



# News Release

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## **Trust for Public Land Announces Conservation Opportunity for Shepherd Farm Ridge**

Scenic Ridgeline and Blue Trail Targeted for Protection

**Woodbridge, CT** – The Trust for Public Land (TPL), a nonprofit conservation organization, announced today that it has reached an agreement to purchase 35.8 acres of the Shepherd Farm property for permanent protection as conservation land. TPL will work with the Town of Woodbridge, Woodbridge Park Association, and Woodbridge Land Trust to assemble the public and private funds so that the Town can take ownership of the property by the end of the year.

The Shepherd Farm is a family farm that has been in continuous farming for more than 100 years. The historic Shepherd Farm property, originally comprising 78.5 acres, was divided upon Fred Shepherd's death in 2001. Sarah Shepherd, the widow of Rick Shepherd, who died in 2002, continues to own and operate the 20-acre dairy farm they inherited. The Regional Water Authority acquired 22.7 acres in 2005, and the remaining 35.8 acres is owned by Joan Shepherd Eicher, who has negotiated an agreement with TPL to sell this remaining portion of the property to the town for conservation purposes. The Eicher property includes the ridge line and a hiking trail known as the "Blue Trail."

Shepherd Farm has been a longstanding open space priority for the town, which began working with TPL in 2000 to acquire the property. The Town of Woodbridge Open Space Plan and the Town Plan of Conservation and Development rate the Shepherd Farm land "as one of the top three most important open space parcels that currently are most threatened by developmental forces."

According to Ed Sheehy, First Selectman, "I am very pleased and thankful that the Trust for Public Land has reached an agreement that gives the Town the opportunity to acquire and protect one of the town's top open space priorities. Pending the State's announcement of open space grant awards in October, it is my desire to schedule a

Special Town Meeting in the fall to approve the necessary additional funding to complete the project.”

Tim Northrop, TPL’s State Director, noted that “Shepherd Farm is in a key location bordering other preserved lands. If this property were to be developed, it would interrupt the town’s trail system and open lands considered crucial to the public water supply. Instead, we have a wonderful opportunity to create a new park that will preserve the scenic character of the town, and will always be there for future generations to use for walking, birdwatching, and other outdoor activities.”

John Rochette of Woodbridge is Fred Shepherd's oldest grandson and is of the fifth generation to work on the Shepherd farm. According to Rochette, “For over a century, the Shepherd Family has worked hard to preserve and maintain the land of which we have been stewards. Shepherd Farm is not just a piece of land, but a part of our family and heritage. We can think of nothing more appropriate then to uphold Shepherd Farm as a pristine environment and in doing so, entrust the farm to the community of Woodbridge for future generations to cherish. The Shepherd family would like to thank the partners involved who have put forth much effort into this project and would be honored if the Town chooses to name the area ‘Shepherd Farm Park.’”

Shepherd Farm is directly adjacent to preserved park and water company lands totaling more than 2,500 acres, including land owned by the Woodbridge Land Trust (6 acres), the Town of Woodbridge (160 acres), the South Central Regional Water Authority (1,000 acres) and the State of Connecticut (1,500 acres of West Rock Ridge State Park). In addition, the parcel is a critical link in the 12-mile state-designated Woodbridge Greenway System. The blue trail that runs the length of the ridge on Shepherd Farm connects the Woodbridge Greenway system to the Connecticut Forest & Park Association’s blue-blazed Regicide Trail that skirts the top of West Rock Ridge State Park. The trail is also used as an educational and hiking area for the many Boy Scout Troops who stay at Camp Whiting throughout the year

The property’s purchase price is \$546,000. Funding for the purchase is expected to come from the Town’s Open Space Reserve Fund, an additional town appropriation, and private donations that will be raised by the local nonprofit partner organizations. The town’s share of the price could be offset by a grant from the state’s open space program. A grant application has been submitted by TPL with a decision expected in October. A Special Town Meeting in the fall will be necessary to authorize a town appropriation.

Chris Dickerson, president of the Woodbridge Park Association, said, “This is a great opportunity for the Woodbridge Park Association to partner with the Woodbridge Land Trust, the Trust for Public Land, and the Town of Woodbridge to preserve an important, historic property. The unique funding arrangement for this purchase — utilizing a state grant as well as funding from the two private landholding organizations in town, will drastically reduce the amount of taxpayer dollars needed to purchase the land.”

Jim Bilotta, president of the Woodbridge Land Trust, said, “The Woodbridge Land Trust is excited to see such an important piece of property protected in Woodbridge. The Shepherd family deserves our thanks and the thanks of the many residents who will benefit from this purchase.”

Preservation of the 35.8-acre parcel will provide a buffer between the dairy farm and nearby residential properties, helping to assure continuation of the working farm. In addition, the new Shepherd Farm Park would continue to provide an important habitat for wildlife, including a large number of bird species, deer, fox, coyote, wild turkey, and turtles.

The Trust for Public Land (TPL), a national nonprofit organization, specializes in conservation real estate, applying its expertise in negotiations, public finance, and law to protect land for people to enjoy as natural areas, ensuring livable communities for generations to come. TPL has protected more than 4,000 acres of open space, watershed land, working farms and forestland, and historic resources in 32 communities across the state. For more information, please visit [www.tpl.org/connecticut](http://www.tpl.org/connecticut).