



Community Preservation Committee  
55 Main Street  
Westford, Massachusetts 01886  
Contact: Dan O'Donnell  
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## Westford Community Preservation Funding Application

### Fiscal Year 2012 Project Submission Form

#### Basic Project Information:

Submission Date: January 13, 2012; resubmitted 8/2/12 with a request for consideration at October 15, 2012 Special Town Meeting

Project Name: O'Brien Farm Conservation Project

CPA funds requested: The applicants are requesting that the Westford Community Preservation Committee approve CPA funding for the purchase of a Conservation Restriction (CR), to be held jointly with a qualified nonprofit organization, on a 23 -acre parcel known as the O'Brien Farm, located at 18 Vose Road, Westford. The CR would permanently prohibit future development, while allowing the land to be used for conservation, recreation, limited agriculture, forestry, and educational purposes. Public access would be permitted. The CR has been appraised at \$1,275,000, and the applicant is requesting \$760,000 in CPA funds, which is 60% of the appraised fair market value. The house and barn and two acres of land that are currently part of the farm will be subdivided off and will not be subject to the CR.

#### Applicants:

Name Ronald Johnson, Westford Land Preservation Foundation Board Member

Westford Land Preservation Foundation and Town of Westford Conservation Commission

Address: PO Box 235, Westford, MA 01886

Phone: 978-692-4740

Email: rjohn927@comcast.net

Name Westford Conservation Commission, through William Turner, Westford Conservation/Resource Planner

Address: Town Hall, 55 Main St, Westford, MA 01886

Phone: 978-692-5524

Email: bturner@westfordma.gov

Sponsoring board/committee(s) Conservation Commission

Additional responsible parties – i.e. Property owner, consultant (if applicable) Conservation Consultant for Landowner: Nellie Aikenhead  
Project manager/contact person: Nellie Aikenhead, nellie@aikenhead.com, 781-228-9303

**Purpose:** (please select all that apply)

- Open Space
- Affordable Housing
- Historic Preservation
- Recreation

**Project location/address:**

Assessor information: (map/block/lot id) as applicable:

Map 18, Lot 121 (Map 2: Assessors Parcels)  
18 Vose Road, Westford (Map 1: Locus)

Ownership/care and custody information:

Owned by the Charles H. McColough Trust (property formerly held by the Helen M. Garrigan Family Trust; property transferred 9/15/2009)

Deed restrictions required:

- Conservation
- Housing
- Historic Preservation

Please note: as proposed, this project will utilize a Conservation Restriction which offers permanent protection, rather than a deed restriction, which offer protection for a period of 30 years.

**Budget:**

Project Budget		
Town of Westford CPA Funding Request	\$ 760,000	60% of appraised value
Landowner Gift ("Bargain Sale")	\$ 345,000	
Private Donations from Individuals and Foundations	\$ 100,000	Campaign launched by SVT and WLPF on July 12, 2012
Conservation Partnership Grant (Commonwealth of Massachusetts)	\$ 85,000	Application Filed 7/16/12
<b>Total Budget (includes \$15k stewardship endowment)</b>	<b>\$1,290,000</b>	

Percent of total budget requested from Community Preservation funds:

The Conservation Restriction has been appraised at \$1,275,000. The CPC is being asked to fund \$760,000, or 60% of that amount. If the purchase of the CR can be completed, the landowner is willing to consider protecting the exterior of the barn with a Historic Preservation Restriction in the future.

Other funding sources (committed/applied/planned):

The Westford Land Preservation Foundation (WLPF) and Sudbury Valley Trustees, both of which have voted to support this project, have launched a campaign to raise a minimum of \$185,000 from sources other than the CPA. Potential sources of funding include: a state Conservation Partnership grant, which is awarded to land trusts working in partnership with public agencies; private gifts from individuals; grants from foundations and local businesses that support land conservation efforts; contributions from organizations such as WLPF, Westford Conservation Trust, and Sudbury Valley Trustees; and discretionary funds controlled by the Conservation Commission.

