



Final Report and Recommendations Prepared for the Town of Richmond, VT August 2007

I. Background

At Town Meeting in 2005, Richmond, Vermont, residents approved a one-cent tax increase to fund protection of the Town's natural and historic resources. This tax provided dedicated revenue to the Conservation Reserve Fund. The purpose of the Fund is:

“...preserving water quality, providing outdoor recreational opportunities, protecting wildlife, and conserving important natural, agricultural and historic resources.”

When the Richmond Selectboard established the Conservation Reserve Fund Policy on July 18, 2005, it gave the Conservation Commission the responsibility of implementing the goals of the Fund and advising the Selectboard on how to invest the community's conservation monies. The policy document included some criteria and an initial process for consider requests for funding.

Over the course of the following two years, Commission members and other residents began discussing how best to identify and protect the highest quality lands or resources. Early in 2007 the Commission asked the Trust for Public Land (TPL), through its contractor Sandra Tassel at Look at the Land Inc., to assist the Town in this process. Tassel had been researching the characteristics, policies and procedures utilized by successful local government conservation programs around the country for several years. The findings of that research are important groundwork for the assistance provided to Richmond, and these conclusions.

II. Overview of Technical Assistance Activities

Creating an effective conservation preservation program in Richmond was the overarching goal of TPL's work. Specifically, the activities were designed to help the Conservation Commission with the following tasks:

- Assess community protection priorities
- Evaluate the need for a separate advisory committee or council
- Develop clear, credible project selection criteria based on community priorities
- Create a process for identifying and initiating the best projects

Sandra Tassel, President of Look at the Land Inc, was the individual who carried out the work on behalf of TPL. Activities included:

- Conducting a series of phone conversations and interviews with community leaders including current and past members of the Conservation Commission, Planning Commission, Richmond Land Trust, and staff from the Town and important potential partner entities.

- Attending Commission meetings by conference call to understand issues and decide how best to achieve the goals of the project.
- Reviewing all available information and documents related to the Fund and conservation interests of Richmond residents.
- Working with the Commission to organize a list of key stakeholders to attend a priority-setting community workshop
- Helping to create an invitation list for a partners' implementation workshop.
- Developing speaking points for Commissioners to assist with invitations to workshops.
- Coordinating with the Commission, Town Manager, and Regional Planning Commission to develop workshop programs and materials.
- Facilitating the actual workshops.
- Writing workshop summary of geographic areas identified as offering the highest level of conservation benefits.
- Following up with attendees to gather additional input and information as needed to complete these recommendations.
- Creating this final report to provide suggested next steps.
- Developing the attached project selection documents.

III. Workshop highlights

Because this report is based, in part, on the outcomes of two workshops hosted by the Conservation Commission, it is worthwhile reviewing the purpose and results of those gatherings.

The Conservation Commission analyzed community interests and developed a list of “stakeholders” whose input would help the Commission to carry out the responsibility of implementing the Fund. Participants included residents involved with agriculture, real estate, business, historic preservation, hydrology, education, various types of recreation and science. The objective was to gather a group that was reasonably representative of the community while ensuring that each attendee had expertise needed by the Commission. In a three-hour focused session facilitated by Sandra Tassel, participants were asked to do three things with their local knowledge:

- Refine what each established purpose of the Fund means to Richmond’s citizens
- Identify, on a map, geographic areas that best embody each of the purposes
- Work together to reach a consensus about the general locations where the purposes overlap thereby offering opportunities for meeting multiple community interests simultaneously.

Although this effort would have been best suited to a full-day workshop, it was quite productive. The results were a map that demonstrated five potential areas of focus where Richmond’s funds would generate the highest conservation benefits, and the specific definitions and characteristics used in the recommended Project Selection Worksheet, which is attached.

A second workshop was conducted to bring together potential implementation and funding partners with the Conservation Commission. This session was intended to give the Commissioners information about how the Town can best work with partners, and to provide the possible partners with insight about the areas identified in the community workshop.

Participants included representatives from:

- Audubon Vermont
- The Nature Conservancy
- Richmond Land Trust
- Trust for Public Land
- U.S. Natural Resources Conservation Service
- Vermont Department of Environmental Conservation
- Vermont Department of Fish & Wildlife
- Vermont Housing and Conservation Board
- Vermont Land Trust.

IV General recommendations and observations

The consultant's conclusions and the recommendations that follow are based on a thorough review of the background materials, interviews with key individuals involved in the creation of the Fund, the advice provided in the workshops and the successful practices of other communities. In this section, the general recommendations are summarized to help the reader understand the context for the action steps laid out in the following section.

