible level of protection. It includes parcels owned by private, non-profit conservation organizations that provide specific and permanent legal protection against conversion to a developed use (e.g., properties owned by The Nature Conservancy). The next category, Conservation Easement Lands, refers to privately-owned properties that are under easement to a conservation organization. An easement is a voluntary agreement between that usually provides

binding, permanent protection. In Shelburne, this category pertains primarily to private lands under agricultural easements, which have already been converted from a natural condition to fields, pastures, and other agricultural uses, but where specific legal protection is in place to prevent conversion of these properties to developed uses that permanently alter the landscape (e.g., agricultural easements held by the Vermont Land Trust).

**Association Lands** refer primarily to properties under the control of a Homeowner's Association or similar entity, where deed restrictions typically are in place to restrict intensive development of a

parcel. However, the actual level of protection varies, is often quite limited, and reflects the management objectives of the subdivision developer. Furthermore, in many cases a Homeowner's Association could vote to change permitted land uses or even extinguish all restrictions. Note that, for mapping purposes, this category also includes special cases such as the open space portion of Wake Robin and portions of Shelburne Farms not under agricultural easements.

As might be expected, the category **Town, School, and State Lands** includes properties owned by the

Town of Shelburne, the School, or the State of Vermont. Town-owned lands are generally not encumbered by legally-binding measures ensuring that lands will remain in an undeveloped state, and even those properties that are widely considered to be conserved open space (e.g., Shelburne Bay Park, La Platte Nature Park) could be converted into a different use. It is important to note that some lands in this category are already developed (e.g., school property, cemeteries). Also note that state lands are included in this category because the only example of this type in Shelburne is the

...the current set of open-space categories are based exclusively on assumed protection level and make no inference about public access, which depends exclusively on the policies of individual landowners.

Department of Fish and Wildlife Access Area, which has been highly modified to accommodate automobile access and parking. Other types of state lands (e.g., forests, parks), would generally have higher levels of protection.

The final two categories address the remaining land area in the Town. The category **Unprotected Mostly Undeveloped Lands** includes undeveloped or largely undeveloped properties of at least 20 acres. These lands are not conserved and, assuming development proposals meet pertinent regulatory requirements, could be converted to other land uses even if they have high value as open space and are used as such by the community.

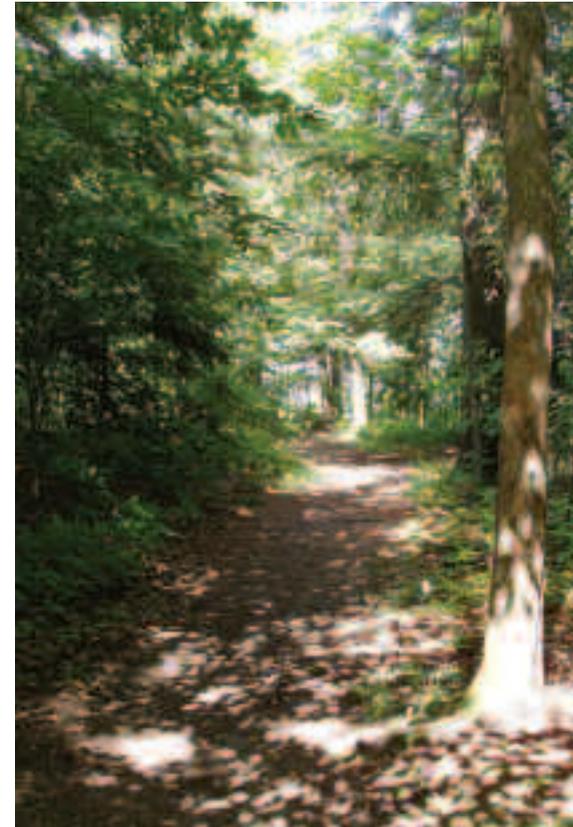
The category **Other Lands** completes the map. It includes developed and developing lands and generally consists of properties that have been or are in the process of being converted to primarily developed uses.

Note that these categories pertain specifically to

the open space lands that currently exist in Shelburne; other categories would be necessary if other types of public or private conservation organizations were represented. Additional categories would also depend on the level of protection afforded against conversion to developed uses.

Also note that the current set of open-space categories are based exclusively on assumed protection level and make no inference about public access, which depends exclusively on the policies of individual landowners. Most publicly-owned lands are open to the public, as are certain privately-owned properties (e.g., LaPlatte River Marsh, Shelburne Farms), but other properties are restricted.

Most existing open spaces in Shelburne occur near Lake Champlain or adjacent to Shelburne Pond. Given their high ecological and aesthetic value, these areas have been the historical focus of conservation efforts. However, numerous properties are also maintained as open space along the La Platte River. The Town of Shelburne owns a diverse collection of parcels, but the two most highly regarded for their natural resources value are Shelburne Bay Park and the La Platte Nature Park. The other Town-owned properties generally provide municipal functions such as schools, playing fields, and cemeteries. Association Lands are scattered throughout Town, but predictably they are concentrated along the Route 7 corridor where residential development has been most extensive.



UVM trail at south-end of Shelburne Pond

# Resource Value Estimation



data become available (e.g., improved land-cover or wildlife-corridor maps).

When the land conservation prioritization tool is applied, users specify the relative weight or importance of each resource feature. The tool then tabulates results and assigns each parcel to a ‘weighted priority’ category. In the course of using the tool, the SNRCC established “cut-off” points to differentiate four conservation-priority categories: low, medium, high, and highest. Cutoff points were chosen to reflect consensus opinions regarding appropriate intervals or categories on a scale of 0 to 100. All rankings generated by the tool will vary according to the resource criteria and weights. Therefore, its results are a starting point for discussion rather than a definitive measure of significance.

## Methods Summary

While developing this plan, the SNRCC used a land conservation prioritization tool to estimate resource value of lands in Shelburne. (For background information on the development of this tool, see Appendix 2.\*) At its core, this tool calculates the number of acres of a resource and/or the number of resource features of a given type falling within each parcel in the Town. Resources evaluated by the system fall within three primary areas: Water Resources, Wildlife Habitat, and Scenic Resources and Agriculture.

The specific data inputs used by the tool—which were selected based on priorities expressed at public meetings, availability, and utility—are identified in Table 1 below. It should be noted, however, that the tool is not static; it can be improved as new and perhaps better

## Prioritization of Properties

Using an initial set of cutoff values, the tool identifies roughly one third of Shelburne’s land area (35 percent) as having “Highest” resource value, roughly one third (35 percent) as having “Low” resource value, and one quarter as having high (7 percent) or Medium (18 percent) resource value. See Figure 1.

Map 2 shows how individual parcels scored according to the resource value calculated by the prioritization tool. Not surprisingly, high-value areas were identified along the LaPlatte River corridor, Shelburne Pond, Shelburne Bay, and Lake Champlain proper. These areas contain the

\* The appendices have not been printed in this version but can be accessed by contacting the Town Planner at the Shelburne Town offices.

largest undeveloped (or minimally-developed) parcels in Shelburne, and they also contain some of the most important wildlife habitats, scenic viewsapes, and water-quality protection zones. In contrast, smaller parcels typically have less resource value because they are less likely to contain significant features and often have been heavily modified.

It is also important to note that the prioritization tool is generally biased toward large parcels because they provide the most cost-effective, comprehensive way to conserve natural resources. However, these results do not preclude protection of smaller parcels; they only identify those parcels that have the strongest combination of features that are routinely evaluated in conservation projects. *As always, the conservation merits of any parcel must be examined individually.*

Another important feature to note is that the prioritization tool considers all parcels, regardless of current protection status. This means that some already-conserved lands, such as various parcels adjacent to Shelburne Pond and parts of Shelburne Farms, scored highly because their natural resources are inherently noteworthy, not because they form a network of existing protected lands. Individual priority scores are relative to those for all other parcels. After resource values have been examined town-wide, conserved lands can be removed from the list of priority areas, identifying those areas that have high value and are still unprotected. These areas can thus become the focus of conservation efforts, helping to direct resources into the most effective and timely investments.

