

Final Report and Recommendations Prepared for the Town of Richmond, VT

Executive Summary

In early 2007 the Richmond Conservation Commission approached the Trust for Public Land (TPL) for assistance with ongoing efforts to maximize value and utility of a Conservation Reserve Fund approved by voters in 2005. TPL has extensive knowledge and experience with local government conservation programs and, at the time, also had a contractor who offered to provide free consulting services to the Commission. The Commission worked with the consultant throughout 2007 to further assess community conservation priorities, and to develop processes and practices for effectively cultivating and selecting projects based on community priorities as well as the formally stated values and goals of the Fund. Two workshops were held to facilitate priority-setting and to foster communication with potential implementation and funding partners. A final report describes the workshops and provides recommendations, and suggested action steps.

The first workshop brought together a group of interested residents selected as being reasonably representative of the community and as having useful and relevant expertise. Participants included residents involved with agriculture, real estate, business, historic preservation, hydrology, education, various types of recreation, and science. This workshop produced a map demonstrating five potential areas of focus where Richmond's funds would generate the highest conservation benefits, and a set of specific definitions and characteristics that will be useful in selecting projects. The second workshop was intended to provide information about how the Town can best work with partners, and to inform possible partners about areas identified in the community workshop. Participants in the second workshop included representatives of Audubon Vermont, The Nature Conservancy, Richmond Land Trust, TPL, U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service, Vermont Departments of Environmental Conservation and Fish & Wildlife, Vermont Housing & Conservation Board, and Vermont Land Trust.

In addition to facilitating the workshops, the contractor conducted a series of phone conversations and interviews with community leaders, attended Commission meetings, and reviewed information and documents related to the Fund and to conservation interests of Richmond residents. Drawing on these experiences and the successful practices of other communities she made general recommendations for refining our vision/strategy for the Fund, maintaining community support, and fostering relationships with partners and community advisors.

The consultant suggested these "action steps" for the Commission: (a) affirm a priority area of focus, i.e., a "vision", (b) create materials and a strategy to communicate the vision, (c) create clear, specific process for applications and project selection, (d) establish a task force, (e) develop strong partnership relationships, and (f) consider creating a small grants program. The report was accompanied by a draft project eligibility and selection worksheet to complement documentation already developed for administering the Fund. With input and information gathered thus far, the Commission is poised to lead the community in a resource conservation process. Citizens of Richmond had the foresight to create a Conservation Reserve Fund. It is clear that there are many good people in Richmond who care about the community, and there are many first-rate partnerships available to help make a caring vision into a future reality.