

Let your voice
be heard!
Vote on
November 2nd!

Potential Barre Town Forest Frequently Asked Questions

Compiled by the volunteer Town Forest Study Committee
Jeff Blow, Jeff Gagne, John Hameline, Mike Fraysier, and Marion Fish (Committee Chair)
October 4th, 2010

Introduction: The Town of Barre has an opportunity to acquire 347-380 acres in the upper Graniteville and upper Websterville area to be owned by the Town as a new Barre Town Forest.

Barre Town voters will be asked to approve the acquisition and the expenditure of funds on November 2nd, 2010, as part of the general election. The Selectboard, the Town Forest Study Committee and several volunteers have been working with the Trust for Public Land (TPL) and the Millstone Trails Association (MTA), who are assisting the town with the project. Note that this is an evolving project, exact parcels to be included, funding sources, and easement restrictions are a work in progress.

Where is the project?

The potential Barre Town Forest is made up of up to 12 parcels with frontage on Church Hill Road, Waterman St, Donahue Road, Graniteville Road and Littlejohn Road. The majority is owned by Rock of Ages, as well as other parcels owned by Websterville Fire District, Graniteville Fire District and up to 4 private landowners. These forested hills contain 28 abandoned granite quarries, and include an extensive trail system built by the volunteers of the Millstone Trails Association.

What happens if the Town elects not to pursue the acquisition of the Property?

The major landowner, Rock of Ages, would still pursue the sale of their parcels, as may other private owners. A new owner, or owners, of these lands would likely have very different goals for the Property with no guarantees that the property would remain undeveloped or open to recreational uses.

Why create a town forest? How does this benefit the town?

164 Vermont towns have town forests, some in existence for more than 100 years. Together, Vermont's town forests account for approximately 66,000 acres of public land. These areas are recreational, educational, open space, water source protection, and timber management assets for their communities, as well as habitat for fish and wildlife.

➤ ***Economic Development***

Recreation and tourism are recognized statewide as the fastest growing and cleanest forms of economic development. Outdoor recreation is an important industry in Vermont, annually generating \$12.5 billion in retail sales and services (accounting for 12% of gross state product), supporting 35,000 jobs, and creating \$187 million in state tax revenue.¹ Permanent protection of the land in Town ownership would help protect the many recreational opportunities, as well as wildlife habitat, water quality, and a cultural and historical treasure for the central Vermont region. The abandoned quarries haven't been profitable in a century, but the transformation from abandoned quarries to healthy forest recreation area gives this unique property an entirely new kind of value to the community of Barre Town and all of Vermont. Just as the Kingdom

¹ Source: Outdoor Industry Foundation. 2006. The Active Outdoor Recreation Economy: Vermont.

Potential Barre Town Forest Project Frequently Asked Questions

Trails have brought revenue and provided customers to support existing and new local businesses in Burke, the Millstone Trails are bringing new life to a part of Vermont that has largely been passed over by Vermont's growing recreation-based tourism economy. Other trails in Vermont have demonstrated benefits to the local economy. The Waterfront Path in Burlington attracts visitors who spend money in the local economy, from \$60 for in-state day visitors to \$157 for overnight out-of-state visitors.² The amenities offered by the larger Millstone Trails network are already recognized as a draw for local businesses trying to recruit new employees to Barre Town. Northern Power, for example, has specifically mentioned the trails at Millstone Hill as a positive local feature when hiring new employees.

➤ ***Timber Revenue***

Permanent protection of the land in Town ownership will not only attract new businesses and homeowners to Barre Town but also ensure that the land remains in active forest management, supporting local resource-based jobs and providing periodic timber revenues to the Town. According to Russ Barrett, Washington County Forester, the property is fully stocked with medium to high value tree species, and has good to excellent potential for sustainable forest management now and in the future. He estimates 271 acres of the proposed Town Forest are accessible and could be managed for sustainable forest products. The total timber volume is 928,000 board feet of saw timber and 3,757 cords of pulp and fuel wood, with a current value of \$143,000. The town will benefit from occasional revenue from timber sales.

➤ ***Recreational Opportunities***

Trails throughout the larger Millstone Trails network connect people to the landscape, local history, and each other by providing a place for year-round recreation and cultural education. If the property becomes a town forest, pedestrian access will be **free** for everyone, both on the town forest, and the extended 70-mile trail network on private land. Ranked as one of the top 10 mountain biking destinations in New England by the Boston Globe in 2009, Millstone Hill offers local residents and visitors alike a variety of recreation options. Trails range from short, scenic hiking paths to technical mountain biking routes that take advantage of the unique terrain of the quarry site. In winter, over 20 miles of trails are open for cross-country skiing, snowshoeing and snowmobiling. Trails have been located to highlight the property's granite history, with views of quarry ponds and granite grout piles now home to mosses and lichens. The trail network also connects to the Bike Path and the Barre Town Elementary and Middle School.

