

**Farmington Land Trust**  
**Farmington, Connecticut**  
Strategic Plan 2003

September 18, 2003

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#### Foreword

This strategic plan is the outcome of a planning process that began in mid-2001. Its contents are the result of input solicited from Farmington Land Trust (FLT) directors, from members and from the community-at-large through questionnaires and focus groups. Out of this process we emerged with an invigorated sense of our mission and a new set of work objectives.

FLT Strategic Plan 2003 does not represent a radical departure from present practice. Rather it continues to refine our traditional strong suits of land acquisition and stewardship, and it places increased emphasis on education and advocacy, areas of importance but not great activity in FLT's past. These two points were explicitly recommended by the membership and the community alike.

The format of FLT Strategic Plan 2003 is simple. Following a statement of our mission and our operative goals--Acquisition, Stewardship, Education and Advocacy--each of these components is discussed individually. Every section contains the following:

- (1) a goal in the form of a statement describing the long-term vision for that area.
- (2) a current status report of how, and the degree to which, the goal is being met.
- (3) long-range objectives that describe what the FLT wishes to accomplish in the next five years. There may be one or more objectives.
- (4) A list of activities in progress and future initiatives that support each objective. Some initiatives are listed more than once because they contribute to the achievement of multiple objectives.
- (5) The final section describes the structure of the FLT. It focuses on objectives and initiatives to better FLT's delivery of its mission—from governance and personnel issues to improving interaction with our larger community of members, donors, governmental agencies and the general public.

FLT Strategic Plan 2003 is the result of the efforts of many. Dick Noyes, our late executive director, provided significant support to the birth of the process. The FLT board, participating FLT members and many members of the community-at-large provided ideas, large and small, that will guide our efforts for the next five years. We thank them all.

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#### **Who We Are**

The Farmington Land Trust (FLT) is a private, non-profit organization, founded in 1971 with the goal of protecting Farmington's open space. For more than 30 years, the Trust has honored its mission by acquiring and managing open space, promoting education about our natural resources and encouraging our community to get involved in open space preservation.

The Trust now owns or controls nearly 260 acres in over 40 parcels throughout Farmington. Recently, FLT has also worked to promote the town acquisition of several large tracts of land, including the Fisher Farm and substantial acreage on Taine Mountain. In partnership with The Trust for Public Lands and the Town of Farmington, FLT helped secure the Farmington Reservoir, a 100+/- acre parcel of land located on the ridge of Farmington Mountain.

The Land Trust is run by volunteers and supported by over 500 members.

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#### **Our Mission**

The Farmington Land Trust protects open space in perpetuity through acquisition, stewardship, education and advocacy.

We achieve our mission through:

- **Acquisition** of open space through outright gifts, conservation easements and other conservation options.
- **Stewardship** practices that protect and improve biological diversity, wildlife habitat and aesthetics.
- **Education** of the public, government and business community about the importance of open space and our collective role in its protection.
- **Advocacy** at the local and state level for policies and actions that insure the long-term protection of Farmington's natural resources.

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#### **ACQUISITION**

**Goal:** Preserve 40 percent of Farmington as open space through the acquisition of additional land and the influencing of such acquisitions.

**Status:** Farmington's undeveloped land, a finite natural resource, is being lost at an alarming rate. In order to address this concern, FLT has identified the need to accelerate the amount of land set aside over the next five years. Currently 33% of the town's land is protected either by natural character (e.g. flood zones) or by human intervention.

FLT currently protects nearly 260 acres throughout Farmington and Unionville. Presently FLT receives its holdings via donated conservation easements or in the form of outright gifts of land by its owners. Recently, developers have also donated properties to FLT as either easements or gifts, since they are required by the town to set aside as open space a percentage of the land undergoing development.

Such transactions require a large commitment in time and resources from FLT, and FLT is exploring how to streamline these processes as well as other ways of acquiring property.

**Acquisition Objective #1:** Expand the Farmington Land Trust's holdings by 400 additional acres by 2008.

#### **Current Initiatives:**

- Publish a FLT operating manual on its acquisition process.
- Establish conservation easement policies, practices and monitoring guidelines that rigorously protect FLT's stewardship obligation to these sites.
- Adopt the Land Trust Alliance's "Standards and Practices" guidelines.

#### **Future Initiatives:**

- Identify and pursue desired properties by developing an acquisition list and landowner contact schedule.
- Increase developer funded acquisitions.
- Provide access to financial and legal planning and advice for potential donors/sellers.
- Establish a process to fund legal, surveying, appraisal and other expenses associated with gifted land.