Anticipated annual income/expenses:

The CR would be held jointly by the Westford Conservation Commission and Sudbury Valley Trustees, a nonprofit conservation organization. Management, stewardship, and monitoring will be completed jointly by the Grantor and SVT, according to an established plan, relieving the Town of future expenses. The Town may incur some related costs, such as appraisal, legal, recording fees, and signage, around the time of closing.

Recurring expenses (i.e. Maintenance):

None. Please see above.

Taxpayer impact: \$760,000 has been requested.

### **Timeline:**

Proposed Start Date: The O'Brien Farm Conservation Project was submitted to the CPC in January 2012 in order to notify and inform the CPC of the potential project. However, because time was insufficient for the Town to secure an appraisal and for project advocates to identify non-town sources of funding, the CPC voted on January 31, 2012 to defer consideration of the application until the October 15<sup>th</sup> Special Town Meeting.

Proposed Completion Date: If approved by the CPC and voters, this project will ultimately include crafting and seeking approval for a Conservation Restriction, a complete survey of the property, significant private fundraising and grant writing, and due diligence on the part of the Town. The applicants are optimistic that most of this work could be completed by the fall and that the project could be completed before the end of 2012. However, this timeline may be extended by agreements of the parties, if necessary, particularly to allow time to apply for state or other grants.

**Endorsement by applicable boards/commissions/community groups:**

- Affordable Housing Committee and/or Housing Authority
- Cemetery Commission
- XX Conservation Commission
- XX Historic Commission
- Parks and Recreation Commission
- Planning Board
- Water Commission
- XX Other

The Board of the Westford Land Preservation Foundation, the Westford Historical Commission, and the Westford Conservation Commission have all formally voted to support the O'Brien Farm Project. Support of other organizations and boards appears likely, but has not been sought. The WLPF, the landowner, and his consultant discussed the project with the CPC on December 6, 2011 and January 31, 2012, with the Conservation Commission on December 14, 2011 and multiple times in 2012, and with the Historical Commission on January 18, 2012. The general reaction seems to be one of support and interest.

**Project Description and Goals:**

**Please describe project.** In proposal, please include how this project impacts Westford's citizens and addresses Westford's current and/or future needs? How does this project preserve Westford's character and meet its preservation goals? Why should this project be funded this year? (Use as many additional pages as necessary)

Please see attached.

If this application is submitted outside of the usual funding cycle, please explain why.

The applicant is submitting this application for consideration at the Fall Special Town Meeting. As discussed previously under "Timeline", the

application was submitted in the normal funding cycle, but consideration was deferred at the request of the CPC because there was insufficient time to prepare for a March Town Meeting Vote.

**List of Attachments:** (including but not limited to photos, plans, maps, quotes, costs, estimates, letters of endorsement)

- Project Description with Property Photos
- Map A. Locus
- Map B. Assessors Parcels
- Map C. Open Space Corridor
- Map D. Hypothetical Development Plan
- Draft Conservation Restriction
- Draft CR Map (to be finalized and surveyed prior to closing)
- Draft Trail Map (to be finalized and surveyed prior to closing)

**Applicant Signatures/Date**

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
Ronald Johnson, Westford Land Preservation Foundation

