

TO: Richmond Selectboard

FROM: Wright Preston and Lou Borie, Richmond Land Trust Board Members

DATE: July 31, 2025

SUBJECT: Conservation Reserve Fund Application

Thank you for the opportunity to present additional information for Richmond Land Trust's (RLT) application for \$7,500 to support the conservation of an 11.2 acre parcel on the Winooski River, which was approved by the Conservation Commission on July 8, 2025.

To start, we are sorry we could not attend the Selectboard meeting on July 21. We had both planned to attend, but unfortunately we each had unavoidable, last minute conflicts.

We would like to address several issues raised by the Selectboard and members of the public at the July 21 meeting, specifically public access and the need for conservation.

Public Access

This parcel has never had land-based public access and, as such, does not have a history of significant public use due to its remote location and lack of formal trails. RLT has received anecdotal reports that the parcel is popular with fiddlehead pickers in the Spring, however we have no direct knowledge of any other public use. The parcel will continue to be available for public use by paddlers, tubers, and others who use this popular section of the Winooski River. In several locations along the shoreline of the parcel small beaches allow paddlers and floaters to rest or to explore the interior of the floodplain forest. The mature forest canopy, including towering silver maple and cottonwood trees, also provides a scenic backdrop for the many Richmond residents and others who use the Rivershore Trail on the south side of the river, float in the river, or just appreciate the beauty of this unique landscape. RLT will post signs on the property indicating that it is conserved and available for public use.

Need for Conservation

Richmond is blessed with some of the finest and most mature Silver Maple-Ostrich Fern Floodplain Forest in the Winooski River watershed. These forests provide multiple natural and community benefits, including ecological stability, flood and climate resilience, water quality protection, wildlife connectivity and habitat corridors, scenic enjoyment, and, in some cases, educational and recreation opportunities.

These forests are all within the regulated Special Flood Hazard Area, which includes the Floodway and the 100 year Floodplain. The 11.2 acre parcel proposed for conservation is entirely within the Floodway. While development is prohibited in the Floodway, other land use

changes are not, including forestry, or clearing the land for other purposes. Removing some or all of the vegetation on the property would increase the velocity of the river during flood stage, causing scouring of downstream properties, and increasing the likelihood of destructive flooding in the village of Richmond. While this property may not be under imminent threat of unwanted land use change, the only way to prevent such changes and insure that the land continues to provide the benefits it does today is to permanently protect the land through fee acquisition or conservation easement.

Significant portions of the floodplain forest in Richmond have been conserved by Richmond Land Trust, The Nature Conservancy, and the Vermont Land Trust, permanently protecting many of the important benefits outlined above. The Town of Richmond owns a key parcel of floodplain forest as well, providing informal protection. (See map below.) Together these protected lands provide invaluable benefits to the Town of Richmond by slowing and retaining floodwaters, reducing the frequency of destructive flooding, and increasing the resiliency of the Town from future storm events. Protecting this 11.2 acre parcel in perpetuity would add another important piece to this fabric of natural flood mitigation properties. \$7,500 is a small investment by the Town to help protect the Town's citizens and infrastructure. This investment would be matched more than 1:1 by other sources of funding.

Finally, we want to point out again that conserving this parcel meets all seven of the Conservation Reserve Fund Policy's General Criteria as well as a number of the Natural Resource Criteria. This is the type of project which Richmond residents have supported when they have voted overwhelmingly to renew the Fund every time it has come up for a vote.

Floodplain Forest Parcels Richmond

