Dear Friend,

Mark your calendars for November 26 (the day after Thanksgiving) at 10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m and February 13, 2011 and join us for what has become an annual Charlestown Land Trust holiday celebration of protected open space. Members of the Charlestown Conservation Commission, one of our many partners, will lead us on a tour of the town-owned 118 acre South Farm Preserve, which was purchased with town funds in 2002. The parcel is made up of woodlands, two agricultural fields, 2.5 miles of field and woodland trails and the restored Horstmeyer Sheep Barn built in the 1800’s.

Directions:
South Farm is located on the east side of the town on the north end of Old Coach Rd. There is a sign and parking lot on the right side going north, across from the horse farm.

Land Trust Goals
We hope by taking the time to explore and walk one of the many preserves and conserved properties in town you will catch the passion that is the Charlestown Land Trust. The trust is made up of citizens working together to protect the beauty and natural resources of Charlestown for current and future generations. We are always eager to welcome new neighbors and members to help us preserve the special land in our town by working toward these goals:

1: Identify and protect significant and scenic land in Charlestown by acquiring title or conservation easements.
2: Manage and monitor preserves and easements, and enforce restrictions to protect natural values.
3: Provide educational opportunities to foster appreciation and understanding of the environment and encourage conservation of natural resources.
4: Effectively promote greater involvement in the Land Trust’s activities to the public.

If you would like to join us in our quest please email us at charlestownlandtrust@gmail.com or call 401 364 9124 x 23

Sincerely,
Michael Maynard, Executive Director

This month in our newsletter we are proud to share the news of college students who came from Providence to work with us as stewards, the results of a wonderful fund raiser, the wisdom of a land use specialist, the passion of three local stewards, and a delicious recipe for the holidays made with local produce. We hope you will join us soon. It can all begin by taking a walk.

Sincerely,
Michael Maynard, Executive Director

Fred Baker
Providence College students working
The Annual Auction at the Arnold Barn

On August 21st The land trust celebrated its annual fundraising auction at the Arnold Barn located in one of Charlestown’s most beautiful neighborhoods. Thanks to the drama and quicksilver pace of our auctioneer, Bob Ward, unique items such as a tour of Perry Raso’s Oyster Farm on Potter’s Pond (of the Matumack Oyster Bar), decorator pillows “with attitude”, rare port, antique dahlias, and four days on Sanibel, FL flew off the block. This was the land trust’s third auction. If you missed it this year and want to help support the land trust join our mailing list for future auctions. Contact us at charlestownlandtrust@gmail.

Donors:
Bose & Penny Arnold
Randall Realators
Francis Topping
Karen Peterson Design
Galapagos Boutique
Clarks Farm
Peter Ogle Mosaics
Shebunarme Farms
Mark Hinkley
Susan Jensen
Ocean House Marina
Pete & Sandy Arnold
Christine Leggio
United Builders Supply
Carla & Russ Ricci
Sundial Beach & Golf Resort
Perry Raso
Grace Farrell Weaver
Sun Up Gallery
Charrio Furniture
Liza Falonre
Nigrelli’s Jewelry
Pat’s Power Equipment
Fred Baker
Charlestown Package Store
Vision Landscaping
The Cooked Goose
Greenwich Bay Gourmet
Bill Hodshon & Stu Demirs
John Huran
Tom McNulty
Vic Dvorkv
Ted Mook
Megan Mynthan

Some feel economic recessions offer a boom to land conservation. In such times, lands once slated for development may be deemed no longer economically feasible for such use and be presented to conservationists to offer a bid. In such circumstances, depressed land markets can stretch conservation donor dollars. Conversely, I have long maintained that major advances in land preservation have also resulted from an exodus of development. Few communities are controlling their destiny because they are not in the driver’s seat regarding future growth. In many towns, people are making land use decisions without a unifying game plan. What often results is haphazard development insensitive to the area’s unique sense of place and natural resources. Consequently, a homogenized blend of land use starts to make our area indistinguishable from other regions of the country. In periods of intense development, communities tend to be in reactive rather than directive modes regarding growth. They end up reacting to development proposals without sending a clear message to developers as to what the community wants. When commissions get bogged down reviewing development proposals, little creative planning occurs. Environments end up accepting what developers offer because it complies with the regulations and the town has no alternate plan. At some point, someone steps back and asks, “Is this the best we can do?” Many local officials would have to answer “Obviously, that’s the best we could do!” but they were truly honest when they might say, “in some cases it is little more than the worst that we can do.

I believe if we are to cope with change in good times and bad, create order out of chaos and provide well designed communities rather than mamadu sprawl, the solution must be found in the comprehensive land use planning process. Land use planning enables communities to direct-growth to those areas capable of supporting it and at the same time identifies and prioritizes areas worthy of conservation. It can and should be a clear statement of how, when and where the community will grow. It provides a concise guide to local officials and developers so no one is surprised by the other’s actions at the last minute.

