

# MEMO

To: Falmouth Town Councilors  
From: Bob Shafto & Mel Dickenson  
Re: Update on Current Activities (revised 5/6/08)

There is a lot of open space related activity underway that WE would like to have briefed you on in person last month, but given your hectic schedule it looks like that will have to wait until the budget is complete. Meanwhile, here is a summary of key initiatives underway, several of which are likely to appear in the press soon in response to reporters' inquiries.

1. Falmouth Conservation Corps: We will be launching this initiative in the next week or two, recruiting volunteers to tackle management related tasks on town-owned open space properties. (You adopted this proposal at your February meeting.) Since then, we have ironed out the process with town staff and Bill Plouffe has reviewed and revised the release language. Our legal ducks will be in a row and insurance coverage has been deemed sufficient. A FCC steering committee has been created (Skip Varney Parks & Public Works; Dave Gagnon, Open space committee; Gary Glick, high school; Jeff Walker, trails committee; & Caleb Hemphill conservation commission). They have identified several priority projects for the summer, including trail building on River Point and Wilshore Forest; clearing the East Branch of the Piscataqua for canoe navigation; building a canoe launch pad at the Blackstrap put in on the Presumpscot; and invasive species control. Two grants are pending for a total of \$14,500 to help with costs (most of which are discretionary, but also include some of my time to do the overall coordination). We also want to enlist business sponsors who could donate materials and equipment.
2. Forest Management Plans: We have written and hope to receive this month a Maine Forest Service Project Canopy Grant. This would pay for much of the cost of developing forest management plans for all town-owned forested parcels. The policy implication of this is that we as a town are going to actively manage our forests for recreation, wildlife habitat and timber. That, of course, is your decision to make. Most of the large properties have been unmanaged for many decades. Consequently they are overstocked with low value species (e.g. - hemlock, red maple), unhealthy and unproductive. OSIC is recommending that we rectify that by managing these parcels in ways that promote forest health, good habitat, active recreation and productive timber growth. Done well, the latter will result in an income stream to the town well into the future.
3. Mitigation: Bob is working with two environmental engineer who need of ±300 acres of mitigation property in the lower Presumpscot watershed. Bingo, that would be us! They enthusiastic about both the Hadlock forest wetlands and the River Point floodplain & wetlands. It remains to be seen if the Army Corps will share their enthusiasm, but since they liked the Adam parcel, it seems logical that they will like one or the other of these properties. If so, we *may* be looking a significant amount of mitigation money coming our way by late summer.
4. River Point: We have an ambitious management plan to propose to you for this property that would include recreation (trails), wildlife habitat (extensive, including two endangered or threatened species) and agriculture. As you know, access to this property is a limiting factor. WE have had John Libby, the post and beam building specialist, do an extensive assessment of the bridge and he says it is basically sound and can be rehabilitated. We will also have a structural engineer assess it for a 2<sup>nd</sup> opinion. Repairs will not be cheap, but we will propose using some of the anticipated mitigation money to pay the cost of making this bridge safe for vehicular traffic.
5. Land for Maine's Future Grant: The OISC submitted (4-1-08) a grant to the state for \$654,500 in Land for Maine's Future (LMF) funding for the *Central Falmouth Conservation Corridor*. This

is a complex project involving 13 contiguous private- and town-owned parcels that extend north from Community Park to the Cumberland town line at the north end of the Hadlock forest. The project totals 320 acres in size, but including other adjacent town-owned land (60 acres of Hadlock were held out to be used as mitigation) and conservation land on the Cumberland side, we end with a contiguous 680-acre corridor that extends for several miles, has very high habitat value (as assessed by the U.S. Fish & Wildlife Service), and is all connected with trails.

We have communicated the nature and impacts of this proposal with Nathan and several Council members (Cathy and Bonny), but there are still a lot of loose ends involved in this project. We are confident we will receive some state LMF funding (probably not the amount requested given the limited funds and extensive competition). To obtain state funding the town needs to put up at least a 33% match. To do that, the proposal calls for placing parts of several town-owned parcels under a conservation easement. While we understand that Council will have the final say in the use of easements on town-owned property, there are strong reasons to include these town-owned properties.

A key rationale for using the easements is the financial impact. The total project cost has been calculated at \$1,698,550. The town can reduce its cash contribution by placing easements on town-owned land, counting the value of these easements as part of its match. Without the easements the cost to the town for this project would be \$777,400 higher. Aside from the financial aspects, other rationale for placing the easements on the town-owned land include both limited development potential and valued open space. Town owned parcels with low development potential include the Hadlock road property (wetlands/vernal pools), while Community Park and Town Forest are treasured open spaces unlikely to ever be developed. Likewise, Town Forest and Hadlock Road are identified in *The Greening of Falmouth* as town-owned lands that ought to be protected by easement. By donating these easements, we show their value as part of the LMF required match, greatly reducing the amount of money we would have to put up in that regard. In fact, our calculated cash contribution would only be \$197,000, less the \$30,000 grant we have already received from the Casco Bay Estuary Project. [We would still have some \$70K in other costs, including appraisals, surveys, legal costs, etc.]

And therein lies the policy decision: Will the Council agree to put conservation easements on 30-acres at the northern end of Community Park; on 10.6-acres of town-owned subdivision land abutting Paddock Way; on the 21-acre Town Forest; and on 162 acres of the 222-acre Hadlock Road forest? To OSIC's way of thinking, by donating these easements, we not only show their value as part of the LMF required match and greatly reduce the amount of money the town would have to put up to acquire the other private properties included in the proposal, but also demonstrate to the community that, consistent with the recent bond vote favored by 70% of voters, town council is strongly supportive of the Open Space initiative. This is only a proposal at this point, but we will be asking you to make a decision on this issue should our proposal be competitive.

More information about some of these projects can be found at the open space website: [www.town.falmouth.me.us/Pages/FalmouthME\\_BComm/openspace](http://www.town.falmouth.me.us/Pages/FalmouthME_BComm/openspace). We look forward to talking more about these initiatives and others in the works when your meeting calendar opens up later this spring. In the meantime, call me if you have any questions. We'd also be happy to meet individually over coffee if that works for you.