

Town protects 109 acres - **SOUTHBOROUGH**

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SOUTHBOROUGH - Town officials yesterday closed on a conservation restriction for 109 acres of Chestnut Hill Farm, protecting the land in perpetuity.

After nearly two years of discussion and months of negotiations with town officials and the Beals Family Trust, the state Executive Office of Environmental Affairs approved the finalized conservation restriction.

The agreement was recorded at the Worcester Registry of Deeds at 3 yesterday afternoon, according to selectmen Chairman Roger Challen.

"This is a done deal," Challen said. "It actually moves the town forward in its goals to preserve open space and maintain the rural character of Southborough."

The Conservation Commission will oversee the restriction, he said.

"This notable conservation project connects hundreds of acres of existing conservation land, maintains valuable wildlife habitat and scenic views," he said. It "permanently protects two very important land uses in New England. Passive recreation opportunities and one of the last working farms in MetroWest."

At a special Town Meeting in January, voters passed an amended article giving the town authorization to buy the conservation restriction.

The \$5.1 million transaction is being funded by several sources, including a \$500,000 state grant, \$2.35 million in Community Preservation Act money, \$2.15 million from the town's Open Space bond fund, and more than \$575,000 from contributions from Sudbury Valley Trustees and the Southborough Open Land Foundation.

The town is borrowing money under a Proposition 21/2 debt exclusion override.

With the purchase of the conservation restriction, which had to be finalized by June 1, the town will own the development rights, preserving the land as open space forever. The Beals Family Trust, current owners of the land, will continue to own the land. Town officials, Beals Family Trust representatives and lawyers discussed the details of the restriction over the last several months, including the town's obligations and the landowners' responsibilities.

"This is fantastic," said Christa Collins, a land protection specialist with Sudbury Valley Trustees.

"It's such a great collaboration ... and such an important piece of conservation land. It's got great scenic and historical value to the town and is a project of regional significance."

Conservation Commission Chairman John Leeds said he is pleased.

"I'm glad to see it finally come to a close," said Leeds. "It's a very nice project and will be very beneficial for the town in the future."

Although the restriction is finalized, fund raising will continue.

More than \$575,000 was raised for the direct purchase cost of the conservation restriction, Collins said. However, there will be costs for the perpetual care of the property in the years to come, she said. SVT is trying to cover costs for staff, who put in hundreds of hours of work over the last two years on the project, she said. SVT is hoping to raise another \$175,000, she said.

In addition, SVT and the Open Land Foundation are working with the Beals Trust to protect 85 additional acres of the farm, which remain unprotected, Collins said.

The Beals family has worked hard to see the land protected for the town, Challen said. "They really put in a tremendous effort to make this happen," he said.

Beals Family Trust member Whitney Beals did not immediately return a call for comment last night.

For more information, or to make a donation, go to www.svtweb.org or www.solf.org.

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- Caption: The town of Southborough has just protected 109 acres on Chestnut Hill Farm. CONTRIBUTED PHOTO
- Memo: TO LEARN MORE

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