## Natural Resource Value Summarized by Open Space Category

As noted above, protection status is a vital consideration in prioritizing conservation efforts. In this Plan, lands at risk of being permanently converted to developed uses are considered to be unprotected. This plan also recognizes that the actual degree of protection afforded individual properties varies widely. For example, some lands are protected in ways that prohibit all forms of development, while others may be developed for selected uses such as recreation or agriculture, including the construction of buildings. Similarly, some lands may be protected on a permanent basis; others are protected only for set periods of time or until changes are approved by a public body such as the Selectboard or Planning Commission. The SNRCC believes that open-space planning efforts are truly advanced only when resource-rich lands have high levels of

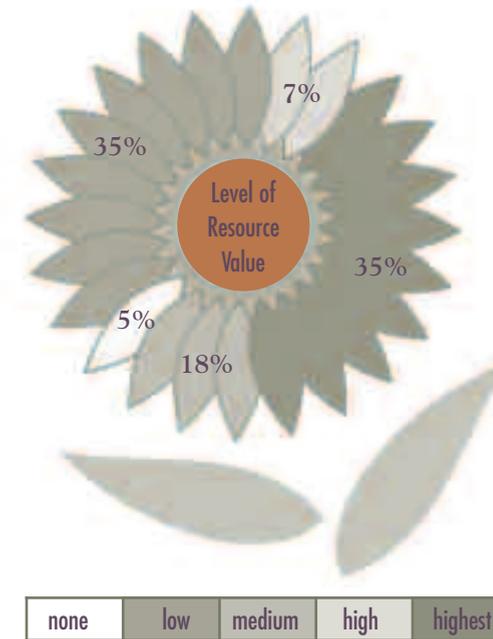
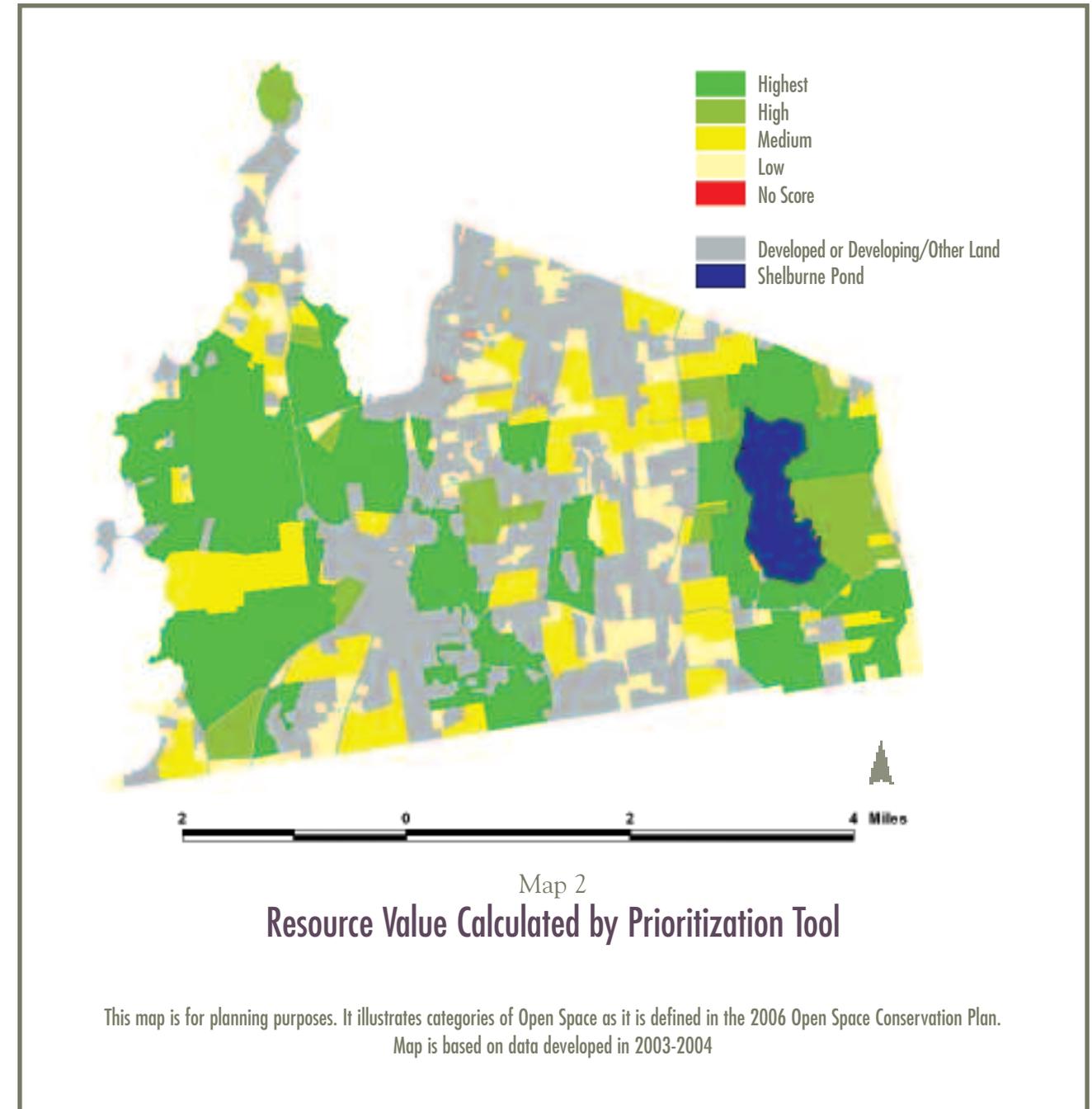


Figure 1- Resource Value of Land in Shelburne, as Determined by Baseline Prioritization

Feature	Description	Data Source
Wetlands	Lands occupied by wetlands identified by the National Wetlands Inventory, as modified by the Vermont Water Resources Board	Vermont Center for Geographic Information
Adjacent Area Stream Buffers	Lands within 100 feet of all mapped streams	Stream information from Vermont Center for Geographic Information
Non-adjacent Area Stream Buffers	Lands between 100 and 250 feet from all mapped streams	Stream information from Vermont Center for Geographic Information
LaPlatte River	Land in parcels with boundaries along main stem of LaPlatte River	Vermont Center for Geographic Information
Natural Communities	Lands within areas identified as significant natural communities in county/statewide survey of significant natural communities	Vermont Center for Geographic Information
Natural Heritage Buffers	Lands within buffer of Natural Heritage sites, as mapped by Vermont Natural Heritage program	Vermont Center for Geographic Information
Mapped Deer Wintering Areas	Lands within deer wintering areas mapped by Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife	Vermont Center for Geographic Information
Wildlife Corridors	Lands within mapped wildlife corridors	Addison County Regional Planning Commission
Forest Land Cover	Using satellite imagery, areas identified as being occupied by forest	Vermont Center for Geographic Information
Adjacent to Conserved Lands	Land in parcels located adjacent to lands with permanent, high level conservation protections and Town open space	Town of Shelburne Planning Office
Natural Heritage Sites	Number of Natural Heritage sites, as mapped by Vermont Natural Heritage program, falling within a parcel	Vermont Center for Geographic Information
Foreground View Area	Lands falling within Foreground View as identified in Town Significant View study	Town of Shelburne Planning Office
Middleground View Area	Lands falling within Middleground View as identified in Town Significant View study	Town of Shelburne Planning Office
Agricultural land Cover	Using satellite imagery, areas identified as being occupied by agricultural land	Vermont Center for Geographic Information
Prime Agricultural Soils	Lands occupied by prime agricultural soils, as identified by the Natural Resource Conservation Service (formerly Soil Conservation Service)	Vermont Center for Geographic Information

Table 1. Data in SNRCC Land Conservation Prioritization Tool



protection in perpetuity. Permanent protection is also a more efficient use of available conservation funds.

Under the categorization system developed by the SNRCC, about 1200 acres in Shelburne have the high level of protection associated with Private Conservation Lands.

Another 1,840 acres have a level of protection consistent with the Conservation Easement Lands, while 1034 acres have a relatively low level of protection consistent with the Association Lands category. About 480 additional acres occur in the Town Lands category. All told, using various conservation strategies, protected lands represent approximately 30 percent of the total land area of the Town<sup>1</sup>. The percentage of total conserved land decreases to about 20% when the categories providing minimal protection (Association Lands and Town Lands) are excluded.<sup>2</sup>

By comparing the results of the prioritization tool with the classification of existing conservation lands, it is possible to identify high-value lands that are currently unprotected. As shown in Table 2 below, approximately 2,025 acres of the highest value lands in Shelburne may be considered unpro-

tected using the SNRCC's classification system. The majority of lands with high- and medium-value resources, with a combined area of roughly 2,900 acres are likewise unprotected. As detailed below, a key recommendation of this Plan is that unprotected properties with high natural resource value should be the focus of Town conservation efforts.

