



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,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read "Brian Hart", with a long horizontal flourish extending to the right.

Brian Hart

Executive Director, SELT