

TOWN OF ACTON
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Acton, Massachusetts, 01720
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Open Space Committee

November 14, 2005

Mr. Matthew Lundberg, Chair
Town of Acton Community Preservation Committee
c/o Planning Department
Acton Town Hall
472 Main Street
Acton, MA 01720

RE: Community Preservation Plan Project Application Form
Open Space Set-Aside Proposal

Dear Mr. Lundberg and Members:

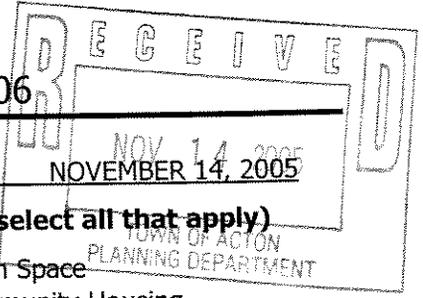
On behalf of the Town of Acton, the Town of Acton Open Space Committee is pleased to submit the attached Project Application Form for the Set-Aside of \$400,000 of Community Preservation Act Funds for the future acquisition and/or preservation of open space. The Open Space Committee suggests that this proposal is consistent with previous recommendations made by the Community Preservation Committee and approved by Town Meeting.

The Open Space Committee thanks you for your consideration of this proposal and looks forward to working with the Community Preservation Committee in advancing this proposal to Town Meeting.

Respectfully yours,

Andrew D. Magee, Chair
Town of Acton Open Space Committee

PROJECT APPLICATION FORM - 2006



Applicant: TOWN OF ACTON

Submission Date: NOVEMBER 14, 2005

Applicant's Address, Phone Number and Email

Purpose: (Please select all that apply)

Don P. Johnson, Town Manager
472 Main Street, Acton MA 01720
978 264 9612 manager@acton-ma.gov

- Open Space
- Community Housing
- Historic Preservation
- Recreation

Town Committee (if applicable): Open Space Committee

Project Name: Open Space Set-Aside Funds

Project Location/Address: N/A

Amount Requested: \$400,000

Project Summary: In the space below, provide a brief summary of the project.

The Town of Acton Open Space Committee requests that the Town of Acton Community Preservation Committee (CPC) recommend to Town meeting that \$400,000 of the 2006 Town of Acton Community Preservation Funds be set aside for future open space acquisition and/or preservation projects. This action would be consistent with previous recommendations made by the CPC and approved by Town Meeting for the set aside of Open Space Preservation Funds.

Estimated Date for Commencement of Project: N/A

Estimated Date for Completion of Project: N/A

Project Narrative

On behalf of the Town of Acton, the Open Space Committee is asking that the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) recommend to Town Meeting that \$400,000 of the 2006 Town of Acton Community Preservation Funds be set aside for future open space acquisition and/or protection projects. This action would be consistent with previous recommendations made by the CPC and approved by Town Meeting for the set-aside of open space preservation funds.

Background. In May of 2001, as part of the development of the *Town of Acton Open Space and Recreation Plan 2002 -2007*, a survey form requesting information on open space and recreation needs was sent to all of Acton's 6,700 households. Over 1,400 surveys were completed and returned, a better than 20 percent response rate. Of the respondents, 81 percent stated they would vote for town-supported land purchases.

In 2005, in response to a recommendation of the *Town of Acton Open Space and Recreation Plan 2002 -2007*, the Board of Selectman created the Town of Acton Open Space Committee as a subcommittee of the Conservation Commission. The mission of the Open Space Committee is to advise Town boards on land acquisition/protection opportunities, identify state and federal funding opportunities for open space protection, and to act as sponsor and/or advocate for open space protection funding proposals to be presented to the CPC through the Board of Selectman. The Open Space Committee has up to seven members, of which one member is from the Board of Selectman, one member is from the Conservation Commission and one member is from the Planning Board.

One of the keystones of the Community Preservation Act (CPA) is the preservation of open space. In its initial two years the Town of Acton CPC has not received any applications specifically designated for open space/land acquisition, although several proposals, such as the Assabet River Rail trail, did include modest associated land purchase. In lieu of specific land purchases, the CPC has recommended to Town Meeting the set aside of \$500,000 of CPA funds for the future acquisition and preservation of open space (\$200,000 in 2004 and \$300,000 in 2005).

Project Scope. Since its inception the Open Space Committee, working with local land trusts such as the Acton Conservation Trust, has identified several potential land protection opportunities. Unfortunately, none of these has of yet come to fruition. In the meantime, the Open Space Committee has identified two basic truths concerning the likelihood of a significant land acquisition in Acton Massachusetts: (1) any such acquisition will likely require an owner interested in land protection over full development potential, and (2) CPA funds set-aside to-date will likely be inadequate to initiate a discussion of a land acquisition of any significant size or area in Acton.

