

Aquidneck Land Trust: Important Resource for the Island's Realtors and Their Clients
Seminar for Women's Council of Realtors
Presenter: Ted Clement, Executive Director, Aquidneck Land Trust
Location: Newport Public Library, Newport, RI
Date: August 18, 2008

- I. Introduction
 - A. Brief background of presenter
 - B. Aquidneck Land Trust – a 501(c)(3), not-for-profit organization, that began in earnest in 1990 to conserve Aquidneck Island's open spaces and natural character for the lasting benefit of our community.
 - C. Overview of presentation

- II. Now Is the Time to Act for Land Conservation on Aquidneck Island!
 - A. Since 2000, Aquidneck Island has lost hundreds and hundred of acres to development. For example, in 2005 and 2006 our Island lost over 350 acres to development. This directly threatens our Island's long-term sustainability and desirability.
 - B. Aquidneck Island's total conserved land area (a little over 20% of Aquidneck Island's 24,500 +/- acres are conserved) is relatively small compared to other nearby islands: about 70% of Prudence Island is conserved; over 40% of Block Island and Nantucket are conserved; over 35% of Martha's Vineyard is conserved; and about 20% of Manhattan Island is conserved.
 - C. In 2004, recognizing the need to act swiftly in a strategic and focused way, the Aquidneck Land Trust completed a comprehensive mapping and prioritization project that identified and scored 500 remaining and threatened open space parcels on Aquidneck Island according to a set of criteria measuring conservation values: wildlife habitat; water and agricultural resources; scenic beauty; recreation potential; and more. From that, a priority list of 100 parcels was created. Of those parcels, only about 90 remain today totaling over 2,000 acres.

- III. Primary Methods Employed by the Aquidneck Land Trust to Conserve Land
 - A. Fee Simple Ownership – Where the Aquidneck Land Trust becomes the landowner (e.g., the Oakland Forest and Meadow Preserve in Portsmouth which is owned by the Aquidneck Land Trust).
 - B. Conservation Easement – Aquidneck Land Trust's primary conservation tool.
 - 1. Simple definition of a Perpetual Conservation Easement: a legal agreement whereby a landowner voluntarily transfers a partial property interest to a conservation organization or government agency to permanently limit a property's uses in order to protect the property's conservation values.
 - 2. Some of the reasons why the Aquidneck Land Trust generally conserves land with Conservation Easements:
 - a) Avoidance of property taxes for the Aquidneck Land Trust and helping ensure private land stays on municipal tax rolls;

- b) Limit liability – Not being the first in line Fee Simple owner;
- c) Keep land in active agriculture and enable farmers to own their land;
- d) Limit stewardship costs – Have others as primary stewards – More hands make light work;
- e) Enable landowners to continue to own their beloved land; and
- f) Limit acquisition costs for conservation transactions.

IV. Aquidneck Land Trust’s Work Preserves the Desirability of Our “**LOCATION, LOCATION, LOCATION!!!**”

A. Conserving open space saves taxpayers money!

1. Many respected studies, such as the following, have demonstrated that communities that conserve land make wise investments in future economic development:
 - a) *The Cost of Community Services in Portsmouth, Rhode Island*, commissioned by the University of Rhode Island and the Coastal Resources Center;
 - b) *Cost of Community Services Studies* by The American Farmland Trust;
 - c) *The Economic Impact of Protecting Rivers, Trails and Greenway Corridors* by the National Park Service;
 - d) *Economic Benefits of Open Space* by The Trust for Public Land; and
 - e) *Fiscal Impact of a Subdivision on Perry Farm: The Tax Benefits of Open Space Preservation vs. Residential Development* by Robert J. Johnson, University of Rhode Island.
2. Studies show that it costs a municipality between \$1.04 and \$2.00 for every dollar of tax revenue to provide services to a typical subdivision. Subdivisions require schools, roads, police, water, rescue and fire department services, storm water management and more. As a result, current taxpayers end up subsidizing new subdivisions that bring increased traffic, crowded schools and the loss of a community’s character.
3. Swan Farm example.
4. When land is protected, the adjacent land often increases in value. A survey by the National Association of Homebuilders concluded that new homebuyers value natural areas and trails above any other amenity.
5. It is cheaper to protect clean water at its source than to build expensive water treatment facilities. It has been estimated that New York City saved approximately \$5 billion in construction costs by purchasing conservation lands around its reservoirs.
6. A landowner who conserves their land may realize important tax benefits:
 - a) Income tax benefits;
 - b) Estate tax benefits; and
 - c) Property tax benefits.
7. Conserving land on Aquidneck Island maintains its desirability as a place to live, work and visit!

B. Other reasons to conserve open space:

1. Protecting local agricultural land that provides fresh farm products and food security;

2. Preserving wildlife habitat and biodiversity;
3. Securing public recreational space and healthy fun outdoor opportunities;
4. Maintaining water resource areas and clean water; and
5. Keeping scenic vistas and the charm and beauty of our Island.

V. Ways to Help the Aquidneck Land Trust

- A. Become a member of the Aquidneck Land Trust yourself.
- B. Welcome your new buyers to the area by giving them a complimentary membership to the Aquidneck Land Trust. They have just bought real estate in the area so explain to them how your membership gift to them will help protect their real estate investment long-term.
- C. Have your real estate firm become a member of the Aquidneck Land Trust.
- D. Participate in the Aquidneck Land Trust's Conservation Buyer Program.
- E. Volunteer with the Aquidneck Land Trust.
- F. Sponsor an Aquidneck Land Trust event (e.g., *Fiesta Verde* or the Aquidneck Land Trust's Annual Golf Tournament).
- G. Participate in the Aquidneck Land Trust's free educational events and encourage others to attend with you (e.g., the Land Matters Walk & Talk Series and the Conservation Speaker Series).
- H. Visit our web-site, www.aquidnecklandtrust.org, and learn more about what we do.