

East Kingston Open Space: Protect It or Lose It

2023 Open Space Bond Warrant Article

26 December 2022



East Kingston Conservation Commission

Dennis Quintal, Chair

Adam Barss, Vicki J. Brown, Julie Ostopchuk, Gordon Powers

WHY?

“In 20-30 years in southern NH,
anything *not* conserved
will be developed.”

- Local conservationist



In NH, 20% of the most productive soil for growing food has been converted to development -- and 68% of those soils remain vulnerable to development.

Source: A NH Legislative Study Committee report on the status of land conservation

WHY?

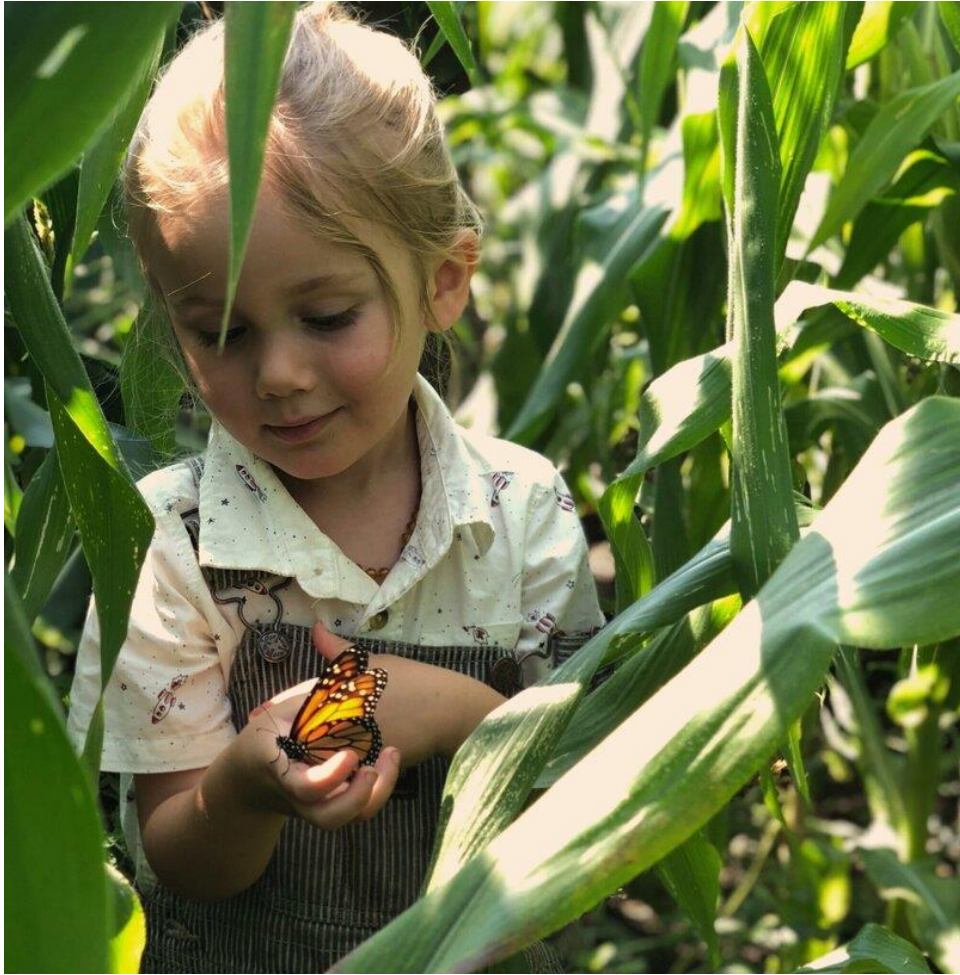
- Between 1929-2009, NH lost 90% of its farmland.
- From 2001-2016, NH lost 11,600 acres of agricultural land.
- If the trend continues, we will lose another 35,600 acres of farmland by 2040.

*Source: US Dept of Ag Census data, Natural Resource Inventory data from NRCS and American Farmland Trust



We Live Here Because of What We Value





Choosing an Abundant Future

Conservation is Part of the
Culture of East Kingston

A \$4M Bond in 2003:

