

# TOWN FORUM

approved by Town Meeting. Although this operating balance has fluctuated from a high of about \$1,700 to about \$1,200 now, it represents our savings over a time span of more than 30 years and the balance is currently about the same as 10 years ago.

We have used these funds for extra things, such as:

- peat moss, fertilizer, and trees planted at the Town Hall and in a former Monticello Drive dump site
- contracted labor cost for the Prime Wetlands report
- purchasing a CD of GIS maps of Andover that will be used in updating the Town's Master Plan
- photographic documentation according to State conservation laws
- revised editions of the NHACC manual of our State-mandated responsibilities

We have overspent our appropriation by \$28 in 2002, by \$143 in 2003, and by \$278 in 2004. These expenses have been paid from our savings in the regular operating budget account, which has enabled us to keep our town appropriation more or less constant over the years.

For 2005, we anticipate higher NHACC dues and purchasing revised NHACC handbooks for Commission members at \$15 each. We feel justified in asking that our regular operating appropriation be increased from \$300 to \$500 in 2005.

#### Conservation Land Acquisition Fund

The second part of the Commission's budget has to do with land conservation. In 1992, Andover voters approved the creation of a Conservation Land Acquisition Fund with an appropriation of \$10,000 for the purpose of acquiring conservation land or conservation easements.

The argument behind this "land conservation" approach for our community is similar to the more familiar "energy conservation" approach that we use for our homes. We invest our money for energy conservation (land conservation) today by purchasing energy-efficient windows and insulation so that in the long run we can control or even reduce our heating costs (tax burden) in the future. The added benefit is that the comfort and quality of life in our home is improved, just as the quality of life in our rural community is retained and improved.

The Fund has grown, through interest, to over \$15,600. The Commission had hoped to add to this amount each year, but we did not because of other pressing town needs, such as additions on the school and town buildings.

Originally, we hoped the Fund, if added to annually, might be enough to hold a particularly desirable land parcel off the market until the voters could approve a purchase or conservation easement on it at the next Town Meeting.

Land prices being what they are today, this money won't go far!

#### Current Use Change Tax

Another way of supplementing the Fund, provided for by State legislation, allows towns to use money collected from the Current Use Change Tax (CUCT), which is assessed on landowners who voluntarily remove their land from Current Use, for conservation purposes according to State laws. Consistent with the action Andover voters took in 1992 to create the initial Fund, the voters approved dedicating 50% of the CUCT to the Fund.

The Commission intends to present a warrant article in 2005 to raise this percentage to 100%. Currently, many New Hampshire towns are dedicating 100% of their CUCT funds for conservation. Although the majority of these towns are in the fastest growing southern part of the state, some of these towns are in our area or north of us, such as Belmont, Boscawen, Bow, Canterbury, Conway, Cornish, Gilmanston, Meredith, Orford, Pembroke, Sugar Hill, Sutton, Tamworth, Tuftonboro, Walpole, and Warner. In addition, the cities of Claremont, Concord, Laconia, and Lebanon are dedicating 100% of their CUCT to conservation.

The Commission has received the following amounts from the 50% Current Use Change Tax: \$4,534 in 2000, \$1,801 in 2001, \$6,973 in 2002, and \$4,493 in 2003. Has the Commission spent any of this CUCT money? Yes, with prior notification of intent and approval of the Selectmen.

All CUCT expenditures have been used to facilitate or enable conservation easements to become a reality or to protect existing easements. Creating an easement donation costs a landowner thousands of dollars in appraisal fees, surveying costs, legal costs, and monitoring fees. Several townspeople have appealed to the Commission through the Ausbon Sargent Land Preservation Trust to assist with these costs.

These expenses have amounted to \$1,100 (surveying) in 2000, \$1,580 (surveying) and \$1,500 (monitoring) for two separate easements in 2001, and \$8,420 this year for monitoring the logging on the Newman easement held by the Town. Both income and outgo of CUCT money are impossible to predict because both are driven by *voluntary* actions of landowners.

#### Master Plan Update

Andover is in the process of revising its Master Plan, a document that forms the legal basis and direction for regulatory decisions of the Planning Board and Zoning Board of Adjustment. Part of this document is a conservation, or undeveloped open space, plan. The Commission would like to be proactive in preserving open space, for it retains the rural character of the town and, in the long run, saves the taxpayers money.

Growth is inevitable, but to plan for

growth is smart, tax-wise. For example, allowing uncontrolled growth around Bradley Lake could compromise the town's existing water supply and might require the development of a whole new water source and distribution system. The Commission would like to encourage landowners to consider putting some of their land in conservation easements, whether for sentimental reasons or for a Federal tax benefit. The landowner continues to pay local property taxes on land in the easement, generally at the Current Use rate they were paying before the easement.

In order to successfully implement and benefit from a land conservation program, Andover needs to be prepared. Timing and readily available conservation funding are both critical factors. The Conservation Land Acquisition Fund is intended, by State law, to be a non-lapsing trust fund, a "capital reserve" fund, if you will, specifically earmarked for future land conservation purposes. The Fund is used, and will continue to be used, as soon as action is appropriate. All such actions by the Commission are subject to prior review and approval by the Board of Selectmen. Any land or easement purchases would be subject to approval by Andover voters at Town Meeting.

What use is undeveloped land to the townspeople? Development of land almost always raises the tax burden because of increased school needs, road maintenance, waste disposal, police protection, and so on. If the landowner has a timber cut, the Town receives revenue from the timber tax. Hiking, cross-country skiing, snowmobiling, hunting, and fishing access are enjoyed by many townspeople of all ages. Rural views, watching wildlife, and small town living with clean air and unpolluted waters are cherished by many. Overall, the quality of life in a rural environment has drawn many of us to Andover and we've decided to put down our roots and call this place home.

But land development pressure is moving north in our direction. With Andover's "Temporary Residential Growth Limitation Ordinance" scheduled to expire in 2007, it seems reasonable for Andover to increase the Fund and to be ready to take action to protect itself from the impact of growth and development. Therefore, the Commission recommends that Andover voters commit 100% of the CUCT to the Fund.

The Commission sincerely hopes that the voters will see the benefits of the land conservation approach to protecting our town from excessive property taxes and, as they have consistently done in the past, will continue to support conservation for our community.

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