2 August 2012

  
\_\_\_\_\_  
William Turner, Westford Conservation/Resource Planner

August 2, 2012

\* AGENT, WESTFORD CONSERVATION COMMISSION

## Project Description and Goals:

### Project and CPA Funding Summary

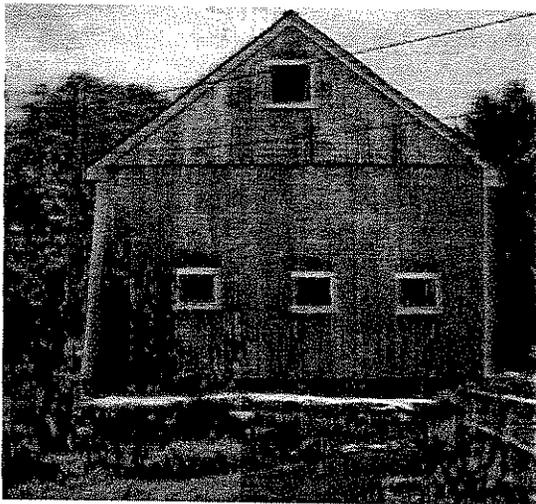
The applicant is requesting that the Westford Community Preservation Committee approve CPA funding for the purchase of a Conservation Restriction (CR), to be held jointly by the Westford Conservation Commission and Sudbury Valley Trustees (SVT), on 23 acres of the 25-acre O'Brien Farm, located at 18 Vose Road, Westford. The CR would permanently prohibit future development, while allowing the land to be used for conservation, recreation, limited agriculture, forestry, and educational purposes. Public access would be permitted. The CR has been appraised at \$1,275,000, and the applicant is requesting \$760,000 in CPA funds, which is 60% of the appraised fair market value.



*Wooded swamp on property, flooded by beavers that are not currently active*

### O'Brien Farm Property Description

Located on one of Westford's scenic roads, as designated under Westford's Scenic Roads Bylaw, the historically significant O'Brien Farm dates back to the late 18th century; it has been owned by four generations of the same family since 1886. Originally operated as a general farm with animals, vegetables and strawberries, the land is now actively managed for the benefit of wildlife. The 25-acre property boasts a variety of habitats on which "Species in Greatest Need of Conservation" depend, including open meadows, forested uplands, a wooded deciduous swamp, a shallow marsh/meadow/fen, and perennial Pond Brook. O'Brien Farm is also an important link in an extensive block of fields and woodlands running between Parker Village and Hart Pond that is actively used as a transportation corridor by native wildlife (see Map C: Open Space Corridor).



*Historic O'Brien Farm Barn*

O'Brien Farm is highly valuable from historic, scenic, and recreational perspectives. The original 18<sup>th</sup> century barn, a recently restored English-style, three-bay, two-story structure that still houses the first farm "outhouse", remains on the land. The barn contains a trove of antique tools, including the anvil and other tools from the original O'Brien Blacksmith Shop, which was located in the area of the former Westford Depot. Other artifacts, including arrowheads and a European musket flint, have been found on the property during cultivation. The rock walls, fields, and

woodlands of the farm offer scenic views to the passing public and are integral to the landscape of Vose Road, a "Scenic" road by vote of Westford Town Meeting. The farm also includes a network of walking trails that will be open to the public, as well as the potential for a small public parking area. Due to the significant conservation, historic, scenic and recreational values, O'Brien Farm was specifically identified as a "Land of Conservation Interest" by the Town of Westford in the 2010 – 2015 Open Space and Recreation Plan.

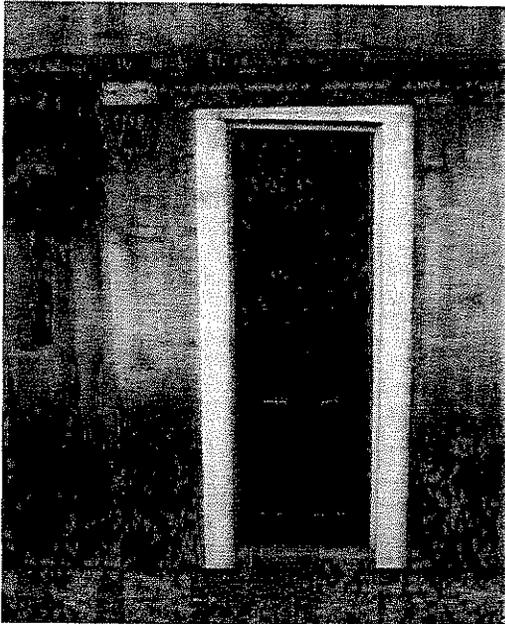


*Pond Meadow Brook was historically stocked with fish; delivery men and guests frequently stopped by with poles in hand.*