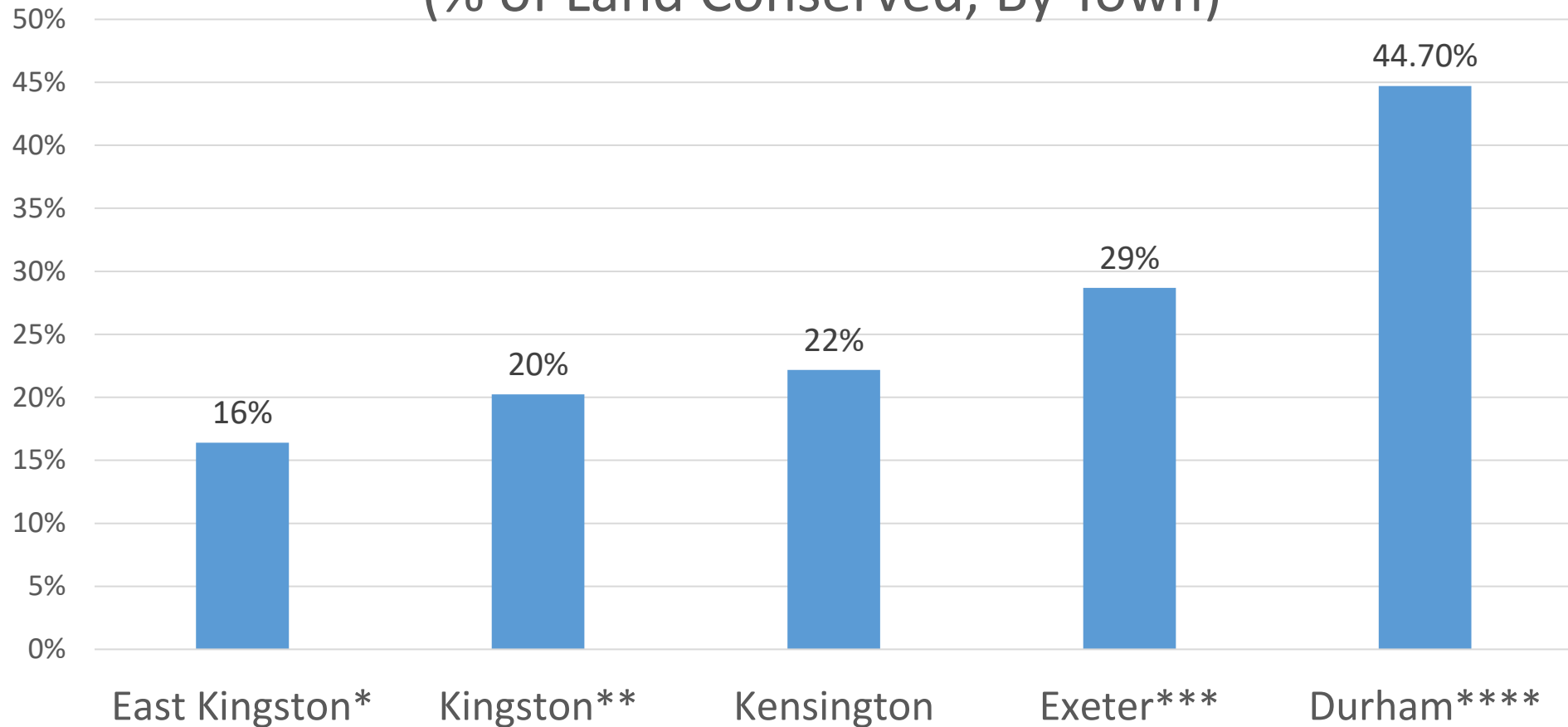
Conservation Easement	No. of Conserved Acres
Bodwell	129.54
Smith	105.67
Blunt Revocable Trusts	47.05
Marcella	42.15
Crosby	36.3
Finch	34.6
Clark	28.84
Bott	28.7
Walker (Monahan Farm)	28.13
O'Shea	27.55
Furnald Trust	23.05
Poelaert	22.44
Bodwell	19.54
Nupp	10.94
Kemp	9.13
Smith	5.93
TOTAL	599.56

as of 4-18-22

- Helped conserve 600 acres in town
- Made 128 potential house lots unavailable for development.
- Reduced the potential number of new students in our school system by 96 – decreasing student/teacher ratios and saving tax dollars

WHY?

Many NH Towns Are Actively Conserving Land (% of Land Conserved, By Town)



* Source: Avitar & NHFG Wildlife Action Plan, June 2020. Excludes town land (fee simple ownership, 43 acres).

** Conserved # excludes all water bodies. From <https://www.kingstonnh.org/conservation-commission/files/conserved-and-protected-properties>

*** From Kristen Murphy, Exeter Resources Planner, on 11/9/22

**** As of 2015. Includes land permanently protected, owned by the University, or with another kind of development restriction.

WHY?

Land Usage East Kingston	Number of Acres	% of Total
Conserved	1,046	16%
Residential , Commerical, Industrial*	1,071	17%
Not Developable**	1,607	25%
Remaining Developable Land	2,657	42%
Total Acres	6,381	100%

Sources:

* 2015 data from Rockingham Planning Commission

** NHFG Wildlife Action Plan, June 2020 (wetland, open water, swamp, peatland and floodplain forest designation)

- More than two-fifths (42%!) of East Kingston is developable
- More than one-half of developable land (1,388 acres) is considered highest priority for permanent land protection*

* NH Coastal Plan (1,121 acres) and Merrimack River Watershed Conservation Plan (267 acres)

WHY?

Benefits of Open Space

1. Preserve rural character
2. Protect streams and water quality
3. Recharge groundwater
4. Maintain scenic vistas
5. Protect prime agricultural land and forestry
6. Protect state-and regionally-significant wildlife habitat & wildlife corridors
7. Improve air quality
8. Protect property values
9. Provide recreational areas
10. Keep municipal services cost low



HOW?