The SNRCC believes that two related issues are highlighted by this analysis. The first is that conserved lands in Shelburne are not created equal—in other words, they do not all share similar levels of resource significance. (All conserved lands have some value, but some parcels have higher ecological and human-centered values.) The second is that open space may not remain in its current condition unless an easement or another conservation measure is enacted to permanently protect it. Both of these issues should be carefully considered when the Town prioritizes future conservation efforts and plans for the long-term management of open space lands.

<sup>1</sup> Note: the area/acres occupied by Lake Champlain and Shelburne Pond is excluded.

<sup>2</sup> The figures contained in this paragraph and in Table 2 are based on a categorization and dataset created with the assistance of the consultant who developed the Open Space prioritization system.

Protection Category	None (0)	Low (25)	Medium (50)	High (75)	Highest (100)	Total	Percent
Private Conservation Lands	2.8	0.0	17.4	112.4	1068.1	1201	8%
Conservation Easement Lands	6.4	127.1	359.8	73.0	1273.0	1839	12%
Association Lands	4.0	201.7	140.5	0.6	687.1	1034	7%
Town, School and State Lands	0.7	45.5	135.2	0.0	300.3	482	3%
Other Lands/Unprotected	17.7	1421.3	1806.0	870.1	2024.4	6140	39%
Other Lands/Developed	680.1	3640.1	284.5	40.0	256.1	4901	31%
<b>Total</b>	<b>712</b>	<b>5436</b>	<b>2743</b>	<b>1096</b>	<b>5609</b>	<b>15596</b>	
<b>Percent</b>	<b>5%</b>	<b>35%</b>	<b>18%</b>	<b>7%</b>	<b>36%</b>		

Table 2. Land, in Acres, by Protection Category and Resource Value, October 2005

## Cost Estimation and Funding Sources

The cost of conserving open space varies according to many factors, including fair market value of the property being conserved, the level of protection being sought (e.g., fee ownership or easement), and related subjects such as potential tax benefits to the seller. The following paragraphs present information relating to the cost of land the Town may wish to see protected, sources of funding that might be used to offset those costs, and “scenarios” that illustrate the possible impact of local land conservation on the Town budget.

### Current and Projected Real Estate Values

Land values in Shelburne are high relative to many locations within Chittenden County and the rest of Vermont. According to the Shelburne Assessor's office, the cost of open land can exceed several thousand dollars per acre on large parcels. The per acre cost of land in smaller lots is even higher. In addition, land is appreciating in value at a rapid rate. According to the Assessor's office, some properties in the Town are currently increasing in value by approximately ten percent per year.

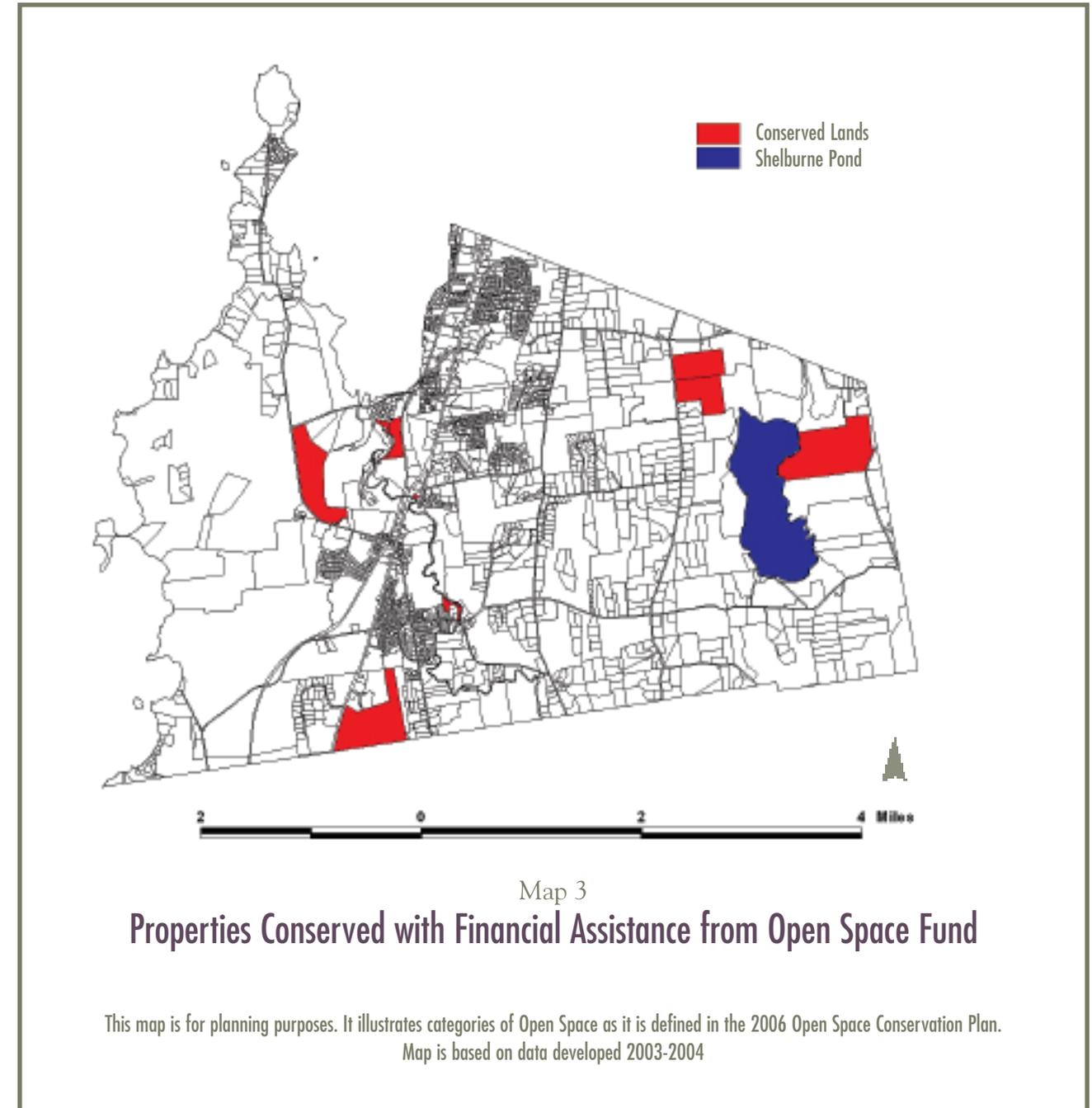
When land is conserved, it is not always necessary or appropriate for it to be purchased outright. As noted elsewhere in this Plan, acquisition of conservation easements can be a highly effective means to protect open space. The cost

of obtaining conservation easements on property in Shelburne is believed to range between 30 and 90 percent of market value. It should be noted that acquisition of easements does not necessarily reduce the size of the Town's tax base (Grand List). In certain situations, easements can provide "amenity values" to adjoining properties to a degree that more than offsets any decline in listed value of the conserved property. Also, some farms, forests, and wetlands are already taxed at the conservation value because they are enrolled in the State's Use Value Appraisal program (i.e., Current Use) or because building potential is low.

### Possible Funding Sources

Given the price of land in Shelburne, the Town's Open Space Fund has been and will have to be supplemented by funds from other organizations to adequately address conservation priorities. The following section provides a brief description of possible funding sources, and Appendix 4 contains a list of organizations with which the Town has partnered to complete conservation projects in recent years.

LaPlatte River on Falls Road at bridge



## CONSERVATION PROJECTS, PARTNERS AND FUNDING

## CONSERVATION PROJECTS, PARTNERS AND FUNDING



### Clark Property – Route 7 and LaPlatte River

2005 • .7 acres • waterway/animal habitat & corridor  
A small homestead on the LaPlatte River became the site of the Shelburne River Park. This parcel is owned and managed by the Town of Shelburne as part of the LaPlatte River greenbelt. Lake Champlain Land Trust partnered with the town and holds the conservation easement.

