2014 CONSERVATION FUND REPORT
November 13, 2014
Submitted by the Charlotte Land Trust

As required by the Conservation Fund Guidelines the Charlotte Land Trust is submitting this annual report on the trends, priorities and strategies for conservation in Town as well as an updated list of potential conservation projects that may require Conservation Fund grants.

## Trends

There are no major shifts in trends from previous years. Projects continue to be a mix of agricultural and natural areas. Larger farm projects usually also include natural areas as part of the conservation mix. The geographic distribution is across all parts of Charlotte. Project size also continues to be a mix of large (usually farms) and smaller (usually natural areas) acreage.

## Priorities

Agricultural projects will continue to be a focus for Conservation Fund projects, consistent with Town Plan goals and Charlotte's longtime commitment to this aspect of our landscape. Large farm projects that not only conserve good farmland but also enhance viable farm operations are a priority. Smaller, non-dairy, diversified farms have also become a priority as a way to broaden Charlotte's agricultural base.

Natural area projects have become an equally important priority for conservation. Projects that connect conserved parcels into a larger swath of habitat are particularly important. The Conservation Fund is key for natural area projects because these are less likely to receive VHCB funding. There are some other sources of conservation funding for natural areas through the Agency of Natural Resources and the USDA Wetland Reserve Program, however, these grants are usually much smaller than VHCB grants. Town Conservation Fund money tends to be a higher percentage of the overall funding for natural area projects.

Scenic resources are important and many conservation projects have some aspect of scenic resource protection. Scenic resources are rarely the sole focus of conservation projects in Charlotte. The viewshed of Mount Philo has been a focus for several years and will continue to be so.

Public access, trail easements and trail connectivity are often considered during agriculture and natural areas project development. The potential impact of trails on the protection of the principal resource is considered and is part of the determination of appropriateness for each project.

**Strategies**

Conservation easements, whether purchased or donated, are the strongest means of protecting agricultural and natural area resources. Ecological and agricultural assessments are done to insure that the land to be conserved has resources significant enough to warrant an easement.

CLT will continue to assess whether land protection goals for a property can be adequately met through other means, such as a PRD open space agreement under the subdivision regulations. In those instances, we will not undertake a conservation project, saving Conservation Fund money for more critical uses.

CLT continues to work very closely with statewide conservation groups, such as the Vermont Land Trust and the Nature Conservancy, on larger projects (usually those over 50 acres). These partnerships provide technical expertise and long-term stewardship for more complex projects.

CLT usually is the sole organization on projects less than 50 acres, or where the resources are more locally significant. This mix of partnership and CLT-only projects insures that the range of project types, sizes and geographic distribution throughout Town are consistent with the Charlotte Town Plan.

**Potential Project List**

Projects are listed without landowner names to protect confidentiality. The projects listed are at varying levels of development but all have had at least an initial discussion with landowners. Project timelines, especially for projects in the early stages of development, are very difficult to estimate.

| Acreage | Resource Type | Estimated Conservation Fund $ |
|---|---|---|
| 70 | NA/Ag | $200,000 |
| 100 | Ag/Sc | $150,000 |
| 100 | PA/NA/Ag | $130,000 |
| 45 | NA | $100,000 |
| 50 | NA/PA | $100,000 |
| 74* | Ag/Sc | $ 50,000 |

* Bidinger, which has been approved but not yet paid

Ag: Agriculture
Sc: Scenic
NA: Natural Area
PA: Public Access