

TO: East Montpelier Selectboard
FM: East Montpelier Conservation Fund Advisory Committee
DATE: December 14, 2016
SUBJ: ADDITION TO CONSERVATION FUND

The East Montpelier Conservation Fund Advisory Committee (Committee) recommends that the Selectboard include an article in the 2017 Town Meeting Warning, requesting \$15,000 be added to the town's Conservation Fund (CF). Our rationale for this request, and the amount, is as follows:

- (1) The CF was established in 1989 with an initial appropriation of \$40,000, overseen by the Committee, to help the town "conserve land and waters for agricultural, forest, wildlife, scenic, recreational, or natural area use." It was determined at the time that this was an appropriate amount to leverage significant funds from federal, state, and private sources for conservation of important properties. Funding agencies usually want to see at least 10% of the total cost of a project coming from the receiving town before a grant is approved.
- (2) The CF has been effective and efficient. Over the 30 years since its inception, it has helped conserve 2,898.7 acres (with related trails, wildlife, etc.), using a total of \$166,580 to leverage \$2,849,735 from other sources.
- (3) As the CF periodically "drains down" to critically low levels, the Committee periodically requests additional funds to bring it back up towards \$40,000, or as close to that as possible in variable economic times. Voters have unanimously approved such funding on every occasion, whether from the floor and by Australian ballot at Town Meeting.
- (4) The CF is once again at a critical low, with a balance of about \$6,000. Considering the dramatic increase in land values (and costs of acquisition) since the CF was established, this amount does not go very far. It also hinders our ability to move quickly -- or at all -- when important properties come up for consideration and jeopardizes the close working partnership the town has had with other funding organizations, such as the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board and Vermont Land Trust

The Committee is aware that discussions about the working relationship between conservation and housing/development, and the Selectboard's consideration of establishing a Conservation Commission, may well result in changes in the Committee's composition, mission, operation, and funding, even its existence. But, until such time, the Committee feels this partial restoration of funds is needed to continue work toward town goals.

Respectfully,

Brian Lusignan (Chair)
Art Chickering
Michael Dworkin
Bruce Howlett
Charles Johnson