Purchase Price \$72,000  
Total Project Cost \$133,000  
Town Contribution: \$40,000  
Funds Leveraged: \$93,000

Source: Lake Champlain Land Trust and Vermont Housing & Conservation Board

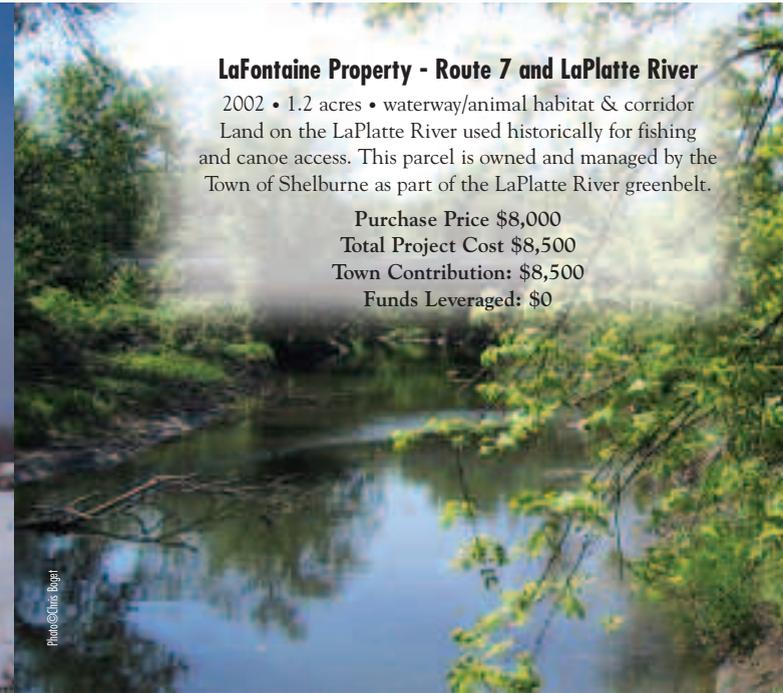


### Clark Farm - Route 7 (southern entrance to Town)

1996 • 146.5 acres • gateway/viewscape/agricultural lands/ animal habitat & corridor. Southern gateway entrance to town, part of expansive view shed to east of Route 7 towards Green Mountains

Purchase Price \$400,000  
Total Project Cost \$450,000  
Town Contribution: \$15,000  
Funds Leveraged: \$435,000

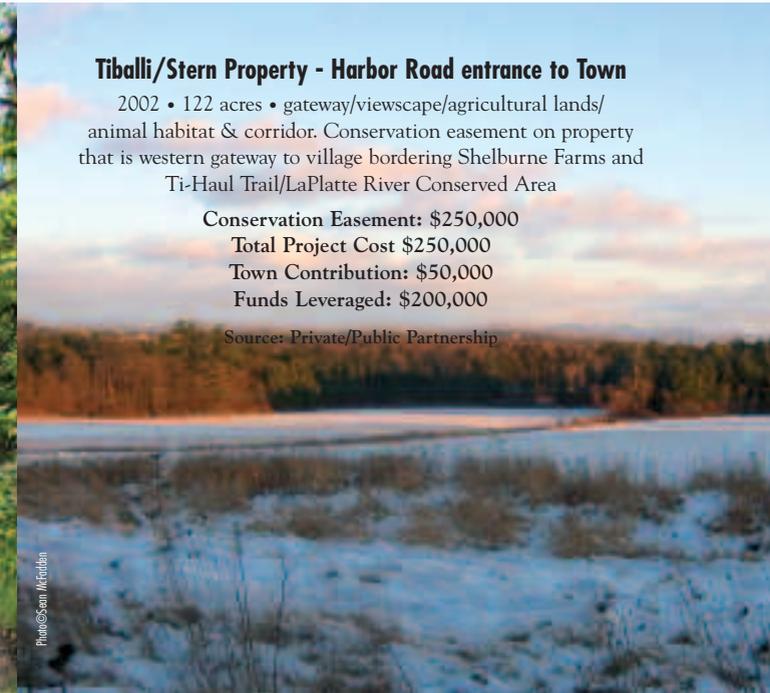
Source: Public/Private Partnership



### LaFontaine Property - Route 7 and LaPlatte River

2002 • 1.2 acres • waterway/animal habitat & corridor  
Land on the LaPlatte River used historically for fishing and canoe access. This parcel is owned and managed by the Town of Shelburne as part of the LaPlatte River greenbelt.

Purchase Price \$8,000  
Total Project Cost \$8,500  
Town Contribution: \$8,500  
Funds Leveraged: \$0

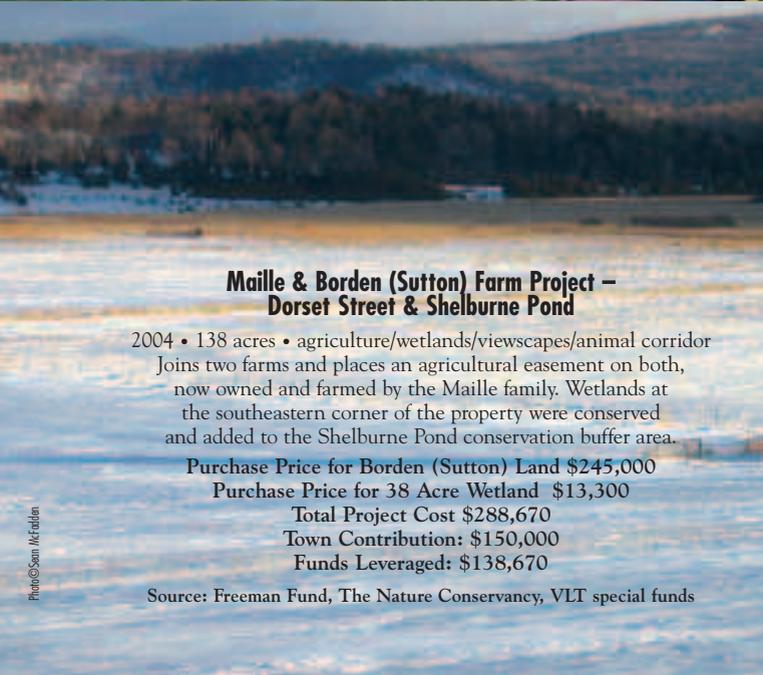


### Tiballi/Stern Property - Harbor Road entrance to Town

2002 • 122 acres • gateway/viewscape/agricultural lands/ animal habitat & corridor. Conservation easement on property that is western gateway to village bordering Shelburne Farms and Ti-Haul Trail/LaPlatte River Conserved Area

Conservation Easement: \$250,000  
Total Project Cost \$250,000  
Town Contribution: \$50,000  
Funds Leveraged: \$200,000

Source: Private/Public Partnership



### Maille & Borden (Sutton) Farm Project – Dorset Street & Shelburne Pond

2004 • 138 acres • agriculture/wetlands/viewsapes/animal corridor  
Joins two farms and places an agricultural easement on both, now owned and farmed by the Maille family. Wetlands at the southeastern corner of the property were conserved and added to the Shelburne Pond conservation buffer area.

