

HELP PROTECT JONES MOUNTAIN

The citizens of New Hartford have an unprecedented opportunity to protect Jones Mountain, a signature landscape defining the history and character of our fast-developing community. This 166-acre parcel, located off Steele Road, includes the summit of Jones Mountain and provides the visual backdrop for the downtown village. Its preservation will provide recreational opportunities and protect natural resources for the enjoyment of generations to come. *Act now and do your part. This opportunity will not come again. Come to the Town Meeting on January 5, 2006, 7:00 P.M. at Town Hall, and vote to preserve Jones Mountain!*

Property Description:

The 166-acre Jones Mountain parcel is covered with rugged mature forest interspersed with meadows and intermittent streams. The property is traversed by existing hiking trails and a beautifully maintained and historic carriage road, lined by old stone walls and culverts built by Irish stonemasons of generations past. The carriage road encircles the summit of Jones Mountain, and provides access to the “bare spot” with spectacular views of the downtown village, Farmington River Valley, and surrounding forests.

The parcel has been designated in the Town and the State Plans of Conservation and Development as a priority conservation area. The property drains into the East Mountain Brook, a tributary to the Farmington River, and is contiguous to 343 acres of undeveloped land held by the Kingdom Game Club. Preserving this land will help protect the Farmington, one of Connecticut’s most pristine waterways, and will help support a large area of continuous forest habitat for our treasured wildlife.

Project Status:

New Hartford’s Open Space Preservation Commission (OSPC) has identified the Jones Mountain property as one of the Town’s highest open space priorities. Two years ago, OSPC asked the Trust for Public Land (TPL), a national non-profit conservation organization, to negotiate with the Jones family to purchase the property and keep it off the market, pending preservation by the Town.

TPL negotiated and recently signed an agreement with the Jones family to purchase the property for \$1,575,000. Thanks to the generosity of the family and their desire to preserve the land for others to enjoy, this price is significantly less than Fair Market Value. TPL applied for a State Open Space and Watershed Land Acquisition Grant, and the State recently awarded TPL a grant of \$450,000 for this purchase. The agreement between TPL and the Jones family requires that the Town approve the purchase of the property by January 15, 2005, and that the sale be closed by February 28, 2006. TPL is paying for title, survey, and other items to help defray the acquisition costs of the Town.

Project Funding:

As a result of the State grant, the portion of the purchase price to be funded by the Town and other sources is \$1,125,000. In June 2004, residents voted overwhelmingly in favor of authorizing the town to bond \$1,500,000 for open space preservation. This month, voters approved expenditure of \$554,000 from these funds to purchase the Goula property on Cotton Hill. The OSPC, Board of Selectmen, and Board of Finance have unanimously approved the expenditure of the remaining \$946,000 to purchase the Jones Mountain property, leaving \$179,000 to be funded from other sources. The Town’s Land Preservation Fund will cover \$60,000, and the New Hartford Land Trust (NHLT) has committed to raising the remaining \$119,000 from private charitable donations.

Like similar projects involving State funds, the Town will need to bond the full cost of project, including the share to be reimbursed by the State. Combined with the Goula project, this amounts to \$1,500,000 in originally authorized bonding capacity (\$554,000 for Goula, \$946,000 for Jones Mountain) and \$900,000 to be reimbursed by State grants (\$450,000 for each project), for a total of \$2,400,000. OSPC and the Boards of Selectmen and Finance have agreed to include an additional \$55,000 in bond capacity just in case this is needed to cover legal fees and interest on short-term

borrowing pending receipt of the State grant funds. Therefore, to create the mechanism to purchase the Jones Mountain property, voters at Town Meeting will be asked to increase the total bonding capacity to \$2,455,000. Only \$1,500,000 of this will be used for long-term (20-year) bonding.

To create the mechanism for closing the purchase, the Town will appropriate \$119,000 from the surplus account to be paid back by charitable donations collected by NHLT. The Land Trust recognizes that this project is critical to the quality of our life in town. NHLT launched a fundraising campaign to pay back the full \$119,000. In the first 2 weeks of the campaign, more than half of the funds have been raised. The goal is to raise the full amount and reimburse the town by April 1, 2006. If necessary, some of this appropriation may also be offset by non-tax revenues from the Town's Land Preservation Fund, which collects fees in lieu of open space from developers, PA 490 penalties, and revenues from the sale of Town-owned land.

State Grant	\$450,000
Long-term Bonding	946,000
Land Preservation Fund	60,000
Charitable Donations	119,000
Total Purchase Price	\$1,575,000

Project Benefits:

Recreational Opportunities - Once purchased, the Town will own the property and be able to use it for passive recreation. For their contributions to the purchase, the State and the New Hartford Land Trust will be given easements to protect and manage the property. Protection of the property will create a park that will be easily accessible from downtown New Hartford. A new trail from Steele Road to existing trails is proposed, along with a small trailhead parking area. Existing trails, the old carriage road, and new trails will be open to the public for passive recreation providing a wonderful place to walk, hike, cross-country ski, wildlife watch, and take in the view. The pristine forest and watershed resources will provide environmental education and research opportunities for visitors, researchers, and school children.

Open Space Connections - Jones Mountain is contiguous to a 343-acre undeveloped property owned and managed by the Kingdom Game Club. Though the Game Club land has not been permanently protected, it is currently managed as an open area. South of Kingdom Game Club, but not abutting, lies the 1400-acre Nepaug State Forest.

Natural Resources - Jones Mountain is a primarily unfragmented, closed-canopy healthy forest with aspen, white ash, oak hemlock, maple and white pine. The property contains intermittent and perennial streams and associated wetlands. The property drains into East Mountain Brook which is a tributary to the Farmington River. In addition, the property is upgradient of the Town's public water supply aquifer. Preservation of this intact forest will protect against the potentially adverse impacts of development on the Farmington River watershed, drinking water, inland waterways, and wildlife.

Historical Resources - The Jones family traces its roots to one of New Hartford's first residents, Deacon Abraham Merrill, born in 1670. Jones Mountain was purchased by the great-grandfather of the current landowners by acquiring 700 acres of woodlots on which to build the family homestead, "The Woodlands". The property has since been owned by his family and passed down through subsequent generations. The Jones family has used the property for enjoying outdoor activities and has diligently maintained the old carriage road that climbs to and encircles the summit.

Economic Benefits - The New Hartford Land Use Office estimates that 48 homes could be built on this property if not preserved. Based on analyses conducted by OSPC, the net cost to taxpayers to provide Town services to these homes would far exceed the costs of bonding \$946,000 for 20 years to acquire and preserve the property.

VOTE YES TO PROTECT JONES MOUNTAIN!

**TOWN MEETING
JANUARY 5, 2006
7:00 PM TOWN HALL**