Vision: Richmond is at a literal and figurative crossroads. Like so many small towns around the country, demographics, economics, geography, culture and politics are combining to cause major changes that impact cherished landscapes and the rich natural, agricultural and historic resources they support. Richmond's physical location, commuting distance to booming Burlington with access to the highway, has already resulted in visible change. It is not possible to stop development pressures but the Town has tools, such as its Town Plan and the Conservation Reserve Fund, to shape its destiny so that current and future residents of the growing town can continue to enjoy the characteristics that make Richmond feel like home. Voters' willingness to tax themselves to retain Richmond's best qualities is a testimony to their affection for the place that they live.

In order to make the best possible use of the money in the Fund, it is necessary to know what features are the most important to residents. Generally, this type of guidance comes from a local conservation plan. Various referred to as "open space," "natural areas," "recreation," or "open lands" plans, the best ones reflect a community's unique resources, history, land use, and values. The most essential element that defines a good plan is the inclusive process of creating it. The process brings together the full range of local opinions, respects differences, and produces a shared vision for conservation. Richmond lacks such a plan, and appears unlikely to produce one in the near future. But meanwhile, pressures on the landscape and its resources continue to intensify. Fortunately, there have been several initiatives that have done a fair amount of the work that ordinarily is associated with a planning process. The workshops sought to gather some of the missing input and can serve the Town well until a real plan is developed, which should be a longer-term objective of the Conservation Commission and other leaders.

As the entity responsible for implementing the Conservation Reserve Fund, the Conservation Commission must synthesize the available information and generate a vision that will serve Richmond in place of a plan...at least for the time being. Members and advisors of the Commission have the experience and knowledge and authority to advance a vision that, if pursued, will beneficially shape the change that is coming. Later in this report, in the Action Steps section, a specific strategy and possible focus for the vision are suggested.

Support: Community “division” was a theme frequently raised in interviews and in the workshop. At its simplest, the divide is presented as separating those who view conservation and development as mutually exclusive endeavors. It would truly be a problem for the future of the Fund, and the character of the Town, if approximately half of the residents really didn’t care what happened to the area’s landscapes, resources, land-based economies, and built environment. Luckily, the actual situation probably is not quite as black-and-white.

Thoughtful, transparent, and efficient implementation of the Conservation Reserve Fund could help dissolve some of the line that sometimes seems to divide residents. While there probably are citizens who truly don’t care about protecting resources, or whose philosophies are antithetical to conservation or perceived government intervention, they are likely a minority. In between them and the core group of committed conservation advocates lies the middle ground whose comfort and support can be increased through implementation. The people in the middle do care about Richmond’s landscapes, resources, economy, culture and future, but may have concerns about how things get done, what land is protected, who receives the benefits, and what the cost will be.

The vision guiding the Fund should be designed with these people in mind. While some of the Fund’s supporters may be disappointed by an implementation approach that appeals to the broadest possible audience (instead of being driven only by biodiversity or recreational goals, for example) it is a strategy aimed at increasing support for land protection generally, building confidence in local partners, and allowing the Fund to be extended when the voters reconsider it in 2010.

Based on public documents, interviews, and the discussions at the workshops the following specific purposes, listed in no particular order, seem to have the broadest local support:

- Trails – Especially creating connections between existing trails and making it possible for people to get around by foot or bicycle without using roads.
- Swimming – Requires safe, clean public access to rivers and ponds.
- Canoeing – Another traditional outdoor activity that can be protected by securing and maintaining water access.
- Fishing – Not just the high-tech Orvis kind. Steps need to be taken to ensure that people of all ages and incomes can fish in Richmond. Obviously this requires water access.
- Clean water – The three preceding activities aren’t much fun if water is polluted. And, in general, people are sensitive about water quality especially if they drink well water.
- Continued farming – This issue probably encompasses many sub-purposes. There is an economic aspect to retaining agriculture. Some supporters are interested in being able to buy local food. Others value the iconic, scenic qualities of traditional farms. And farms provide wildlife habitat. When farmers practice careful stewardship, agricultural land uses can keep watersheds clean.

Other purposes such as hunting, motorized recreation, and wood cutting would likely also resonate with residents who have traditional values with respect to land conservation. However, these uses could risk alienating some of the core support. The Commission needs to assess the trade-offs carefully.

