

INFORMATION ABOUT THE CITIZENS' PETITION TO ACQUIRE DONIBRISTLE FARM



THE PROJECT:

Community residents, working in partnership with Essex County Greenbelt Association, are working towards the conservation of Donibristle Farm. The project aims to permanently protect 44 acres of beautiful wooded hillside located on Hill Street and Rowley Bridge Road in Topsfield. Once the county estate of renowned historian James Duncan Phillips, the property features towering mature trees and an extensive, wide trail system. This property abuts the permanently protected Open Space at English Commons, and the Donibristle Trails would connect to the English Commons public walking path.

Learn more & see video footage of the property: www.ecga.org/donibristlefarm

DEVELOPMENT RISK:

Several development scenarios have been proposed in the past year for this ridgeline land with its steep slopes, propensity for flooding, and extensive resource areas. Most recently, a subdivision plan for 20 houses was reviewed by the Planning Board. The conservation project would substantially preserve this National Register-eligible property. It would become a new public reservation, open free to the public for nature observation and recreational use.

PROJECT FUNDING SOURCES AND TIMELINE:

Greenbelt has an agreement with the landowners to acquire the 44 acres outright and a 2-acre conservation restriction on adjacent agricultural fields on Hill Street for \$900,000. This price is

based on an independent appraisal. The Town would hold a perpetual conservation restriction on the 44-acre parcel and on the 2 acres of fields.

Greenbelt and a coalition of Topsfield residents have committed to raising \$400,000 in private donations. The pace of donations from individuals and groups, including the New Meadows and Topsfield Garden Clubs, have been steady and strong. Some major donors have established a Challenge Grant to match new donations up to \$100,000.

Voters at Town Meeting will be asked to invest up to \$500,00 toward the purchase of Donibristle Farm for conservation. If awarded, a state LAND grant could reimburse the town for up to \$400,000 and reduce the Town's contribution to \$100,000.

The Finance Committee voted unanimously to endorse the use of a capital exclusion to fund the project, if voters support the investment at Town Meeting and at the Ballot. The cost to the average homeowner would be a little more than \$18 per month for one year, and then the land would be protected and available for public use forever. No new debt, no interest. Of special importance, there would be no long-term maintenance costs to the Town because Greenbelt will manage and maintain the property.

A YES Vote at Town Meeting and the Ballot Box will:

- Save this historic 44-acre property from development
- Provide new public trails for hiking and equestrian use in southern Topsfield
- Protect prime agricultural land
- Safeguard streams and wetlands
- Create a new reservation in Topsfield adjacent to other conserved lands.

FUNDING DEADLINE:

Project Supporters have until May 31st, 2017 to secure funding for the project.

FIND OUT MORE:

- Donibristle Sitewalks:
Sunday, April 23rd, 2:00pm
Monday, May 1st, 10:00am
- Public Information Session:
Thursday, April 27th, 7:00pm
Proctor Elementary School, 60 Main Street, Topsfield