Purchase Price for Borden (Sutton) Land \$245,000  
Purchase Price for 38 Acre Wetland \$13,300  
Total Project Cost \$288,670  
Town Contribution: \$150,000  
Funds Leveraged: \$138,670

Source: Freeman Fund, The Nature Conservancy, VLT special funds

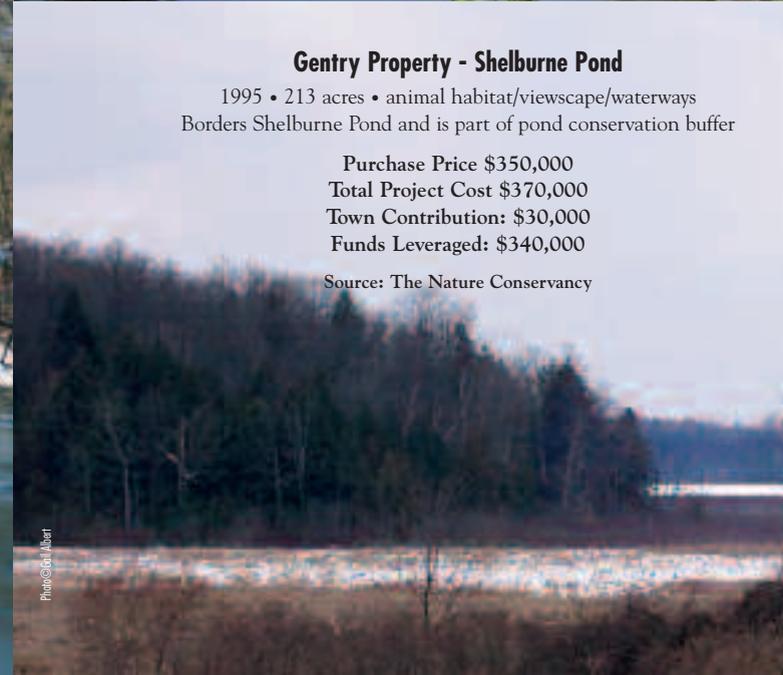


### Hayes Property - LaPlatte River

2000 • 7.2 acre • animal habitat/viewscape/waterways  
On LaPlatte River at historic Shelburne Falls and southeastern edge of LaPlatte Nature Conserve

Purchase Price \$95,000  
Total Project Cost \$96,4000  
Town Contribution: \$40,000  
Funds Leveraged: \$56,000

Source: Vermont Housing and Conservation Board



### Gentry Property - Shelburne Pond

1995 • 213 acres • animal habitat/viewscape/waterways  
Borders Shelburne Pond and is part of pond conservation buffer

Purchase Price \$350,000  
Total Project Cost \$370,000  
Town Contribution: \$30,000  
Funds Leveraged: \$340,000

Source: The Nature Conservancy



### Palmer Property - LaPlatte River

1994 • 28.8 acres • animal habitat/viewscape/waterways  
Located at the mouth of the LaPlatte River, this old camp site has a conservation easement on it and was turned over to the Vermont Audubon Society.

Purchase Price \$110,000  
Total Project Cost \$138,500  
Town Contribution: \$30,000  
Funds Leveraged: \$108,500

Source: Vermont Housing and Conservation Board

## Local Funds

### Open Space Fund

Residents of Shelburne have consistently expressed support for conservation by voting to set aside money into an Open Space Fund. This fund has been in existence in its current form since 1989. However, public support for acquisition of open space dates to 1973, when voters approved appropriating \$16,000 for conservation-related purposes. To date, \$338,000 has been spent by the Town for open space protection (approximately \$300,000 remains in the Open Space fund as of October, 2005). These public funds have been used to purchase conservation easements for both small and large properties and to leverage money from state agencies and non-profit land conservation groups. Over \$1.2 million has been leveraged from Federal, State, and private sources.

All told, Shelburne's Open Space Fund has been used to help protect roughly 640 acres of land. A complete list of projects is contained in Appendix 4. The location of properties conserved with financial assistance from the Shelburne Open Space fund is depicted in Map 3. For past purchases, the SNRCC has screened potential properties and submitted acceptable proposals to the Shelburne Selectboard for approval.

### Property Tax Incentives

Under Vermont State Law (Title 4, Chapter 75), the Selectboard has the authority to provide tax

relief by setting the tax rate or amount of annual taxes to be paid for a particular property for a period of up to ten years. The tax relief established by the Selectboard applies only to the Town portion of the property owner's tax bill. However, these tools can help provide an incentive for property owners to provide conservation easements or donate property to the Town.

### Bonding

Another mechanism for accessing local funds—for conservation as well as other purposes—involves the issuance of municipal bonds. Typically, conservation-related bonds are issued in an amount based on the cost of acquiring rights in a specific property or properties, to pay for the acquisition of those rights. (It may also be possible for bonds to be issued for a set amount but with no particular acquisition in mind, akin to a letter of credit.) Under Vermont law, any municipal bond request must be approved by voters. Although Shelburne does not have a history of using municipal bonding as a means to protecting open space, it is an available option. The SNRCC is particularly intrigued by the opportunities presented by the use of bonding in conjunction with ongoing capitalization of the Shelburne Open Space fund.



## State Funds

State funds for conservation of open space are available primarily through Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB). VHCB, which is capitalized by revenues from a portion of the statewide property transfer tax, operates several programs. These programs include funding dedicated to the conservation of natural areas, recreational land, and historic properties; conservation of land or historic resources of

## Private Funds

Local projects funded by VHCB might include: land acquisition to provide access to water for swimming or boating, biking and hiking trails, greenways, conservation or expansion of town parks, forests and natural areas or acquisition of important historic sites for public use. Private funding for conservation may be available from or through a variety of private sources, such as the Freeman Foundation, the Vermont Land

Over \$1.2 million has been leveraged from Federal, State, and private sources.

statewide significance; and conservation of locally important recreational or agricultural land, natural areas, and historic properties.

Conservation projects eligible for VHCB funding typically include acquisition of natural areas that provide habitat for rare or endangered species, acquisition of lands to provide public access to trails or water, greenways, or acquisition of important historic sites for public use.

Trust, the Trust for Public Land, and Lake Champlain Land Trust. The Freeman Foundation, with offices in Stowe, is a major contributor to land conservation efforts in Vermont, generally funding large and well-established land conservation organizations. The Foundation has also been a contributor to local projects in Shelburne (Sutton and Maille farms) and other Chittenden County towns.

The mission of the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) is to conserve land for the future of Vermont. VLT's major focus is conservation of working farms by acquiring a property's development rights, which are transferred to VLT through a

conservation easement. Since its creation in 1978, VLT has conserved nearly 600 agricultural parcels. In some cases, farmers donated all or part of the value of a conservation easement, but more often VLT has purchased the development rights on these farms, using grants from various public agencies, private foundations, or individuals. VLT also seeks to conserve large tracts of well-managed forest land for their timber-production capabilities, biological attributes and the multiple recreational benefits these lands often provide.

Founded in 1972, the Trust for Public Land (TPL) is a national nonprofit working exclusively to protect land for human enjoyment and well-being. TPL is a source of expertise to help generate Federal, State, and local conservation funding. The Lake Champlain Land Trust (LCLT) seeks to “to save the scenic beauty, natural communities, and recreational amenities of Lake Champlain by permanently preserving significant islands, shoreline areas, and natural communities in the Champlain Region.” LCLT partnered with the SNRCC in 2004 to proactively purchase an important parcel along the LaPlatte River near the Route 7 bridge. This property will now be a site for low-impact recreation called the Shelburne River Park.

## Federal Funds

Federal funding for land conservation is available through several programs, including the Land and Water Conservation Fund, Federal

and State Agricultural Conservation Programs, Forest Legacy Program, and Partnerships for Wildlife. The Land and Water Conservation Fund Program (LWCF) dates from 1965 and is used to create parks and open spaces, protect wilderness and forests, and provide outdoor recreation opportunities. The Federal government, states and local partners use Forest Legacy funds provided through the program to buy conservation easements, or to purchase the land from willing sellers outright. The Forest Legacy program is intended to protect important scenic, cultural, fish, wildlife, and recreational resources, riparian areas, and other ecological values.

Partnerships for Wildlife, which is administered by the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service, provides grants focusing on species which are not hunted or fished, or not currently protected under the Endangered Species Act. Priority is given to projects involving species at risk of becoming threatened or endangered.



Photo © Shelburne News



## Conservation Cost Scenarios

To assist in planning for a comprehensive land conservation program—and to illustrate the possible impact of such a program on the Town budget—the SNRCC has prepared a series of three conservation cost scenarios. These scenarios reflect different assumptions regarding the number and cost of land acquisition projects completed by the Town (“activity”) during a 6-year period. The scenarios also reflect different assumptions regarding the level of local funding (i.e., funds raised via the open space fund or issuance of a municipal bond) involved in the project (“local share”). The scenarios are not based on any statewide statistics. Rather, they represent the Committee’s attempt to formulate distinct policy options that seem realistic and provide insight into the potential cost of conservation activities in the Town.

Three levels of activity based on the size and frequency of projects are assumed in the scenarios (“high,” “medium,” and “low”). Within each activity scenario, three different local share levels are used. These local share levels range from 10 to 50 percent for larger-scale project to 50 to 100 percent for smaller scale projects. As shown in Table 3 below, the potential cost of a high activity land acquisition program could range from \$69,000 to \$257,000 per year over six years, depending on the level of local share. Under the scenarios, the potential cost of a medium activity land acquisition program could range from \$44,600 to \$203,000 per year. Finally, a low activity land acquisition program could cost from \$30,000 to \$121,000 per year.