### **The Opportunity**

For financial reasons, including the settlement of debt inherited with the property and the execution of estate plans, the owner of O'Brien Farm must sell at least a portion of the land now. With 2,200 feet of road frontage and a total of 25 acres, the farm could potentially be divided into 13 separate house lots, under current zoning bylaws. One of these lots would be an oversized ANR "estate" lot fronting on Vose Road, one would contain the existing house and barn, and the other eleven would be located on a conceptual cul-de-sac behind the existing house (see attached Map 4: Hypothetical Development Plan). The owner has been approached by developers interested in purchasing the farm. However, he would prefer to see the property permanently protected, if it is financially feasible, and has decided to provide a window of opportunity for a conservation purchase before accepting any developer offers.

In order to help make this project a reality, the owner has agreed to convey a Conservation Restriction (CR) that would permanently protect 23 of the 25 acres at a discounted price. This would prohibit any additional development, thereby eliminating all 11 hypothetical lots, while allowing for conservation, recreation, agriculture and other uses. The CR was valued at \$1,275,000 in June 2012 by an independent certified appraiser hired by the Westford Conservation Commission. Project applicants are requesting \$760,000, or 60% of the appraised fair market value, from CPA funds.



*Door to "outhouse" in barn*

The rest of the funding will come from private and state sources. The owner of the farm has agreed to donate \$345,000 in land value, by selling the CR at a discounted price of \$930,000. The Westford Land Preservation Trust hopes to raise \$170,000 in private gifts and state grants, as well as an additional \$15,000 to fund an endowment, eliminating future outlays by the Town.

### **Goals, Objectives, and Benefits**

The O'Brien Farm Conservation project offers a wide range of current and future benefits, and it would help to preserve Westford's character and meet preservation goals. As noted in the property description above, the land provides a myriad of conservation, historic, scenic, and recreational values, all of which help meet goals established in the Open Space and Recreation Plan and approved by Town Meeting.

In addition, the land is valuable from forestry, agricultural, and educational perspectives. O'Brien farm is currently managed according to a forestry plan designed to enhance habitat as well as woodlands. As part of this, a plan to introduce native plants, in particular those indigenous to Middlesex County, has already been developed by the applicant in tandem with the USDA Natural Resources Conservation Services Wildlife Habitat Improvement Program (WHIP) ) and MA Division of Fisheries and Wildlife (Mass Wildlife). In 2011, the first phase of the plan was implemented. Mature trees were removed from three acres of the woodlot in order to enlarge the young forest/scrubland transitional border between the grassland and forest habitats. Native plants that enhance pollinator habitat and expand turtle nesting habitat have been introduced. And additional improvements are planned for the future.

O'Brien Farm includes fertile, potentially tillable land,. The Conservation Restriction will permit some future agricultural uses in designated areas that are currently open fields, thereby ensuring that, if desired, active farming would be allowed in the future. In addition, the property provides excellent educational opportunities. In fact, the New England Wildflower Society conducted a program on enhancing wildlife habitat and encouraging and supporting pollinators through the use of native plants on the site in May 2012.

Permanent protection of the O'Brien Farm and Barn will ensure that the conservation, historic, scenic, recreational, forestry, agricultural, and educational resources are available for current residents of Westford and for future generations.



*Panoramic view of O'Brien Farm and Barn from Vose Road*

For Community Preservation Committee Use Only

Date received: \_\_\_\_\_

Copies distributed on: \_\_\_\_\_

Is sufficient data/detail provided? \_\_\_\_\_

Is timeliness an issue? \_\_\_\_\_

Is additional information required? \_\_\_\_\_

Project interview date: \_\_\_\_\_

Public hearing date: \_\_\_\_\_

Committee vote:

Yes \_\_\_\_\_

No \_\_\_\_\_

Abstain \_\_\_\_\_

Date \_\_\_\_\_

Recommendation from Committee:

Recommended for Town Meeting consideration:

Spring \_\_\_\_\_

Fall \_\_\_\_\_

Special \_\_\_\_\_

Year \_\_\_\_\_