To the degree possible, without compromising any of the values associated with the Fund’s approval, it would be wise to incorporate other local concerns either into the vision, or the implementation process. For example, real estate costs are rising as a consequence of the same forces that threaten Richmond’s

natural resources and making it increasingly difficult for young people to stay in their hometown. One argument against conservation is that, along with the much larger force of development itself, it takes land out of the market and might further drive up prices. Accordingly, it would be ideal to combine housing for local residents of limited means with protection of a key landscape.

Partners: Ultimately, the success of Richmond's Conservation Reserve Fund rests on the shoulders of a variety of partners. This is not unusual – most small Vermont communities work with entities such as the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, Vermont Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, Trust for Public Land, and/or a local land trust to secure property interests, access matching funds, monitor agreements and manage acquired land. Richmond has neither the staff nor the money to undertake and complete conservation transactions. Accordingly, the Conservation Commission must concentrate its efforts on identifying the best partners and building relationships with them. The Implementation Workshop was a productive first step as it informed the Commissioners about the major potential acquisition partners while allowing representatives from those organizations and agencies the opportunity to meet the members of the Commission.

During the workshop, and in one-on-one interviews, the representatives of key partner entities repeatedly indicated that a conservation vision and protection priorities were essential to gaining their assistance in Richmond. Several partner entities have senior staff members who live in Richmond. Therefore, those individuals care deeply about the local land and built environment. That is the good news. The bad news is those individuals also are aware of the range of opinions that characterizes local debate about conservation. Accordingly, decisive leadership on the part of the Conservation Commission in developing a vision for the Fund, broad public support for the vision, and a strategy to strengthen the political forces behind the Fund will improve the chances that one of these groups would make a significant investment in Richmond.

It is critical that the Conservation Commission understand, and explain to others, the level of risk that a partner would be taking when it agrees to be the lead project negotiator on a significant conservation transaction. All of these organizations are understaffed relative to the number of challenges facing Vermont's natural resources. Even the largest of the groups must carefully choose among many possible protection initiatives in order to maximize their effectiveness. Each project can involve substantial outlays of staff time and money just to determine if the terms of a transaction can be agreed to between buyer and seller. Once a contract is signed, it can take years to secure funding from the multiple sources which are often required in order to purchase important lands, or the development rights. Richmond's partners must contemplate those inherent risks and not be worried about the reliability of the Town's interest and commitments.

Advisors: In order to achieve some or all of the above general recommendations, the Conservation Commission may benefit from the assistance and support of a corps of advisors. It could be referred to as a task force, advisory committee, or any other name that sounds unimposing. This group could be an ad hoc committee, not requiring official appointments or formation. The purposes of the group would be to:

- Engage citizen leaders who come from a cross-section of Richmond
- Involve people who are connected to landowners, funders, and partners
- Build a wider political base for the Fund, and its projects
- Obtain assistance with tasks associated with administering the Fund
- Secure additional input for key decisions

Although this recommendation appears last among the general recommendations, this is not because it is lowest priority or even an activity that can be tackled after the others. Rather, it is at the end so that the need for assistance will be self-evident. The Conservation Commission is comprised of dedicated, knowledgeable, creative, thoughtful environmentalists – as befits the majority of its responsibilities. Effective implementation of the Fund simply demands some different skills, contacts, and interests. The list of attendees from the community workshop provides an ideal starting point for assembling a 6-10 person group that could greatly improve the odds of the Fund achieving a notable conservation outcome.

V. Action Steps

- Establish/Affirm a priority area of focus, i.e., a vision

In the Conservation Reserve Fund Policy adopted in 2005, the Selectboard gave the Conservation Commission the responsibility for implementing the Fund, and bringing appropriate transactions to the Board for approval. Now, two years later, the Commission is preparing to take meaningful action in that direction. As described above in the section in General Recommendations, the first step is to establish a vision for the Fund.

Establishing a vision will potentially provide a number of immediate benefits for the Fund. Taking action in this manner will:

- Demonstrate to the public that thoughtful progress is being made to wisely invest their taxpayer dollars in the best possible conservation efforts.
- Build the Town's credibility with implementation partners such as Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, Vermont Land Trust, Trust for Public Land, The Nature Conservancy, Audubon Vermont, and Richmond Land Trust. These entities have stated that they will be more likely to participate in possible transactions if they know where the community's priorities are.
- Inform landowners whose properties are in the area of focus so that they become aware of the Town's interest in their type of land. Someone may then step forward and initiate a dialogue with the Town, knowing that funds are too limited to undertake more than one significant project.
- Give the Town a starting point for a more complete planning effort.
- Provide the cornerstones for the Project Selection criteria.