Currently, Shelburne’s Open Space fund is capitalized at a rate of approximately \$65,000 annually and is not typically adjusted to match the value of land in Shelburne. Consequently, this level of funding appears marginally adequate to support a “low” to “medium” level-of-activity land acquisition program with low levels of Town financial involvement. Furthermore, this level of funding probably is not adequate to achieve the goals presented in Conservation Priorities. Should the Town wish to operate a medium to high level of activity acquisition program, the level of funding raised via the Open Space Fund (or bonding) likely will need to increase substantially.

## High Activity Scenario Details

The High Activity Scenario developed by the SNRCC assumes completion of one large-scale project costing \$500,000 and one medium-scale project costing \$250,000 once every two years. (An example of a possible large-scale project might be to protect a large scenic parcel with significant development potential; an example of a medium-scale project might be to protect a portion of an operating dairy farm, such as the Maille/Sutton farm.) The High Activity Scenario also assumes completion of one small-scale project costing \$100,000 in the alternating years. (An example of a possible small scale project might be to protect a small parcel with wetlands and floodplain along the LaPlatte River, such as the former Clark property.) Assuming three different local share levels for each type of project, total acquisition costs for the community over six years would range from \$487,500 to \$1,800,000. The amount of outside funds leveraged would therefore range from a low of \$750,000 to a high of \$2.06 million.

## Medium Activity Scenario Details

The Medium Activity Scenario also assumes completion of one large-scale project every two years. However, it assumes smaller projects less frequently. Both small and medium-scale projects would be completed once every four years. Again assuming three different local share levels for each type of project, total acquisition costs for the community over six years would range from \$312,500 to \$1,425,000. The amount of outside funds leveraged would therefore range from a \$525,000 to \$1,637,500.

	Total Cost	Cost per Year
<b>High Activity Scenario</b>		
Low Cost Estimate	\$487,500	\$69,643
Medium Cost Estimate	\$975,000	\$139,286
High Cost Estimate	\$1,800,000	\$257,143
<b>Medium Activity Scenario</b>		
Low Cost Estimate	\$312,500	\$44,643
Medium Cost Estimate	\$837,500	\$119,643
High Cost Estimate	\$1,425,000	\$203,571
<b>Low Activity Scenario</b>		
Low Cost Estimate	\$212,500	\$30,357
Medium Cost Estimate	\$450,000	\$64,286
High Cost Estimate	\$850,000	\$121,429

**Table 3. Potential Budget Implications of Open Space Acquisition  
— 6 Year Capital Planning Period —**

## Low Activity Scenario Details

Under the Low Activity Scenario, every two years one large scale project would be completed. Small and medium-scale projects would be completed once every six years. Given three different local share levels for each type of project, total acquisition costs for the community would range from \$212,500 to \$850,000. The amount of outside funds leveraged under the Low Activity Scenario would therefore range from a \$500,000 to \$1,137,500.

Again, it must be noted that these scenarios were developed to illustrate the possible direct financial costs of a land conservation program. If the level of activity pursued, cost of land conserved, and/or amount of outside financial assistance gained were to change, the financial impacts on the Town's budget would need to be adjusted accordingly.



Shelburne Vineyard on Bostwick Road

# Conservation Priorities



## Introduction

Analysis of estimated resource values and existing conservation lands shows that many of Shelburne's remaining high-value undeveloped lands are unprotected. Given the intensity of development pressures in Town, it is a certainty that some of these lands will be converted into residential and commercial development, with attendant loss of open space and alteration of the Town's fundamental character. However, Shelburne residents have consistently shown an interest in and commitment to open-space protection, and it is not too late

**Shelburne residents have consistently shown an interest in and commitment to open-space protection, and it is not too late to conserve a substantial portion of the Town's natural heritage.**

to conserve a substantial portion of the Town's natural heritage. Indeed, the Town has already made notable progress in conserving land and maintaining its cultural identity, with contributions from many organizations and concerned citizens, but more time, effort, and money is needed.

Accordingly, the SNRCC recommends that the Town identify, prioritize, and actively work to conserve land with high-value natural resources that are currently unprotected. All conservation models and methods should be considered, including direct ownership by the Town and purchase of development rights through conservation easements. If necessary and appropriate, the Town should use money from the Open Space Fund to help finance these efforts, but whenever possible other sources should be used. In addition, the Town should actively collaborate with other public and private entities to identify and protect open-space lands.

In setting priorities for conservation, this Plan focuses on the ecological, aesthetic, and water-quality benefits of open space; these values have been consistently identified as most important by citizens and require little or no financial investment (beyond the original cost of conservation) or maintenance. However, low-impact recreation will be permitted on Town-conserved lands when it does not detract from other open space values or conflict with private-property rights. Usually, recreational opportunities will be provided by unpaved, minimally-maintained trails that permit walking, snowshoeing, cross-country skiing, and similar non-motorized activities. Where appropriate, public-access provisions will be included in conservation easements on private lands.

## Focus on High-Value Lands

When high-value open space lands (as determined by the prioritization tool, the opinion of the SNRCC, and other criteria) are available for purchase from a willing seller, the Town and its partners should make a reasonable effort to conserve these lands through direct acquisition, easement, or another established protection mechanism. Any transaction involving the Town will, of course, be contingent on the availability of funds and approval of the Selectboard. When the Town cannot contribute funds to a worthy Town conservation project, the Town and SNRCC will encourage other organizations to actively pursue effective protection strategies.

Initially, conservation efforts will focus on high-value lands encompassing or adjacent to these priorities:

**Shelburne Pond** ✎ **LaPlatte River Corridor**  
**Lake Champlain Shoreline** ✎ **Remaining Working Farms**



Photo © Shelburne News



Photo © Deborah Albert

Most past and current conservation initiatives have involved these resources, and it is vital to continue this focus until they are protected to the fullest extent possible. This approach will maximize the value of previously-spent conservation funds and complete long-held priorities. When the initial goals have been satisfied, emphasis will be shifted to other high-value lands, including:

**Other Riparian Zones** ✎ **Isolated Wetlands**  
**Remaining Forest Patches** ✎ **Land with Exceptional Views**  
**Land with Unique or Rare Features**

Whenever possible, the largest undeveloped parcels containing high-value resources should be conserved first. This policy will simultaneously maximize conservation funds and natural-resource benefits.

It is important to reiterate that the focus on high-value lands does not preclude conservation of lesser-value properties. Similarly, prioritization of large, contiguous parcels does not mean that small properties should be eliminated from consideration. An important example is the newly-created Shelburne River Park, whose aesthetic and ecological values more than compensate for its relatively small size. The priorities described here will guide, but not explicitly dictate, conservation initiatives and use of the Open Space Fund; as always, potential projects will be evaluated on their individual merits.

Furthermore, worthy land-conservation efforts will be considered in every section of Shelburne, including all zoning districts and neighborhoods. Widely-dispersed conservation lands will help maintain wildlife corridors and will provide immediate access to open space for adjacent neighborhoods. However, this Plan cannot guarantee an even geographic distribution of conservation land, and a project's collective benefit to the Town will always be the most important determinant.