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- Establish a Land Acquisition Revolving Fund as a revenue source to cover expenditures associated with land acquisition expenses and to provide financial assistance to fund raising drives for such purchases.

**Acquisition Objective #2:** Encourage and support the town's purchase of an additional 600 acres of open space by 2008.

#### **Current Initiatives:**

- FLT currently holds two seats on the town's Land Acquisition Committee.
- Provide support for town open space bonding referendums through signage, letter campaigns and other methods.

#### **Future Initiatives:**

- Improve relationships with the town's land use commissions, committees and departments that influence protection —Town Planning and Zoning Commission, Land Acquisition Committee, Conservation Commission, Inland and Wetlands Commission, Planning Department and Town Council.
- Develop relationships with the Trust for Public Land, Land Trust Alliance, Farmington River Watershed Association, The Nature Conservancy, Farmington Valley land trusts and others that might help our cause.
- Provide access to financial and legal planning and advice for potential donors/sellers.
- Get town requirement for open space in new residential developments increased to 15 percent.

**Acquisition Objective #3:** Establish alternative methods for protection that go beyond FLT gifting or town purchase of land held as open space.

#### **Current Initiatives:**

- Develop an operating manual for the acquisition process.
- Develop conservation easement policies.
  - Draft a model FLT conservation easement.
  - Draft easement monitoring guidelines.

#### **Future Initiatives:**

- Identify and pursue desired properties.
- Develop partnerships with common goal organizations to support our objectives
- Provide access to financial and legal planning and advice for potential donors/sellers.
- Research alternative and innovative methods of protection.
- Create a fund for FLT's outright purchase of open space

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#### **STEWARDSHIP**

**Goal:** Observe, protect and maintain FLT properties through processes that insure compliance with quality standards.

**Status:** A comprehensive natural resources inventory and property evaluation was conducted in 2001 on each of the FLT parcels. The purpose was to develop a better understanding of the condition and ecological characteristics of each property. The data provides a foundation for prioritizing stewardship practices. The data also describes other factors that could influence stewardship procedures: vehicular access, proximity to surrounding residences and current stewardship practices, for example.

**Stewardship Objective #1:** Establish procedures to prioritize, fund and monitor implementation of 2001 Natural Resource Management Plan

#### **Current Initiatives:**

- Adopt Land Trust Alliance's "Standards and Practices" guidelines.
- Eradicate invasive species on parcels highlighted in the 2001 Land Management Plan.
- Research feasibility of native grassland restoration.
- Develop handicapped trail on the Douglass-Mount Parcel.
- Extend Canal Aqueduct trail across Town and Walker Parcels.
- Develop and implement a stewardship plan to monitor properties.
- Work with neighboring landowners of high-maintenance properties to reduce costs.
- Mark boundaries of conservation easements.
- Finalize baseline reports of Land Trust properties not covered by the 2001 Natural Resource Plan.
- Transfer Zipp retention basin to the Town of Farmington.
- Repair drainage problem on Stedman Parcel.

#### **Future Initiatives:**

- Develop more multi-use trails on accessible properties.
- Establish a procedure for prioritizing improvements for properties in need of maintenance or enhancement.
- Maintain all of the natural resource inventories of the Trust's holdings in a GIS-based software that can interface with the Town's I/T-based land use data.

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#### **EDUCATION**

**Goal:** To educate Farmington residents about the benefits of open space.

**Status:** The Farmington Land Trust has periodically launched education initiatives, with limited success. However, feedback from members and from the community clearly indicates a desire for the FLT to take a more active role in educating the public about open space, our lands and other environmental subjects. FLT's 2002 "Day on the Land," along with other recent education offerings, have been very well received by the public.

**Education Objective #1:** Establish a curriculum of environmental and land-use education offerings with standard delivery methods to insure consistent quality.

#### **Current Initiatives:**

- Educate public on invasive species removal and habitat restoration.
- Coordinate the "Day on the Land."

#### **Future Initiatives:**

- Target environmental and land use education outreach programs and/or publications specifically for homeowners and property management businesses in town.
- Establish educational opportunities and assistance to the residents and municipality in particular on issues relevant to land protection and growth management
- Partner with Farmington Continuing Education, Farmington Historical Society, Unionville Museum, FRWA and garden clubs, among others, for curriculum and program ideas and offerings.
- Recruit teachers and naturalists from FLT membership to contribute time and expertise.