Open Space and Tough Economic Times

Jim Gibbons

Open Space and Tough Economic Times

PC students working at the Old Schoolhouse, Cross Mills

The student groups focused on three properties, the Carter Preserve overseen by The Nature Conservancy, and CLT’s Mill Pond Preserve and Cross Mills’ trails and the grounds surrounding the Historic Schoolhouse and Library. The most consuming projects was to clear and maintain the trails and improve walking trails with the library and community members who are looking for a peaceful spot to read a book or have a moment of quiet reflection. Because of the effects of the April floods, the task to clean the area was immense but by day’s end, the trail was visible again and the students delighted in the new work. By the end of the April floods, the task to clean the area was immense but by day’s end, the trail was visible again and the students delighted in the new work.

Charlestown Land Trust: Stewardship Day

Andrea Urrutia

The first week of September brought smiling faces to South County. Over a hundred and fifty incoming Providence College freshman were invited into our community by the land trust to experience our open spaces and the natural beauty of our town. The students bused down during “Stewardship Days”, prepared to do trail maintenance, build benches, create rock walls, trim trees, and work on the landscape. They also worked with members of the Charlestown Historical Society, the Cross Mills Public Library and The Nature Conservancy. Their day with us marked the grand finale of a week of community service for the students involved with Urban Action, a Providence College Service program. CLT has been involved with Urban Action for several years offering college youth an opportunity to become physically involved with stewardship and the land.

Why Plan for Land Use?

Jim Gibbons

The Importance of an “Open Space Plan.”

At the heart of the land use-planning process is an open space initiative that calls upon residents to envision a new approach to land use. It calls for a network of green spaces that protect our New England landscape and natural infrastructure, provides close-to-home recreation opportunities, buffers unique resources, and improves our experience as we move through the land. This new approach highlights a system of protected open spaces that helps determine where growth and development should occur. Rather than being the residual of development, this approach places preservation of fragile and unique sites in the forefront and designates the remaining lands to be developed. Under this approach development is delegated to areas capable of supporting it while open space is protected based on a precise functional plan.

Behind this suggested approach is recognition that our resources don’t have to be designed as something special. They are by their very nature something special. Most importantly we must realize if we take the imperative steps to first protect our unique natural resources, quality development, sensitive to those resources will follow and as a result our town’s special character and your quality of life will be enriched.
Making an Effect on the Local Level

Ana Flores

The crow of roosters greet you as you drive into the home of Cliff Vanover and Ruth Platner. Just behind the chicken coop there is a large sunny area that has been carved out of the woods for an impressive vegetable garden. Their couple’s footprint on the land is light, only areas they’ve needed to meet their eco-friendly living have been cultivated. Their plot of land reflects their belief in the importance of open spaces and their sustained efforts to protect lands in Charlestown for the past 25 years. In the back of the home they’ve built is a wall of windows that looks into the heart of the forest. Cliff points towards the trees and tells me, “we connect to the Great Swamp Management lands from here.” I sense the forest is both library and mentor.

“We first got here we used to just read the New York Times and rarely saw the local papers. Thinking the global issues are what mattered. But we soon realized the local level is where you can have some effect. One of our earliest experiences with putting things into conservation began with this tract of 60 acres of privately owned, undeveloped land that is between us and the swamp.” Ruth explains. “We sent a survey crew out here one day because the owner was planning a development. That got us calling the Nature Conservancy- they were only in Boston then. We also contacted the owner and DEM to get them talking. That dialogue began in 1985 and the breakthrough finally came in 1997.” The Nature Conservancy finally brokered the purchase for the tract, with $66,000 provided by the Champlin Foundations for 30 acres and the Nature Conservancy finally brokered the purchase for the tract, with $66,000 provided by the Champlin Foundations for 30 acres of uplands. The remaining 30 acres of wetlands were donated by the owner.

Ruth tells me all this in a very understated way, since that first effort the couple has been involved in their town in many ways. Cliff was on the Conservation Commission from 1994-2000, serving as chairman from 1998-2000. Ruth was on the first board of the South County Conservancy from 1995-98, and in 1997 began to serve on the planning commission where she still serves. Through their involvement with town committees and strategic matchmaking they have helped put almost 1000 acres under conservation.

During our conversation many maps have come out on the table to show me the parcels around town they’ve been involved with: Maple Lake, South Farm, many acres abutting Rt 1 that are now open space. “We take the green space around Rt 1 for granted,” Cliff remarks. “Some of our open spaces can be taken for granted, you have to fight politically and get involved to push back the line.” Ruth dittos.