Preserve open space via conservation easements

- Landowner retains ownership
- Land cannot be developed and remains in current use
- Land remains on tax rolls
- Cost of community services remains low
- Future tax rate is kept down and taxes increase less

Approve a \$4M bond (warrant article March 2023)

- Ensures opportunities are not missed when open space is available
- Enables town to leverage grant money from federal, state and other sources
- Many towns, including Epping and Brentwood, recently passed similar bond issues
- **Only as needed!**

WHEN?

Time to act is NOW

More than 2,600 acres (42%+) are developable and not protected

Our goal is to permanently set aside another 600 acres, to achieve our goal of 25% total land conserved in town

On March 14, 2023, we will ask voters to approve a bond issue to preserve some of this remaining open land

Please vote for the bond

Talk to your neighbors and friends

How will this affect my tax bill?

- Minimal impact
- The cost to the average taxpayer* would be \$30 for the first year of a typical \$250,000 bond.
- Each year following would be less since the Interest is calculated on the remaining balance

* Assuming an assessed property value of \$500,000

IMPACT ON TAX RATE (5.57%)

NHMB B2023

AMOUNT	YEAR 1 (\$ PER \$1,000)	YEAR 25 (\$ PER \$1,000)
\$250,000	0.06	0.03
\$500,000	0.12	0.05
\$1,000,000	0.24	0.11
\$2,000,000	0.48	0.21
\$3,000,000	0.73	0.32
\$4,000,000	0.97	0.42

Development Has Costs

1. New development requires more community services.
 - School costs, roads, police and fire protection, trash pickup
2. Many studies have shown that in the long run, **it costs less to preserve land than it does to develop it.***
3. Simply put, the tax revenue generated by new housing developments does not cover the increased costs of schools and town services for those new residents.

* Does Open Space Pay? UNH Extension

Who will decide what land to conserve?

- Once the bond issue passes, the conservation commission would make recommendations on specific parcels of land, based on:
 - Proximity to other conserved land
 - Presence of significant wildlife habitat and/or wildlife corridors (via NH Wildlife Action Plan)
 - Identified priority agricultural resources (from NH Coastal Wetlands Conservation Plan)
- Public hearings would give residents the opportunity to voice their opinion and concerns.
- The Select Board would have final approval of any purchase.

We Have an Important Choice to Make



Are we going to sit back and watch this critical resource of land disappear, eroding our food security, rural communities, and environment?

Or will we join together now to conserve land and secure an abundant future?

Please vote “YES” on the
open space bond warrant
on March 14, 2023.

Letter of Support from SELT





December 21, 2022

Town of East Kingston
24 Depot Road
East Kingston, NH 03827

RE: Support for Conservation Commission's Bond Warrant at 2023 Town Meeting

Dear East Kingston residents:

On behalf of the Southeast Land Trust of New Hampshire (SELT), please accept this letter of support for the Conservation Commission's proposed \$4M bond warrant article at the upcoming 2023 Town Meeting. Since 1980, SELT has worked to conserve and steward land for the benefit of people and nature in New Hampshire and serves all of Rockingham and Strafford counties. Our mission is to protect and sustain the significant lands in our communities for clean water, outdoor recreation, fresh food, wildlife, and healthy forests. Toward achieving our mission, SELT has partnered with the East Kingston Conservation Commission to conserve community landmarks like Monahan Farm.

According to a US Forest Service Report in 2010, the Town of East Kingston straddles two of the most threatened watersheds in the nation: the Merrimack River watershed and the Salmon Falls River watershed. At present, only 17% (1,062 acres) of the land in East Kingston is conserved (source: NH GRANIT database). The *2021 NH Coastal Watershed Conservation Plan* and the *2014 Merrimack River Watershed Conservation Plan* identify several key conservation priorities in East Kingston including lands that protect water quality and supply, important wildlife habitat, climate resiliency, agricultural resources, recreational opportunities, and landscape connectivity. Of the remaining 5,321 acres not conserved in East Kingston, the NH Coastal Plan identifies an additional 1,121 acres (21% of the Town) as the highest priority targets for land protection, while the Merrimack Plan identifies an additional 267 acres (5% of the Town) as highest priority for permanent protection. In total, these 1,388 acres are critical to the long-term integrity of natural systems and to the environmental infrastructure that benefits human communities (e.g., drinking water supply, flood storage, etc.) long into the future.

These plans make it clear that East Kingston has significant land worthy of permanent conservation. But how to make that happen? Passage of the warrant article allows the community to be ready when a willing landowner is ready to voluntarily conserve their land. Then, the Town's Conservation Commission can partner with SELT and other conservation organizations to leverage private, state, and federal funding to conserve the critical conservation lands in your community. In short, the proposed bond will be an important investment for the long-term protection of natural resources and quality of life for people in East Kingston. SELT looks forward to working with the Town to conserve these special places.

Sincerely,

Brian Hart
Executive Director, SELT



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