For these reasons, the Open Space Committee is requesting that the CPC set-aside \$400,000 in this funding year, raising the total Town of Acton CPA open space set-aside to-date to \$900,000. It is the Open Space Committee's belief that doing so will allow for

more serious discussions with potential landowners, and potentially set the stage for a significant purchase(s) within a shorter time frame.

Review and Recommendation Criteria

As noted above, the acquisition and preservation of open space is one of the cornerstones of the CPA. The following section reviews the applicability of designating an open space set-aside in relation to the Review and Recommendation Criteria of the *Town of Acton Community Preservation Plan 2006* as presented on page 18 of the Plan.

Consistency with the Town of Acton Community Preservation Plan.

The acquisition and preservation of open space is a basic tenant of the CPA. The Town of Acton Community Preservation Plan fully adopts the CPA's focus to the point of quoting from the Act the definition of community preservation as including "the acquisition, creation and preservation of open space...".

Consistency with Town of Acton Planning Documents

The set-aside of funding dedicated to the acquisition and preservation of open space is highly consistent with both the *Town of Acton Open Space and Recreation Plan 2002 - 2007* and the *1998 Master Plan Update*.

The *Town of Acton Open Space and Recreation Plan 2002 -2007* identified three specific goals: the preservation of the remaining elements of Acton's rural character, environmental protection, and improved recreational opportunities. The objectives of these goals specifically references the preservation of "open space" and the creation of "public open spaces and parklands" bordering Town waterways. The Plan objectives include the preservation of "natural and man-made features that contribute to Acton's character such as open field, woodlands, ponds, country roads, scenic vistas" and makes specific mention of the importance of protecting the Town's remaining farmlands. Clearly, a CPA open space set-aside would be consistent with this Plan.

The set-aside is also clearly consistent with the *1998 Master Plan Update*. The Master Plan goals and objectives specifically includes reference to the protection of Acton's remaining farmland, the conservation of open space parcels, the creation of green belts, and the management and enhancement of Acton's existing conservation lands.

Economic Feasibility

The acquisition and preservation of open space in a town like Acton, where real estate values have sky-rocketed, is an expensive proposition. Buying large parcels of land at market rates will require funds in excess of those available through CPA funding alone. Hence, significant open space purchases will likely require a number of convergent circumstances, such as a seller interested in land protection over maximized dollar value.

and the participation of other entities in the funding process. The intent of the open space set-aside is to continue to develop a pool of money for land protection that begins to give credibility to the concept of land purchase in the eyes of both a potential seller and a potential acquisition partner. To-date the CPA set-aside for land acquisition is \$500,000 which, while not insignificant, represents the going price for a single buildable lot in many parts of Acton. The addition of \$400,000 of set-aside moneys, potentially combined with additional funding in the following year and monies from a funding partner, begins to approach amounts that may be of interest to a seller intent on a reasonable income from a land sale over full market value.

Population Served

To the degree open space preservation serves the entire population it also serves an under-served population. Acton has a number of superb conservation lands and public open spaces. They are used for a range of passive and active recreational purposes, offer environmental protection for our water supplies, and scenic vistas for us as we go about our business. Similarly, there are a number of such spaces, some of which serve similar purposes, that are not currently protected as conservation lands or which have conservation restrictions. As these parcels disappear, so does a portion of what makes Acton so desirable. The open space set-aside offers the hope of protecting some of these parcels that touch the lives of all of our citizens.

Multiple Needs and CPA Focus Areas

Although no specific site is being identified at this time it can be presumed that any land acquisition or preservation effort will entail properties that contribute open space of passive value, such as the preservation of town and rural character, a site of passive and/or active recreational value, a site of potentially historic value either as direct preservation of historic or archeological resources or heritage vista, or properties that offer specific environmental benefits, such as groundwater protection.

Leverage of Funding

Although no specific site is being identified at this time, it is presumed that any significant land acquisition or preservation effort will require certain leveraging actions, including the likely surrender of some value of the land by the seller, and/or the contribution of additional funds by local or regional land trusts and/or private funding initiatives.

Relation to Town Assets

Although no specific site is being identified at this time, the potential for expanding existing Town lands, or creating links between existing and neighboring town lands is always possible.

Consistency with Past Town Meeting Actions

The Project is consistent with recent Town of Acton Town Meeting actions, which include the setting aside of \$200,000 and \$300,000 of CPA funds for open space acquisition and preservation in 2004 and 2005.

Competency to Implement

It is presumed that the Town of Acton will be applicant or co-applicant of any proposal to utilize CPA open space set-aside funds. The Town has successfully demonstrated competency in the implementation of CPA projects.

Site Control

Although no specific site is being identified at this time, it is presumed that ownership and/or a conservation restriction to which the Town is party will be required for any CPA open space land acquisition or preservation proposal funded with set-aside funds.