Cliff knows the lines on these maps intimately because of his love of hiking, geography and training as a cartographer. He’s also the author of several hiking guides for the state. His keen interest in topography is what led to him to explore the United Nuclear Corporation property in Charlestown. “No one wanted to touch that land because of its radioactive issues but I organized some walks to get environmental officials out to show them what I thought was so special about the land. Almost the first thing we run into was the grasshopper sparrow, a species which is in decline. I didn’t have to say much after that, little bird sold them on the importance of that land.” The grasshopper sparrow is a fairly nondescript, small brown bird with a short tail and a flat head that spends a lot of time hiding and nesting in grasslands that are disappearing because of agriculture and residential development. Since large tracts of grasslands at UNC had sat untouched for decades it was a perfect and rare habitat. Eventually The Nature Conservancy put together the purchase of 84 acres and it became the 2nd largest tract owned by TNC in the state.

Ruth worries that the town council thinks there is too much open space. “We are always fighting the same battle between development and conservation. We believe it’s what our country was made for here. They’d be convinced if they saw a fiscal plan.”

As I leave the couple give me a tour of their garden and send me off with a cucumber and some of their garlic. On my way home I drive past the old Charlestown Nature Conservancy property which is now the Francis C. Carter Preserve and I admire the fruits of their larger gardening efforts.

Grasshopper Sparrow

A Golden Eagle sighting

Ana Flores

“I was probably born here for a reason”, Peter Arnold says philosophically as he looks out through the large windows of the greenhouse room of his old home. “Sandy and I have restored many old houses but this is our last”, he laughs. I can understand why as I take in their spectacular views of farmland, ocean, and salt ponds. The same perseverance and patience it takes to restore and maintain something of historic value Peter has applied towards placing the land we look at under conservation.

The area of Charlestown now known as Arnolda was bought by his grandfather Frank and his brother Tom in 1907. The siblings purchased acreage on either side of Ninigret pond and from the beginning there were two philosophies about the land. “My grandfather had four boys, and his brother had none. Tom was a coffee merchant in New York City and he offered beach front properties to friends hoping they’d retire here. So as you can imagine over the generations the land on either side has evolved in different ways. Our side of the pond is known as East Arnolda, and that’s been my involvement”.

“My family lived in Pelham, New York, and we only missed summering here the two war years of 1943 and 44 because of gas rationing. It was just a piece of heaven for a child. I’d go fishing in the pond for lobster, blue crab, oysters. And it’s still as pristine a pond as you’ll find anywhere with Type A water. In my lifetime I’ve seen cattle grazing on these fields and a working potato farm. The family also owns a 1/4 mile of ocean front. Local men and their oen would go out on the beach throw their net and catch everything you can imagine. That would feed our extended family living here during the summer. My family also bought the cedar swamp across on Rt. 1A which is now owned by the town- to make cedar posts for buildings and fences, and up on Narrow Lane we had a woodlot. We needed that to fuel all of our wood fires. When my grandfather’s four boys started to die off in the 1970’s, all of us grandchildren began to think about the future of this place. By 1975 Sandy and I had bought a piece of land here”.

The vote in the family to conserve was 28 to 1 and it took 13 years diplomacy to arrive at a complete family consensus. “The tipping point ended up being the 1996 Cape North oil spill that happened along Matnuck. As a response to the spill and to prepare for future emergencies DEM wanted to buy up 45 properties along Ninigret and put them under conservation. We happened to have just that- plus we gave them a few more, 52 for $45. That financial transaction quieted the one family member. But we felt the owners were in favor of open spaces. We realized the local level is where the future of this place. By 1975 Sandy and I had bought a piece of land here”.

The farm “Burnside Acres” is what remains of a property originally owned by the Browning Family. The house dates from 1750 and sits on about 20 acres. There is also an historic cemetery abutting the property. The farm is run by my husband John and our two children with the help of young people in the neighborhood. We grow sweet corn and tomatoes as our principal crops along with a variety of assorted vegetables. The produce is sold at our roadside stand “The Farmers’ Wagon” and at the Charlestown Land Trust Farmers Market.

Colonial Corn Pudding

Vicki Jackson from Burnside Acres

This recipe has become a favorite to serve at Christmas with rib roast for our family using our own corn that has been frozen.

3 cups corn thawed and diced
3/4 cup evaporated fat-free milk
2 tbs. whole wheat flour
1/2 tsp. salt
1/8 tsp. white pepper
3 tbs. oyster crackers crushed
3 tbs. cornmeal cooking spray
1 cup shredded sharp cheddar cheese
2 tsp. butter melted
Preheat oven to 350. Combine 1 cup corn, 1/4 cup evaporated milk, and half and half in a blender; process until smooth. Combine remaining 1/2 cup of evaporated milk, salt, pepper, and 3 tbs. crushed oyster crackers in a small bowl. Stir in pureed corn mixture, remaining 2 cups corn , 3 tbs. crackers and cornmeal. Spoon mixture into an 8 square baking dish coated with cooking spray. Sprinkle evenly with cheese. Bake at 350 for 30 minutes or until golden brown. Serve warm. Yield: 8 servings.