

Remarks by Fritz Gahagan at the  
Lyme Land Conservation Trust Annual Meeting  
June 3, 2007

When I speak to Land Trusts or conservation groups around the State and I tell people where I am from, I discover what we have done here in Lyme is held in awe by most other land trusts and communities. Why? Because over 40% of our town is in protected open space and we are continually building on that!

As of now, in its 40 years, the Lyme Land Trust:

- holds over 1750 acres under Conservation Restriction,
- owns over 525 acres, and
- has partnered with the Town, the State, and the Nature Conservancy to protect well over 1000 additional acres

To put this in perspective – a square mile is 640 acres – that means that our Land Trust has been involved in the protection of over 5 square miles of land!

In short, other land trusts and communities are amazed by what we have accomplished because:

- we have done what they all wish they could have done, and
- we have, so far, stayed ahead of the onslaught of modernity.

People want to know how and why we have been able to accomplish this - and this is what I want to talk about today.

First, to celebrate, because all of you are the reason we have been able to accomplish so much. We live in a Town where the Land Trust, the Town's leaders, our regulatory commissions, and individual donors all act in support of conservation action.

Second, if we are going to continue our success, we had better know why we have succeeded so far.

Our success did not just happen; it evolved over a long period of time. We don't have to look far back to recall when the land trust was viewed as an idiosyncratic group of well meaning, but harmless, individuals. Wow, were they wrong!

In hindsight we can recognize some of the strategies that worked and some other factors that I can only call our Lyme blessings.

You, the early leaders of the Land Trust recognized that:

- conservation action had to begin with landowners & the strong emotional tie that every landowner has with their land; and
- that broad community support had to be built from the ground up; *i.e. the hard way.*

You were willing to:

- be proactive about reaching out to landowners, and risk rejection,
- recognize, respect, and nurture Lyme's landowners' stewardship ethic,
- take the risk of contracting to buy properties and trust that there would be support in the community to raise the funds,
- develop a strategy for broader protection based on our important natural resources, and
- begin what seemed like an endless series of programs to educate the community and landowners on the importance of their land and the ecological resources we are blessed with.

All in all – you were willing to put in a lot of hard work!!

And then we are blessed, blessed with a number of things all of which, I believe, were necessary components of our success.

- We are blessed with resources of national and international significance.
- We are blessed with our landowners, who protected over 2000 acres of land, **by gift**, before there was ever money involved or it was the “Lyme” thing to do
- We are blessed with two farmers who were willing to sell their development rights to preserve farmland and a way of life.
- We are blessed with town leaders who had an open mind and were willing to see that conservation action was necessary to protect our town budgets **and** our traditional community values.

All this resulted in something wonderful – what I call “community conservation consciousness” which affirms and values the protection of our conservation resources. And so others came to live here who shared those values.

Looking back these 40 years, it seems that we are blessed with a truly endangered phenomenon in the modern, east coast of the United States - a common ethos:

a sense of who we are, what is important to us and, most important, ***a real commitment to take the responsibility to make it work – to live out our values.***

We are a rare town – we put our money where our mouth is – whether it is in the way we have historically:

- funded our volunteer services (with a lot of gifts),
- pre-sold the bonds for the public safety complex,
- built our own affordable housing,
- voted to fund our educational programs, or
- spent ***our own*** money to protect key parcels of land that needed to be protected to maintain our rural character.

This common ethos leads to another rare thing in an old, small Yankee town - a consensus where old and new citizens can have a meeting of the minds and share a common ethos.

The board you elected today reflects this. It has:

- new members to our community, who bring a life time of experience and skills, as well as economic resources, and
- old members of our community with contacts and history in the community to make sure that the Land Trust stays on course.

What binds them all is their attachment to that Lyme ethos. One of our current board members who is “new” to Town recently told me that our sense of community is so strong that this is the first place that has truly felt like home since the town where he grew up and, so, it is a community he is committed to supporting and giving to. Another new board member is our first board member to represent 3 generations of the same family.

In close I would like to say that, what we can only hope for is more of them same and I have high hopes for this because of the strength of the foundation you all built. A foundation based on a love for our community, a love for our landscape, and a commitment to protect and nurture a sustaining relationship with the land.

Thank you for your good work.