


Lyme acquires 250-acre parcel for preservation

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Lyme — The town's newest piece of preserved land — 250 acres of forest bordering Route 82, otherwise known as the Johnston parcel — was formally acquired after town officials closed on the property Thursday.

Filling a space amid what will now be a large uninterrupted block of forest land, town officials have deemed the parcel as another “piece” to Lyme's 12,000-plus acres of preserved space — a number that represents more than half of the town's land mass.

“It's a big piece of property and contiguous to other town and land trust properties,” First Selectman Steven Mattson said earlier this week. “Obtaining this moves us further along in our greenbelt creation. We're adding more and more, trying to keep the town's greater goal of preserving land going.”

Mattson said the town has been negotiating with property owners to obtain the parcel over the last two years. The \$1.45 million purchase will be paid for with an \$870,000 Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Grant, a \$25,000 donation from the Nature Conservancy, \$255,000 from the town's open space reserve fund and a loan from the property owners to the town of \$300,000. The loan will be paid back to the family over the next two years, Mattson said.

George Moore, former executive director of the Lyme Land Conservation Trust, the group that helps manage much of the town's conserved land, said Thursday that the Trust aided the town with writing their application for the DEEP grant. He explained the Trust's relationship with the town as a “hand in glove relationship.”

“The amount the town received is a higher percentage than what (DEEP) often gives,” Moore said. “I think it was a big parcel and the state has a goal to have a certain percentage of CT in open space. Rather than trying to pick up an acre here or there, it made sense when they were presented with the opportunity to pick up hundreds of acres to help with that.”

The property, previously owned by David Johnston and his family, has not been developed or used for residential purposes and is entirely wooded, Selectman Parker Lord said Thursday. He said the land was cleared in the 1800s and formerly utilized as pasture space. Bordering its northern side, the property abuts Route 82 and extends southward towards both the Jewett and Pleasant Valley Preserves. It can only be accessed from Route 82 and includes the highest elevation point in town, 465 feet above sea level.

Lord, who has walked the property extensively, described it as hilly with ledges and outcroppings, “all of which is typical for Lyme,” he said. There are two streams — one feeds into the Eightmile River and the other eventually flows into the Connecticut River. The parcel will eventually be renamed as North Woods, he said.

Mattson, who said he has not explored the property, said he was looking forward to hiking it. The property will be open to the public and will allow for hunting in some areas.

“It will have a little bit of everything on it. There are no lakes. Sure, there are some streams. I don't know of any noted features, but that's part of the whole exploration of this,” Mattson said.

Mattson said new trails, which will extend to other trails on abutting preserves, will be laid out on the property by the town's Open Space Committee and possibly with the help of Lyme Land Conservation Trust. The idea, he said, was to marry the properties together.

The property will be managed by the town and that committee, as well as its Open Space Coordinator Wendy Hill.

Besides new trails, the state will need to place a small road from Route 82 to access the property, and the town will need to erect a small parking area. Money for those improvements “will be earmarked in the future,” Mattson said.

A dedication for the property is still yet to be determined.

When asked how it felt to preserve another piece of land in town, Mattson said, “It's always nice to have another project come to fruition. The town has enough of them and it's nice to put some behind us.”

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