



Aquidneck Island Land Trust

The Conservation Easement at Sweet Berry Farm

The proposal to build additional structures at Sweet Berry Farm has raised questions about the role of the Aquidneck Island Land Trust and the meaning of the conservation easement that applies to portions of the property.

A conservation easement is a voluntary legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust or government agency that permanently protects a property's conservation values by restricting certain development or land uses while preserving certain rights for the landowner. These rights and restrictions are negotiated at the time the easement is established and remain in effect even when the property changes ownership. The Land Trust inspects conserved properties at least annually and is responsible for enforcing the terms of each easement.

The Land Trust holds conservation easements on three Sweet Berry Farm parcels in Middletown, including Plat/Lot 125/1, where the current proposal is located. The easement on this parcel dates to 1996 and requires that the primary use of the land remain agricultural. It also explicitly allows for structures that are accessory to that agricultural use, as well as activities consistent with the Middletown Zoning Ordinance and the Right to Farm Act.

In reviewing the current proposal, the Land Trust's role is limited and clearly defined: we interpret the language of the conservation easement and determine whether the proposed structures and activities are permitted under that document. Based on that review, the Land Trust has determined that the proposed structures are consistent with the easement, provided that the property continues to function primarily as a working farm.

While our primary role is upholding the terms of the easement, as a community-based conservation organization we also encourage the Planning Board to meaningfully address any concerns expressed by neighbors and some residents of Middletown, including traffic, noise, and related impacts. These are important considerations that fall outside the scope of the conservation easement but are central to the Planning Board's broader review. The Planning Board plays a critical role in balancing the interests of Sweet Berry Farm to remain a viable and productive agricultural enterprise, while also addressing overall quality of life for surrounding residents.

Lilly Dick, Board Chair

Matt Kirby, Vice-Chair

Terry Sullivan, Executive Director