➤ ***Protection of Drinking Water***

Significant portions of the Websterville Water District Source Water Protection Area and the East Barre Source Water Protection Area are within the proposed Town Forest. (See Drinking Water Map available on www.barretown.org.) Conservation of this property, and proper management, will ensure the water quality and safety of these two drinking water supplies

➤ ***Health Benefits***

The property is also valuable to the overall health of the community. The Spaulding high school cross-country team practices on the property and hold meets there. Because of the interconnected trail network, it is one of the few cross country meets in the region to not have to cross any roads

² Source: Zhang, C., L. Jennings & L. Aultman-Hall. 2010. Estimating Tourism Expenditures for the Burlington Waterfront Path and the Island Line Trail. University of Vermont Transportation Research Center.

Potential Barre Town Forest Project Frequently Asked Questions

nor worry about safety or delays related to traffic. Office workers visit the trails for lunchtime rides.

Less than 2% of Barre Town is conserved public land, compared to 15.2% of the State. Incorporating parks and town forests into communities can support increased exercise and healthier lifestyles³. Having public land close to population centers is important not only to the physical and mental health of the community, but having protected areas within walking or biking distance reduces car travel, air pollution, greenhouse gas emissions and the accidents and stress that are by-products of driving.

What is the status of the negotiations to buy the land?

The Trust for Public Land, a national land conservation organization, has a signed Letter of Intent with Rock of Ages and with Pierre Couture, securing 7 parcels, totaling 343 acres. We have also had initial meetings with the Websterville Water District, the Graniteville Water District and 3 other landowners of small parcels adjacent to land owned by Rock of Ages. TPL will move forward with contracts with all landowners after progress in raising funds for the project, including a successful vote for Barre Town to contribute funds.

How would Town ownership work?

The Town of Barre would acquire the property subject to a conservation easement co-held by the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) and Vermont Housing and Conservation Board (VHCB). This easement would ensure that the property would never be developed and that wildlife habitat, public access, and water quality would be protected. Barre Town would be able to harvest timber on the property as a source of municipal income and the property would be open to recreation including hiking, snowshoeing, birdwatching, and snowmobiling. Day-to-day management decisions would be made by the selectboard and/or a new Town Forest Committee. The town would work with the Washington County Forester, Russ Barrett, or contract with a consulting forester, to assist with the development of a Management Plan and to oversee any timber harvesting activities.

How will property be managed?

Before the town took ownership, a Management Plan would be created, with open public input, which would describe how the property would be managed over the next ten years. Based on initial discussions, and requirements of the funding sources and easement holders, the Town Forest will be managed for multiple uses, including sustainable timber harvesting, source water protection, historical and cultural education, and recreation such as hiking, biking, cross country skiing, snowshoeing, and snowmobiling. The property will be open to free public access for hiking, birdwatching, fishing, snowshoeing and educational activities. It is proposed that snowmobiles will be allowed on designated VAST trails. Swimming, horseback riding, hunting, ATVs, and other potential activities will be considered by the Town in the process of creating the Management Plan. A volunteer Town Forest Committee could be established that would oversee stewardship and management related to recreation and timber management. The Committee would work with the Washington County Forester, or a consulting forester, to create a management plan and to carry out future timber harvests.

³ The Health Benefits of Parks: How Parks Help Keep Americans and their Communities Fit and Healthy. By Erica Gies. Available at www.tpl.org

Potential Barre Town Forest Project Frequently Asked Questions

What other restrictions would there be on the land?

The Conservation Easement terms will be determined through easement negotiations between the Town Forest Committee, TPL, VHCB & VLT. The easement would require that wildlife habitat, public access, water quality, and cultural resources like the abandoned quarries be protected. A Forest Management Plan will have to be developed that is approved by VHCB, VLT and the County Forester.

Can the town log the property?

