

FAQs for Bluffside Farm Conservation Project

Who is the Vermont Land Trust?



We are a private, nonprofit land conservation organization. Since 1977 we have been conserving working farmland, forestland, and land important to communities. We have an office at Bluffside Farm in Newport, as well as offices in Montpelier, Richmond, Brattleboro and Bennington.



Most of the land we have conserved is privately owned; landowners manage and pay taxes on this land. We use a tool called a conservation easement to keep this land available and affordable for farming and forestry.

We have worked with community members across the state to develop solutions that meet local needs. We have also worked with municipalities and the state to conserve lands with high public value. Once land is conserved, we make sure the provisions of the conservation restrictions are upheld by current and future owners.

Why conserve Bluffside Farm?

The 129-acre Bluffside Farm is located in Newport, Vermont on Lake Memphremagog. This scenic farm sits on a prominent point of land that is very visible from downtown. In addition to its value as a farm, the land has significant value for recreation and water quality. It is located near the rail trail, Prouty Beach, North Country High School, and North Country Hospital.



Community support—demonstrated through phone calls, emails, letters to the editor, and attendance at a September 2015 City Council meeting—made it clear to the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) that Bluffside Farm (formerly the Scott Farm) is a special part of the area's natural and working landscape.

To buy and conserve this property, VLT borrowed \$1 million from The Conservation Fund, a national conservation organization that offers temporary financing to land trusts to protect properties that are especially valuable to communities. Ultimately, when VLT transfers the property to the next owner, we will repay the loan and cover the holding and project costs. The funding for this will come from a combination of fundraising, grant funding, and proceeds from the sale of the land.

What is the role of Vermont Land Trust on the farm?

VLT purchased the farm in December 2015 and is serving as the interim owner to allow time to work with the community on a long-term ownership plan that will maximize use of the land for purposes such as farming, recreation, and natural resource protection. VLT does not plan to be the long-term owner of the property. Bluffside Farm will be up for sale again once our staff work with the Newport community on ownership alternatives, and line up the conservation funding.

What are the property tax impacts to Newport residents?

VLT paid the back taxes owed on the property when it was purchased in 2015, and has paid the last two years' tax bills in full. The property was reassessed in 2017 and the assessment went up, as did many in the City. VLT will continue to pay the property taxes, as assessed, while we own the property. The final disposition plan for the property could have property tax impacts to Newport residents. For example, land owned by the public would be removed from the City grand list. The property assessment may also be reduced due to a conservation easement, which would limit development on the property.

In late 2015, VLT asked property tax expert, Deborah Brighton, to conduct an analysis of two purely hypothetical scenarios to get an understanding of the potential range of impacts. The analysis, based on the 2015 tax rate and grand list, indicated that:

- 1) If the entire parcel were removed from the grand list (if for example, it was acquired by the City as public land), the municipal tax rate would increase by less than one cent. The municipal tax bill of property owners in the city would increase by roughly \$7 per \$100,000 assessed value.
- 2) If, the conservation project reduced the taxable value of the property by 25%, the tax bill on a \$100,000 property would increase by \$1.64 instead.

As VLT works with the community on a conservation plan, we will include a more detailed analysis of property tax and other impacts.

Is there public access to Bluffside Farm?

Yes! Low impact, dispersed pedestrian access is permitted during VLT's interim ownership. However, the property is actively farmed and we ask that you please follow public access guidelines available at www.vlt.org/bluffside. Over the winter (2017-2018) a groomed cross-country ski trail is available, thanks to a partnership with Memphremagog Ski Touring Foundation. To learn more about their extensive trail system in Newport and Derby, visit their website – www.mstf.org.



VLT is currently working toward building a bridge that will cross the cove to Prouty Beach Recreation area, allowing public access to the waterfront at the Farm and the creation of a four-season waterfront recreational trail. This trail will go through the Bluffside property and connect downtown Newport to the Beebe Spur Rail Trail. When complete, there will be a seven-mile waterfront recreation corridor connecting to the Canadian border and bike paths in Quebec. VLT was recently awarded a \$425,000 grant towards this ambitious project.

How do I get involved?

- Public meetings were held in March, April & May of 2016 at the North Country Career Center Visit www.vlt.org/bluffsidefarm/ to see notes and presentations from these meetings.
- A public meeting about the recreation connector bridge and trail will be held sometime in the winter of 2018 and announcements will be posted once a date and location are set.
- Talk to your friends, neighbors, state representatives, and encourage their involvement.
- You can visit the www.vlt.org and use the form at the bottom of the page to sign up to receive email updates. We send occasional emails with information about tours and events, educational opportunities, and public meetings.

**For more information about the Vermont Land Trust, please visit: www.vlt.org.
Or contact Tracy Zschau, Conservation Director at VLT, at Tracy@vlt.org**