

I am sure that you value, as I do, the extraordinary scenic beauty of the Pugsley Hill - Millbrook School valley area. It has remained protected from the desecration of landscape quality occurring elsewhere in the County because all of us have dedicated ourselves to its stewardship.

Recent interest in our valley on the part of a developer, who has taken options on two farms and publicly expressed his intention to build 27 units on the Sheldon Farm, has raised serious concerns among all of us for the future of the area. Coincidentally, the Dutchess Land Conservancy was formed this year to preserve open space resources, particularly here. It seems to me that now is the time to take concrete, practical steps to protect what we have while we still have it.

The Sheldon and Van Benschoten farms are major concerns we share and several of us have been working with the Dutchess Land Conservancy to find a way to purchase these farms, place conservation easements on them and resell them to neighbors and perhaps a new owner or two who would abide by a restriction plan. In this way we can stave off the threat of an outside developer ruining our magnificent countryside, while securing the future of these properties as open land.

Equally important, in the long run, is the future of our own lands. I am confident that none of our current neighbors would choose to destroy what we all value. The next generation of landowners, however, may well follow the pattern of selling out to developers which we see happening in other portions of Dutchess County and elsewhere. There is a practical way that we can work together to prevent this from occurring: placing conservation easements on our land.

A conservation easement permanently restricts, or channels, future building only to those portions of the property where it can be accommodated without destroying visual and environmental qualities of the landscape. The open fields and woodlands we cherish in their present condition would be permanently preserved from development. If we all do this simultaneously, we would enhance the value of each other's properties by assuring that what makes them valuable to begin with, their scenic beauty, would continue indefinitely.

I am willing and eager to donate conservation easements on my property if my neighbors will join, so that our immediate area can be preserved. Joel Russell of the Dutchess Land Conservancy specializes in conservation easements and would be very happy to work with us individually and together to do a mutually beneficial preservation program. He is in the final stages of preparing a conservation easement for Leslie Barclay at Fraleigh Hill Farm. That easement will be the first in our area. I would suggest that we might all begin to prepare easements and place them "in escrow" until a critical mass is reached, at which point they would be executed and filed as part of our land title. We would then be assured that we were not doing it alone, but were all benefitting from the program.

If we follow Leslie Barclay's fine example and dedicate ourselves to the long-term stewardship of this marvelous countryside, we will not only do a service to ourselves and each other, but to future generations.

I would like to suggest that we meet at Wethersfield House on Saturday, October the 12th. at 4 PM to hear Mr. Russell make a presentation on conservation easements and answer you questions. He has also offered to meet with you individually on a confidential basis if you prefer. He can be reached at the new office of the Dutchess Land Conservancy in Bangall by telephoning () . I am enclosing an informational paper on conservation easements by Mr. Russell to help familiarize you with this technique.

Time is running against us. The sooner we get organized and act, the greater the likelihood that we will succeed. Please RSVP to Mr. Russell whether or not you plan to attend on October the 12th., and let him know when it would be convenient for you to discuss this matter. Thank you for your concern.

Yours sincerely,

Chauncey Stillman

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