Yes. It is expected that the property would be managed sustainably for forest management purposes which would provide Barre Town with periodic income. Other towns that have acquired productive timberland find that the revenue from periodic harvests can be used to fund special projects after any debts have been satisfied. A forest inventory conducted by Russ Barrett found that 271 acres are accessible and available to be managed for sustainable forest products. The most common trees are sugar maple, white ash, and red maple, followed by eastern hemlock. Much of the area shows no or little sign of past harvesting activity. Where harvesting has occurred, it has been done under supervision of a forester and in compliance with Use-Value standards. Under the terms of the easement, the town would be required to work with a professional forester to develop a 10-year forest management plan that would ensure that forestry is done on a sustainable basis.

How much will this acquisition cost and where will the funding come from?

Appraisals are presently underway, but TPL estimates the total acquisition cost for the land to be \$1,000,000, of which the Town of Barre is requested to contribute 10%, or \$100,000. There is another \$175,000 in costs associated with the project (title, survey, appraisals, timber inventory, environmental investigation, legal costs, and an endowment for the conservation easement) bringing the total estimated cost to \$1,175,000. The Trust for Public Land and the Millstone Trails Association, with cooperation from the Town, believes that they can raise the remaining funds for the purchase and the transaction costs from a mix of federal, state, and private sources.

Has any money been committed to the project already?

Millstone Trails Association has committed to raising \$100,000 in private funds. To date, \$30,000 in private funds have been pledged. TPL will lead the effort to raise \$975,000 through federal, state and private grants and private donations. TPL has applied for a \$270,000 grant from the Open Space Institute's Community Forest Fund, and will be applying to Vermont Housing and Conservation Board in spring of 2011 for significant funding. Half of the acquisition funds are expected to come from the new federal Community Forest & Open Space program, which will be requesting applications in early 2011. Other sources are also being pursued.

What is the Town's contribution?

The Trust for Public Land has requested that the Town contribute \$100,000 to the project, or 10% of the estimated purchase price for the land, (8.5% of the total estimated project costs). This is a long-term investment in the town's future. Town funding is proposed to come from a loan from the Barre Area Development Inc., at 3% interest, that would be paid back over four years. While all of the project cooperators are very sensitive to the impact on property taxes, the project is simply not feasible if only outside funds are used. Funding requests from federal, state and private sources are much more successful if the town has shown financial commitment to the project.

Potential Barre Town Forest Project Frequently Asked Questions

How will this acquisition affect property taxes?

If the Town were to borrow the \$100,000 from Barre Area Development, Inc then the annual payments would be \$26,561 per year for 4 years (assuming a 3% interest rate). This amount would be funded by property taxes. The impact on taxes will be roughly \$4.40 per \$100,000 in assessed value on an annual basis for 4 years. For the average homeowner with a property value of \$175, 000, this would mean \$7.70 per year for four years. Over the life of the ownership, it is anticipated that the timber revenue, and increased revenue from tourism, would more than pay for the town's investment. However, due to the extensive recreational resources and concerns about water quality, timber harvesting may not be the town's priority for the property and it is quite likely that the return on the investment is a long-term endeavor and property taxes will have to carry the acquisition costs in the short term.

What other financial issues are there?

Once municipally owned, the property would be taken off the tax roles. The annual municipal tax loss resulting by the creation of a Town Forest is estimated by the town to be between \$7,000-8,000. If the properties were to sell on the open market it is likely that there would be some development of new homes. Conservation of the property will avoid increasing the demand for municipal services in Graniteville and Websterville. The creation of open space has been clearly documented to increase resale values of homes adjacent to the conserved land⁴. Property owners will benefit from higher property values when they sell their homes and the town will benefit from an increased tax base, over time. According to a 2001 survey by the National Association of REALTORS® by Public Opinion Strategies, 50 percent of respondents said they would pay 10 percent more for a house located near a park or open space. It is the opinion of the town tax assessor, that in just a few years the creation of a Town Forest will be a net generator of additional tax revenues. Lastly, the Websterville Fire District is considering using a portion of the proceeds from the sale of the parcel they own to pay off an existing bond, which would then decrease the water bills of Websterville ratepayers.

How about the long-term responsibility and cost of maintaining the trail network on this land?

The Town of Barre will not be required to maintain existing trails. Two trail networks currently exist on the proposed Barre Town Forest. The Barre Town Thunder Chickens, a local non-profit, has built and maintains a snowmobile trail network through the Millstone Hill area. The non-profit Millstone Trails Association (MTA) has built and maintains a walking/hiking and a mountain biking network in summer and a snowshoe and cross country ski network in the winter that extends beyond the boundaries of the proposed Town Forest. Thousands of hours of volunteer labor, memberships and day-use fees have funded the creation and maintenance of these trails, and paid for associated liability insurance. A successful partnership between MTA and Barre Town has been demonstrated over the past few years on the two parcels currently owned by Barre Town on Little John Rd, which contain trails that are part of the Millstone Trails network.

