

# Stonington Residents Form Land Trust

New group hopes to acquire, preserve land

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**Stonington** — A group of residents has created a nonprofit land trust to acquire and preserve open space in town.

The Stonington Land Trust Inc. is patterned after other successful land trusts in the area, such as the Westerly and Lyme land trusts.

Its mission “is to preserve the town's natural resources including its farms, water resources, marshlands, swamps woodlands, beaches, plant and animal life as well as the unique historic and scenic character of Stonington.”

The land trust's president, Jim Smith, said he and the 10 members of the board of directors will work to identify available parcels of land and try to save them as open space. While there is a large amount of undeveloped land in town, little of it is formally preserved as open space and could be developed at any time.

“We're trying to be proactive instead of sitting back and saying it's awful that a certain piece of land is being developed,” Smith said.

He said the group got its start a few months ago when it heard that the Board of Finance did not want the town to borrow money to buy open space, a plan suggested by the Open Space Committee.

“So I thought, 'Why don't we try to do it in the private sector,'" or with a type of joint public/private partnership, he said.

Smith said the group will work with the Open Space Committee and is beginning to identify desirable parcels that might be available. When the group decides on a parcel it wants to acquire, Smith said it would then have a fund drive to raise the money needed to buy it.

But he said the group may not need to buy all the land it wants. In some cases, he said a landowner may want to give the land to the group or agree to a conservation easement so it cannot be developed. In other cases, the owner may agree to sell it at a discounted price.

“Each piece will be different,” Smith said.

He pointed out that there would also be tax incentives for people who give land to the group or sell it at below-market price.

While the group has not made any decisions, Smith said he would like to look at preserving large tracts of land and those that adjoin existing open space areas. Smith said the group will also be launching a membership drive.■