The community workshop provided the Commission with a well-informed analysis of where the largest number of the Fund's purposes can be achieved. Information from that gathering gives an excellent basis for the vision. In addition to ensuring that maximum public benefit is accomplished through the Fund's expenditures, as discussed in the General Recommendations section, the vision must also serve to increase local support for conservation.

Concentrating on one area that offers the best opportunity for the highest conservation return for Fund investments will best advance local objectives. Based on the thoughtful, informed input at the workshop it appears that the Winooski River corridor is the logical location. It would be up to the Commission to determine how to describe the vision and the area of concentration. State and county specialists can give expert assistance in this regard so that the zone of focus is based on real characteristics such as prime farm soils, important watersheds, key wildlife areas, and best

locations for recreation. In addition, the Chittenden County Regional Planning Commission and other entities (CCRPC) can provide invaluable maps of the resources and of the area of concentration.

The river corridor contains the largest number of resources targeted under the Conservation Reserve Fund policy and has the corollary benefit of appealing to some residents for reasons beyond the direct scope of the policy, such as tourism development. All of these benefits should be considered by the committee and enumerated in the vision. Specifically:

- Traditional recreation such as fishing, canoeing and swimming
- High wildlife values, such as in places where native riparian vegetation or open grasslands are present
- Rare forest type, per The Nature Conservancy's assessment
- Trail connections that are top priority for many community members
- Prime agricultural soils and functioning farms
- Historic structures and land uses
- Scenic character of village and town generally
- Flood control
- Opportunities to protect water quality.

It may be advisable to also consider the possible objections to such a vision, and to respond in advance. For example, some taxpayers may incorrectly perceive that, as a floodplain, land along the river is completely protected by virtue of zoning that prohibits most forms of development. Even if this were currently true, zoning is a temporary restriction that could be modified and there are types of development (such as building on artificial islands) and uses (such as chemical-intensive farm practices) that, though not prohibited, could cause significant, unwanted and unnecessary harm to the river and its resources.

Furthermore, lack of development today is no automatic guarantee of future resource protection or public access. But by negotiating a conservation agreement with a landowner to limit development on a property for the long term, the Town and its partners could accomplish multiple community goals including improving water quality, keeping fertile land available for agriculture and forestry, increasing recreational access, and protecting wildlife.

- Create materials and strategy to communicate vision

In order to put the vision to work, the Commission should prepare materials to share it with all interested parties. Good, reproducible, clear maps of the focus area(s) will be especially important. CCRPC – or possibly the University -- can create these, in partnership with the Town. Using GIS, these maps can illustrate how multiple community objectives will be achieved.

The vision map should show the general zone of concentration, but not specific parcels in order to avoid appearing to target any one property. Each should be produced in various formats so it can be used in presentations, on the Web and in printed materials. The Commission will need to have a parcel map for future deliberations, but it should be kept confidential.

In addition to the map, the Commission should prepare a written description of the vision and how it embodies the broader public goals of the Fund. This description should include a reiteration of

the importance of working only with willing sellers and keeping land in private ownership, wherever possible. It might also make sense to point out that landowners should not be prevented from selling their land to whomever they wish, even if it is a nonprofit or government entity. If someone is ready to sell it would be an obvious infringement on the private property rights to bar a certain category of qualified buyer.

Wording of the description is essential as this presents a significant opportunity to bridge the divide sometimes created by misunderstandings about conservation and to reach out to people who are sympathetic toward certain aspects of resource protection.

With maps and description ready, members of the Commission and Task Force have to get out and talk to Richmond residents. Possible venues include gatherings such as meetings of the Richmond Area Business Association, the local Grange, parent's groups and the Richmond Historical Society. Community fairs and the Richmond Talks & Walks speaker series offer additional opportunities.

These presentations and conversations should cover the vision and goals. By being visible and communicative, the Commission can create broad support for and awareness of the Fund. Through the dialogue that is a likely outcome of the outreach efforts the Commission will be aware of project opportunities. Other benefits include a better informed electorate, greater credibility with partners and funders, and increased contact with landowners or their representatives and friends.