**Education Objective #2:** Provide numerous visual reminders of the FLT and the many benefits of its activities.

#### **Current Initiatives:**

- Publish a periodic newsletter.
- Design and maintain a web page.
- Provide regular news releases concerning FLT activities.
- Install Founders' commemorative painting/plaque at the Town Hall.

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- Coordinate another “Day on the Land.”
- Install interpretive signage at Canal Aqueduct.

#### **Future Initiatives:**

- Create and implement a volunteer program.
- Increase visibility of properties with signage.
- Publish a map of FLT, town and state Blue trails.
- Develop trail booklets with maps and information about the flora and fauna of our properties for children and adults.
- Develop programs on the importance of open space to present to children and adults.

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#### ADVOCACY

**Goal:** Implement a natural resources-based approach to land use throughout the Town of Farmington.

**Status:** Over the last thirty years, FLT has been a consistent voice for open space preservation helping to create a townwide attitude favoring open space acquisition. The FLT's general message of the various benefits of open space has, over the years, resonated with the residents of Farmington and the town's governing bodies, and the success of this message is seen at the polls whenever open space acquisition is put to a public vote. Every land purchase referendum question has passed by an overwhelming margin, and FLT has vigorously supported both general land bonding issues and specific land purchases.

**Advocacy Objective #1:** Influence open space acquisition and land use planning in the Town of Farmington.

#### **Current Initiatives:**

- Currently FLT holds two of the five seats on the Town Land Acquisition Committee, the group that selects land to target acquisition and recommends specific parcels to the Town Council for purchase.
- FLT is actively participating in the creation of the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development, the one document that formalizes the town's land use direction.
- Maintain a strong presence on the Land Acquisition Committee and Comprehensive Plan Steering Committee.

#### **Future Initiatives:**

- Get town requirement for open space in new residential developments increased to 15 percent.
- Develop a network of open space advocates.
- Lobby new members of town land use committees to attend state sponsored training seminars.
- Create strong ties with Conservation Commission, Farmington River Watershed Association (FRWA) and the Farmington Valley Open Space Consortium.
- Pursue open space preservation objectives with Town Council and Town Planning and Zoning Commission.
- Encourage all of the town's land use commissions and committees to meet biannually to specifically discuss land use issues and programs.
- Develop effective lobbying campaign strategies for open space referenda.
- Strengthen partnerships with local "green" organizations.

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- Continue working toward sharing information/experience and activities with Valley Land Trusts and environmental agencies/advocates.
- Work towards the establishment of an Inland Wetlands Commission separate from the town planning and zoning commission.
- Lobby town for village lot protection zoning.

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#### ORGANIZATION

**Goal:** Create an organizational structure that enables FLT to carry out its four-pronged mission.

**Status:** The Farmington Land Trust is run by a board of directors that provides strategic direction, operational decision making and the majority of the person power necessary to execute its initiatives. Until recently, FLT had an executive director to handle day-to-day operations and act as the predominant liaison to the community. Those duties now fall to the FLT office manager and various board members.

**Organization Objective #1:** Establish an organizational design and infrastructure that supports the achievement of FLT's mission.

**Current Initiatives:**

- Affirm the organization's mission and direction through a strategic planning process.

**Future Initiatives:**

- Institute a Board and committee structure based upon the Strategic Plan 2003.

**Human Resources Objective #1:** Maintain a working environment that attracts the best staff and volunteers.

**Current Initiatives:**

- Establish a procedure to create a smooth transition from one executive director to the next.

**Future Initiatives:**

- Review current board structure and meetings schedule.
- Seek new board members with skills needed to meet Land Trust goals.
- Establish personnel review process.
- Develop new board member packet and mentoring program.
- Develop a job description for an executive director.
- Establish a pattern of rotation for board member committee assignments.
- Use "corporators" or other non-board experts on specialized ad-hoc committees.
- Review bylaws and particularly address extending term limits of board members.
- Develop Carey Garage as a multiple land use organization office space to reduce costs, increase visibility and coordinate efforts.

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**Funding Objective #1:** Establish a revenue stream that is diversified and predictable, with realistic opportunities for growth.

**Current Initiative:**

- Establish a more aggressive marketing effort for FLT products.

**Future Initiatives:**

- Review all possible funding sources and develop strategies for pursuing those sources.

**Membership Objective #1:** Establish long-term approach to retain and expand membership.

**Current Initiative:**

- Develop membership opportunities to participate in mission-based initiatives.

**Future Initiative:**

- Determine realistic targets in membership growth.
- Acquire mailing lists from other organizations and identify potential members.
- Coordinate regular mailings to newly identified potential members.
- Establish a major donor list; identify goals and develop a strategy for approaching these people.