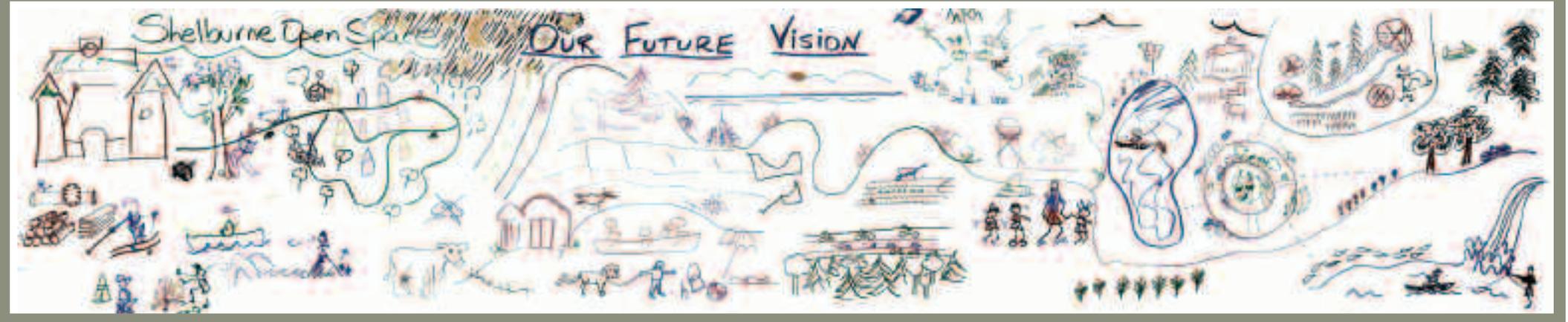
# TAX DOLLARS FOR OPEN SPACE FUND

Voter Approval by Ballot

1974	\$16,000
1978-1983	\$10,000
1984	\$25,000
1985-1988	\$0
1989-1990	\$25,000
1991-1999	\$15,000
2000	\$59,003
2001	\$59,632
2002	\$60,267
2003	\$60,000
2004	\$65,000
2005	\$67,000
2006	\$100,000



## Action Plan for Conservation



During a public town meeting held in October 2002, this banner was a product of the community effort to illustrate the most valuable natural resources and activities in the town of Shelburne.

### Introduction

This section of the Plan describes recommendations for activities to conserve new properties and manage already conserved properties, especially those conserved through use of the Open Space Fund and owned by the Town. It includes activities that will provide up-to-date information on natural resources within the borders of our town to allow us to identify important high-value lands. Other recommended actions will help ensure that land conserved using the Open Space Fund will be managed in a manner consistent with the intent that residents voted to use such funds: to keep the land undeveloped and in its natural state.

### Development of Open Space Fund

Land conservation is often (some would say unavoidably) a reactive process; individuals and institutions marshal effort and money to protect property when it is placed for sale on the open market or an imminent threat becomes apparent. With an Open Space Fund and an accompanying plan in

...it is imperative that the SNRCC and other interested citizens continue the long-standing effort to educate the Town about the costs, benefits, and value of open-space protection.

place to guide its use, Shelburne can respond to these eventualities.

Land values are high in Shelburne,

meaning that conservation efforts depend on timely and adequate fundraising. Although Shelburne's Open Space Fund is currently capitalized at a rate of approximately \$65,000 annually, the potential cost of even a "low activity" conservation program may be as high as \$157,000 per year. Consequently, the SNRCC believes that the Town must increase local funding for land conservation. With a larger Open Space Fund, the Town will be better able to respond quickly and effectively to prospective conservation projects, and it will be better positioned to leverage funds from other organizations. To facilitate this increase, it is imperative that the SNRCC and other interested citizens continue the long-standing effort to educate the Town about the costs, benefits, and value of open-space protection.

## Landowner Outreach

Rather than merely be responsive to development proposals, the SNRCC should proactively reach out to landowners whose properties fall within the Town's natural resource priorities before they decide to sell or develop their land. This outreach can take the form of both education to encourage private conservation efforts and information about sound land-management practices.

Information about the many conservation strategies currently available and the organizations that practice them can help large landowners plan for a future that will both meet their own economic needs and protect the Town's natural heritage. If landowners have this information in advance, they are more likely to practice responsible land management and to be receptive to conservation-minded alternatives to conventional development options.

As part of the Town's landowner outreach activities, owners of properties with significant resources may be offered information regarding actions that they could take to maintain or enhance these assets. These options could range from limiting development on the property (easement, transfer of development rights) to preserving a buffer space around sensitive areas or educating landowners about the impacts of mowing or "brush-hogging" on grassland birds. These owners may also be made aware of the opportunities provided by the Town's Conservation Fund. Funding for these activities should be built into the annual work plan budget submitted by the Natural Resources and Conservation Committee to the Selectboard.

## Support Neighborhood Initiatives

Neighborhood groups should be encouraged to develop plans to protect significant resources, through purchase, neighborhood covenants, or non-binding agreements.

## Promote Agricultural Use of Conserved Lands

The Town should promote the appropriate agricultural use of conserved lands with prime or statewide agricultural soils.

## Encourage Private Conservation Efforts

Private conservation efforts, including the following, should be strongly encouraged.

**Naming and/or designating property.** Naming a park or conserved property after an individual or group should be considered when a significant contribution (not necessarily financial) has been made. Commemoration of project donors on a plaque or some kind of signage is an alternative to naming.

**Voluntary donations to Town conservation fund.** The Town could encourage a regular "giving program" with private funds going to the Open Space fund or a separate maintenance and program fund. One variation of this approach involves the creation of an 'adopt-a-park' program.

**Establish a "Friends of Shelburne Open Space" Group.** Separate from the SNRCC, this group of concerned individuals could provide fundraising and stewardship support for the Town's public open spaces. Conservation organizations often start such groups when undertaking campaigns for an open space acquisition project.

## Expand and Update Resource Mapping

Advances in mapping technology have expanded the planning capabilities of communities such as Shelburne. Residents and officials can now see the interrelationships between features on the landscape and, as a result, are better able to understand how changes could affect the character of the community. However, this technology relies on having an accurate and complete digital library of spatial coverages. While Shelburne has more of its resources mapped than do some other communities, additional inventorying of resources should be completed.

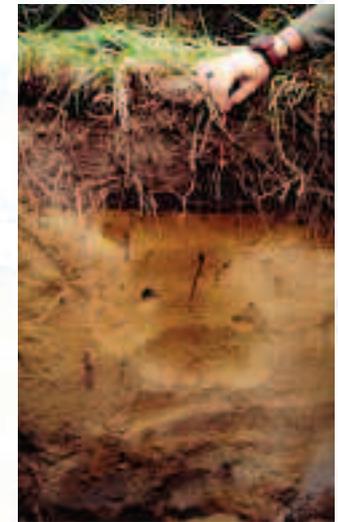
Several maps were identified during this Plan's development as being critical for Open Space Planning. While some of these maps have remained essentially unchanged (e.g. Primary Agricultural Soils, National Wetland Inventory, Hydrological features, FEMA 100-year Floodplains), others need to be created or updated through field work activities or by adapting maps when new material prepared by outside agencies or organizations becomes available. Such maps include the following:

**Natural Features & Significant Views**  
**Wildlife Core Habitat and Corridors & Ridge Lines**  
**Significant Geological Features & Biological Diversity**  
**Landscape Diversity & Recreational Areas,**  
**including current & proposed trail networks**

In terms of inventories, Shelburne-specific species lists for birds, mammals, amphibians, reptiles, invertebrates, and plants also are needed to facilitate assessment of biological diversity and possibly identify additional locations of rare, threatened, or endangered species.

The Planning Commission, working with the Town Planner and SNRCC should identify all maps to be updated or created, but balance that need in light of town budget and staffing constraints.

The maps should be prioritized in order of need with budget, town staffing and schedule so that effort can be focused on those that are of highest priority and return to the town. Finally, all existing and new inventories should be updated on a regular basis. As a general principle, this Plan assumes that the availability of better information will lead to better decision making.



## Create and Maintain Management Plans for Town Owned Lands

Management plans are a necessity for town-owned lands. These plans can range from a very simple few pages to more extensive ones completing all elements of the template. Each one will be different and dependent on the characteristics of the particular property and its intended use.

## Conduct Regular Updates to Open Space and Natural Resource Conservation Plan

This Plan should be reviewed and updated as necessary but no less than five year intervals. The Priority tool should be revised and updated as necessary.



Management plans shall be developed or updated for parcels that are owned by the Town and have significant resource value. This list would include Shelburne Bay Park, the LaPlatte Nature Park, the Shelburne Bay Fishing Access, the Green Meadows property, Hayes (formerly Elkins) property, and Town forests. Development of the management

Management plans shall be developed for parcels that are acquired by the Town or with financial assistance provided by the Town. Where properties are acquired by the Town without outside assistance and are owned in fee,

### NEWLY ACQUIRED LANDS

without the granting of an easement, the Town will prepare the management plan according to the guidelines specified below.

Where properties are acquired by the Town with outside assistance or where an easement or easements are conveyed to third parties, management plans will be prepared cooperatively with these partners.