MTA has proposed to continue requesting membership and/or day-use fees for mountain biking and groomed cross country skiing, which will pay for the management, maintenance, and liability insurance for the full 70-mile trail network that extends on private land beyond the proposed Town Forest. The full trail network will be **free** and open to all hikers, snowshoers and dogwalkers. MTA proposes that any new recreational development on the Town Forest that requires maintenance or other costs follow the same model. If there is an interest in developing other uses, such as horseback riding trails, then a local non-profit could be created by enthusiasts of this activity, and request a license from the Town to develop this activity, assuming it is consistent with the Conservation

⁴ The Economic Benefits of Land Conservation by Constance deBrun. Available at www.tpl.org

Potential Barre Town Forest Project Frequently Asked Questions

Easement. The cost of establishing these activities and the responsibility of maintaining them rests squarely on the groups interested in these activities and not on the town taxpayers. If the Selectboard or Town Forest Committee is unsatisfied with the way these activities are being managed, they could withdraw the license.

Are there any environmental issues with the property?

Prior to acquiring the property, there will be a thorough investigation by professional firms for any environmental issues or title problems like old rights of way or mineral rights controlled by third parties. Under the terms of the contract, the property must not have any defects in order for the acquisition to go forward. The results of the environmental and title investigations will be made available to the Selectboard prior to the commitment of any funds.

How will this affect the drinking water sources on or adjacent to the Property?

205 acres (77%) of the Websterville Water District Source Water Protection Area is within the proposed Town Forest. (See Drinking Water Map available on www.barretown.org.) The Property also contains 27 acres (37%) of the Source Water Protection Area for Barre Town Water System that supplies drinking water for 1,210 people. Conservation of this property, and proper management, will ensure the water quality and safety of these two drinking water supplies. All activities on the property will need to follow the rules set out in the Source Water Protection Plans of both water sources.

What is the role of the Trust for Public Land and the Millstone Trails Association?

The Trust for Public Land is a national land conservation non-profit organization with a mission of conserving land for people. TPL is leading the real estate negotiations, due diligence and the fundraising for the land acquisition. TPL has considerable expertise in real estate, law, finance, and fundraising in support of purchasing conservation land for public agencies. TPL operates a community forest program in New England that assists towns in the creation of new municipally owned forests. TPL has successfully completed new town forests in West Fairlee and Hinesburg, Vermont and in Errol, Freedom, Randolph, and Meredith, NH, among other places.

The Millstone Trails Association (MTA) is a 501(c)(3) non-profit organization dedicated to establishing a comprehensive trail system in Central Vermont for the purposes of public recreation and environmental and cultural awareness and education. The association was established by in the spring of 2005 and officially opened its trail resources to the public in June of 2005. MTA has proposed they would like to continue to manage the bike and ski trail network, as well as help with additional recreational and educational uses. MTA's mission is to:

Create one of Vermont's most unique recreational areas in hopes of fostering and promoting local economic development.

Provide Central Vermont residents with accessible and affordable non-motorized recreational activities.

Draw enthusiasts regionally and nationally to Central Vermont to experience this unique setting for recreation.

Work in conjunction with other Central Vermont organizations in making locals and tourists alike more aware and appreciative of Barre's granite heritage.

Potential Barre Town Forest Project Frequently Asked Questions

*Note that these are not the goals of the proposed Barre Town Forest—those will be developed with public input when creating the Management Plan.

What is the relationship between MTA and the Millstone Lodge, Touring Center and other businesses at Millstone Hill?

The non-profit Millstone Trails Association is completely separate from businesses owned by Pierre Couture. All membership and day-use fees collected for mountain biking and cross country skiing go towards tools, ski-trail grooming, trail maps, liability insurance, and expenses associated with the Winterfest, Millstone Grind, and trail maintenance. Without any paid or professional staff, MTA depends on a dedicated corps of volunteers to develop, manage, and maintain the trail system, market and promote the trails, organize races and special events, and develop partnerships.

For more information contact:

Carl Rogers
Barre Town Manager
802-479-9331
crogers@barretown.org

Kate Wanner
Field Representative
Trust for Public Land
Montpelier, VT
kate.wanner@tpl.org
802-223-1373 x27

Mike Fraysier
President
Millstone Trails Association
mcfraysier@myfairpoint.net
802-476-8396