- Create clear, specific process for applications and project selection

Inventing a fair, logical and landowner-friendly application and review process for potential acquisitions is often one of the most difficult steps for new programs. The process describes the steps by which a project is brought forward, considered for funding, and eventually either approved or rejected by decision-making bodies. (In this context, the word "project" means the acquisition of a property or development rights, by purchase or donation. It does not refer to grants that the program might give out, as described in the section below. That process would likely be much simpler.) However, the importance of having a well-thought-out process can not be overstated. It is at this stage that a program's most important partners, the landowners, can be turned into allies. Clearly, the outcome of this process – namely the properties acquired – is the benchmarks by which the program will always be judged.

Especially challenging for most communities is balancing the need to handle proposals in a flexible yet accountable fashion, so that landowners are respected and protected, but the public's interests are carefully considered as well. The following recommendations will help Richmond navigate this tricky terrain and create a defensible, logical process that is suited to its funding source.

The first step in the process is creating project selection criteria to make clear what makes a property eligible for funding. Attached to this report is a draft *Project Eligibility and Selection Worksheet* which contains suggested criteria that were formulated using existing Town documents, and input from the workshops. This is provided as a well-researched, well-informed starting point for the Commission. When finalized to the satisfaction of the Commission, the document will serve several purposes:

- It articulates the goals, values and objectives of the Conservation Reserve Fund in a straightforward, accessible way.

- Anyone can determine if their property is likely to be eligible.
- Project reviewers will have clear guidance on how to choose a project, and can compare choices, if necessary.
- Potential partners will have guidelines to help them judge if their own projects might be eligible for funding from the Town..

In order for the Commission to finalize the *Worksheet* it must first determine the areas of focus/vision for the Fund. Project selection must serve the specific goals in the vision. Therefore, some of the criteria will need to be refined, and possibly others added once those key decisions are made.

In addition to the *Worksheet* the Commission or Town staff should create a simple application form to help landowners (or their representatives) apply for consideration. (In light of the concerns that exist in many communities around targeting parcels and private property rights, it can be unwise to allow anyone other than a landowner, or a representative, or entity with a right to purchase to make an application.) A sample application form can be provided.

Before releasing the application or inviting landowner inquiries, the Commission must establish the process for considering and approving funding requests. Key steps and considerations should be:

- Maintain landowner confidentiality – Applications should be discussed and evaluated in executive session, as befits real estate matters.
- Determine who will collect applications.
- Decide if there will be specific periods during which applications will be accepted. (Given the small amount of funding available and importance of completing good projects relatively quickly, this probably would be counter-productive at this time.)
- Assess what information will be required with an application – Usually it is best to collect information in two phases. Ask for fairly nominal, easy to collect, background with the initial application. Then, if the project is of definite interest, additional information can be requested by a specific date.
- Confirm how the Selectboard will handle recommendations from the Commission. Ideally that body would accept and discuss recommendations in executive session first and give permission to proceed with the project as contemplated. Then, once any additional information has been collected and the project is mature enough to disclose the landowner's name and property information, a public meeting could be held prior to the Selectboard authorizing funding.
- Include information about the possible requirement for a Town Meeting in the application instructions to put landowners and partners on notice that certain types of transactions can not proceed without additional authorization from the voters.

Note: It is possible that more information is needed to prioritize parcels. The Commission should evaluate whether additional data such as location and quality of wetlands, potential trail corridors, or conservation priorities in other towns may be important. This is a good question for discussion with funders and partners during relationship building efforts.

- Establish Conservation Reserve Fund Task Force

All of this work to implement the Fund is likely to impose an unrealistic burden on the members of the existing Commission. For this reason alone, an ad hoc group should be formed to study and refine the options and make recommendations to the full Commission. However, there are even more reasons that suggest it is wise to create an adjunct entity.

The Commission, as it is currently composed, is made up of dedicated, knowledgeable, conservation experts. This composition was entirely logical before its responsibilities were expanded to include the implementation of the Fund. For this new task, a different range of perspectives and expertise would be very helpful. However, it is unrealistic – and maybe counter-productive – to attempt to expand or modify committee membership at this time. The Commission could secure a comparable outcome, with much less effort, through some form of advisory council whose members look more like a cross-section of Richmond.

For the purposes of this report, this group will be referred to as a “task force.” The task force could be constituted immediately by the Conservation Commission, in order to assist with the development of the vision. It could also be brought together somewhat later to help introduce and support the strategy. (It will be essential to convene the group before doing any outreach and publicity so they can feel like they are part of the process.) In addition, a well-chosen group could give the Commission access to landowners and possibly to funders. The responsibilities of the task force could include advising the Commission on the desirability of specific transactions, or even managing a small grants program, which will be discussed later in this report.