Once a town-owned parcel has a management plan, the Selectboard, with input and recommendations from the SNRCC, will consider applicants as early as practicable and appoint one or more volunteers to be Stewardship Coordinator (s) for these lands. This position would require one or more visits each year to the property to ensure that the principles of the man-

agement plan are being achieved. Stewardship Coordinators should report to the SNRCC at least quarterly. The SNRCC would recommend appropriate actions to the Town Manager and/or Selectboard, as needed.

### EXISTING TOWN OWNED LANDS

plans shall be integrated with existing town staff annual work plans and considering town budget constraints with the goal of completing these plans within a three year time frame for all of the Town properties. Until such time as a Permanent Management Plan is approved for a property, development or alterations of any type can only occur with necessary town reviews and final approval by the Selectboard.

The Town Staff will oversee the development of each management plan with appropriate consultation with the SNRCC, other town bodies and parties. Work on development of management plans should be financially supported via appropriations from the general town budget or, where possible, grants and/or donations. Final approval of Management Plans shall be by the Selectboard following a public hearing. Changes to these management plans would occur only after review by the SNRCC and inclusion on the Selectboard agenda.

### MANAGEMENT PREPARATION GUIDELINES

### STEWARDSHIP COORDINATION



## PROCESS

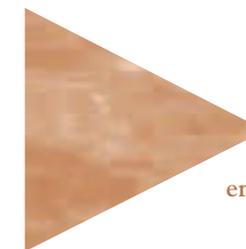
## FOR USE OF TOWN CONSERVATION FUND

Residents of Shelburne have demonstrated strong support for the Town's Natural Resources / Conservation Land Preservation Fund ("Conservation Fund"). Since its creation 15 years ago, requests to capitalize the fund have been approved with the support of an average of nearly 70% of voters casting ballots. The Conservation Fund has been used to purchase properties and conservation easements in the Town. Typically, this fund has been used to leverage significant amounts money from state agencies and non-profit land conservation groups. While, it is uncertain whether the Town will be able to maintain the high levels of leveraging achieved in the past, we will strive to continue to do so.

Until now, the review process for using the Fund for purchases and easements has been relatively informal: the SNRCC screened potential properties against

a set of qualitative criteria, including gateways, waterways, viewsapes, agricultural lands, and critical wildlife habit. The Committee then submitted its proposal to the Shelburne Selectboard for approval.

While this process has worked exceptionally well in the past, there is a need to document the process. Documenting and standardizing this process will:



- provide process clarity
- ensure fair treatment of proposals
- facilitate the parcel review process
- ensure coordination among Town committees and commissions
- add formality regarding the use of the Fund

## Direct Conservation Funds to Parcels with Significant Open Space Values

The Conservation Fund will be directed to only those undeveloped parcels that have significant natural resource value consistent with the conservation priorities described previously in this Plan.

At times the Conservation Fund may be used to purchase properties without these values. However, this may occur only when such properties are to be exchanged for properties with high open space values as part of a coordinated purchase.

Recommendations of the SNRCC are presented by the SNRCC to the Selectboard, usually in Executive Session where detailed discussion of the proposal takes place and is considered in light of and in compliance with the Conservation Fund principles. Executive Session is typically necessary at this point as this would be a negotiation in process between the Town and a landowner and/or other parties.

## Review Applications and Screening Process

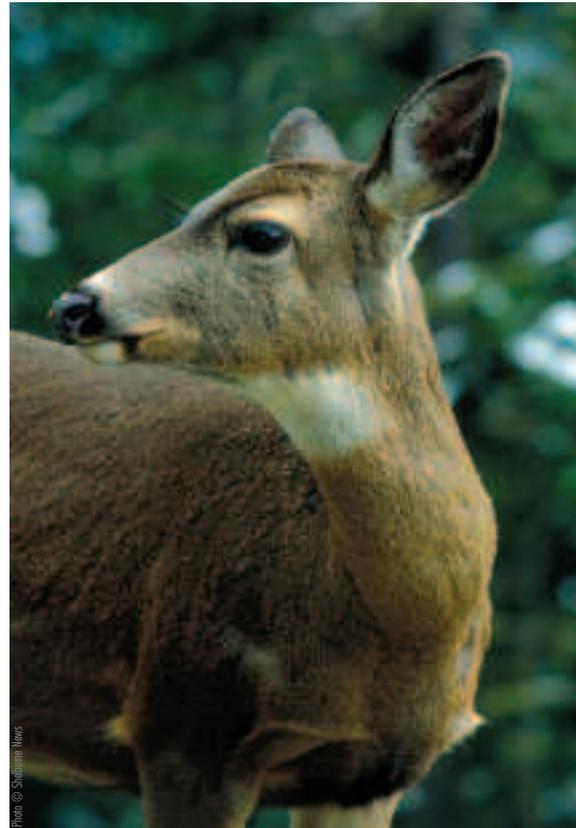
The NRCC uses a five-step process to determine the suitability of a parcel as follows:

**Submission of Application Form** Completion of an application form will allow residents and other concerned parties to nominate parcels for conservation through acquisition, easement or donation.

It should be realized that in the very early stages, there will likely be informal discussion prior to the initiation of an application form. The form should provide critical management information (location, price, proximity to other conserved lands) as well as details about its natural resource values and unique features. It should also provide information regarding potential local and regional planning implications, such as proximity to existing conserved lands, location relative to sewer service area, and access to trails.

### Preliminary Analysis

Available natural resource maps and information will be queried using ArcView GIS software or other means to screen how well a property matches the community priorities as described in this Plan. The initial check will be to determine if it is a property that is in the prioritization category of of the “highest” resource value as described in this plan. For additional prioritization information, the SNRCC or Town Planner will check to see if the parcel has any of the following features:



- Lakes, rivers, or stream
- Mapped wetlands or floodways
- Habitat for locally significant/threatened species
- Significant vistas or landscape features
- Productive agricultural soils

**On-Site Evaluation** Provided that the parcel has met the basic criteria to this point, members of SNRCC will conduct an inspection to determine a property’s suitability for conservation. The committee may elect to have one or more experts or representatives of other Town committees on this visit

...this fund has been used to leverage significant amounts of money from state agencies and non-profit land conservation groups.

**Solicit Input from Town Staff and Committees** SNRCC shall contact Town committees and Town departments for input. These contacts should include, but not be limited to, Planning, Zoning, Town Manager, and the Paths, Recreation and Historical Review committees and even the general public if that is appropriate in light of a negotiation in process.

**Notify Selectboard** The SNRCC will provide informative discussion or written notice throughout the review process culminating in a written final recommendation regarding use of Conservation Funds.

If an application is denied by the Selectboard, the Selectboard will provide feedback regarding the rationale for the denial to the SNRCC.

## Conservation Fund Principles

The following principles should guide the actions of the SNRCC with regard to any activities related to land conservation.

The acquisition or protection of land shall be accomplished only in cooperation with willing landowners.

The SNRCC shall consider the full spectrum of approaches for funding and acquiring properties or rights in those properties with significant conservation value.

The SNRCC shall serve as the initial contact and coordinating body for applications, purchases, and donations of open space.

The Conservation Fund should be directed to those parcels that have a high open space value. When possible, the Conservation Fund should be used to leverage other sources of funds. It shall be used for obtaining qualified conservation interests including but not limited to fee simple ownership, easements, rights of first refusal, stewardship endowments, management plans, and costs related to donating a property or conservation easement and

creating the initial management plans if that is a responsibility of the town. As ongoing stewardship costs will be part of the Town's annual operating budget, estimates of the costs of this activity will be included as part of the decision analysis presented to the Selectboard.

§ All real estate transactions shall include either language that permanently limits development on the property in accordance with a management plan, or transfers development rights to a third party land trust organization.

§ No change/addition to the property can be made until a management plan or transfer of development rights has been established. Development of the initial permanent management plans and attendant costs will be included within the scope of the acquisition. The plan development will be overseen by the town staff, and completed within one year of closing.

§ All conservation projects to which town funds are being contributed shall include language in the management plan that the property will be managed in an environmentally responsible manner.

§ Members of the SNRCC will recuse themselves when a conflict of interest exists.

§ A simple majority of all members of the SNRCC will decide by vote whether to recommend to the Selectboard that Conservation Funds be used for a parcel.



## RESOURCES

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