In the future, the task force could play an important role in building support for extending the life of the Fund and for specific projects being considered. Also, members of the task force would be positioned for appointment to the Conservation Commission, thereby building the pool of candidates and broadening the reach of the membership.

To accomplish the various purposes of the task force, the members should reflect the make up of Richmond without duplicating the skills and connections of the Commission. Possibilities include a:

- Farmer
- Forester
- Realtor
- Person involved in a local business or tourism enterprise
- Watershed expert
- Hunter and/or angler
- Land conservation technical advisor

This type of composition would augment the skills that currently reside among the members of the Conservation Commission. A member of the Conservation Commission would serve as a liaison to the task force as well.

- Develop strong partnership relationships

As discussed in the *Partners* section of the General Recommendations section, Richmond must have capable, trusted collaborators for the Fund to have a meaningful impact on area landscapes. A number of the preceding action steps are aimed, at least in part, in increasing the Town’s ability

to build strong relationships with implementation partners. Vision, outreach and community support are all particularly important. The following steps will further strengthen connections to partner entities and improve the chances of getting the essential help that the Town needs.

The action step of developing partnerships appears after several other tasks. However that is not intended to imply a sequence. In fact, this step should be initiated immediately and be completely concurrent with the others as it will be an ongoing process.

The Conservation Commission should start by reviewing the groups and representatives who came to the partners' workshop. If the Commission has not already sent thank-you notes to each of the individuals, it should do so immediately. Each of these people took a chunk of their weekend and freely donated it to Richmond. The Town's appreciation should be clearly communicated.

If appropriate, use the thank-you note as a chance to provide an update on the implementation process and the next steps, if the Commission has made any decisions. If no decisions have been made, send the letters anyway. Ask the partner entities to keep the Commission informed about any work that their organizations initiates in or around Richmond. Invite them to attend upcoming Commission meetings so that you can collectively discuss possible projects and ways to cooperate.

Evaluate the list of partners from the workshop. Is it really complete? Or are there entities that should be included on the list in the future? Get in touch with any that were overlooked immediately and arrange for each one to do a presentation at a Commission meeting soon.

As the vision and area of focus are refined, find opportunities to confer with key potential partners. Get their input, consider their feedback, and keep the partners informed. If possible, organize a quarterly forum to systematically explore how to integrate these entities into the work of the Commission. Be sure to include a connection to the Creative Economies work that is going on in Richmond.

Remember that partners will have wise counsel on all matters associated with local conservation including focus, applications, communications and, ultimately, management plan for conserved land

- Consider creating small grants program

While vision and focus will advance significant opportunities for resource conservation in Richmond, the Commission may want to keep avenues open to invest the Fund's capital in other ways. A small grants program could allow the Fund to also support a variety of projects that could advance community goals and increase the Fund's visibility.

Examples of potential grant types could include:

- Water quality improvement restorations and plantings
- Trail construction or upgrades
- Funding for conservation planning
- Transaction costs for voluntary protection
- Small, permanent upgrades to historic buildings

- Landowner workshops on taxes, Farm Bill, habitat improvement, estate planning and other conservation tools.

The size and quantity of these grants should be limited. A maximum expenditure of \$5,000 might be appropriate, with a requirement that it be matched 1:1 with other resources. In total, the small grants should probably not exceed 20% of any year's Fund revenues.

If the Commission judges that such a program would be useful to Richmond, and provide good value, it needs to establish an application process and timeline for distribution of the grants. This work could potentially be delegated to the Task Force. That group could do initial reviews of applications as well.

A publicity plan similar to that described for the primary funding should be developed and carried out so that landowners, partners, community leaders, and funders will be aware of the opportunity.

VI. Conclusion

Citizens of Richmond had the foresight to create a Conservation Reserve Fund so that the Town could work with willing landowners and a broad array of partners to help protect the natural, agricultural and historic features that make the town special and which are increasingly under threat. The Conservation Commission has taken very seriously its responsibility to invest the Fund in an effective, accountable manner. With the input and information the Commission has gathered, it is poised to lead the community in a resource conservation process. This is a complex effort, especially at the beginning, but one that is necessary to secure the best results.

Going forward, the intentions and integrity of the Commissioners will guide the process. It is clear that there are many good people in Richmond who care deeply about the community. And there are first-rate partnerships available to help make a caring vision into a future reality.