

August 8, 2023

The **Town of Bedford Open Space Acquisition Committee** hereby makes a recommendation to the Town Board to acquire 3 lots of land with 24.27 acres to combine with the adjacent 56 acres purchased by the town in 2020. This would be a significant expansion of what is known as “Buxton Gorge Preserve” which would include all the property along Buxton Road between the Bedford Hills Correctional Facility property, DOT property along I-684, and a Bedford Hills residential area on Rome Ave.

This acquisition, if approved, would permanently protect a total of 80 acres for passive recreation and water quality and wildlife habitat protection. The proposed acquisition price is \$3,000,000 to be paid from the Open Space fund. In an effort to keep a balance in the fund for other projects, it is proposed that \$2,000,000 be paid at closing, \$500,000 in early 2024 and the remainder in early 2025 or sooner as funds are available. Grant applications may be submitted to offset town costs and some borrowing may be necessary. Details need to be worked out in a contract to be approved by the Town Board at a future date.

The Town’s Open Space Committee, the Westchester Land Trust, the Conservation Board and other conservancy and environmental advocates have placed the acquisition of Buxton Gorge Preserve as among the highest priority for preservation and protection in Bedford. For 22 years, the Town of Bedford and Lakeover Development have been working together to preserve this critical natural habitat. This will become the largest open space acquisition in town history.

Over 20 years ago a comprehensive inventory and assessment of the parcel recognized the property’s unique natural resource which represents a declining and increasingly rare natural community with its wildlife habitats and being ideally suited to function as a recreational and educational resource for the residents of Bedford and the surrounding region. It provides a broad array of benefits, including flood mitigation, passive recreation, climate cooling, wildlife habitat, drinking water filtration with the Broad Brook which runs through it, being a tributary of the Croton Reservoir protecting the drinking water supply for New York City and the Town (as a backup source for the Consolidated Water District). The property sits over an aquifer protection zone. A copy of Natural inventory and assessment is attached here

The current 56 acre Buxton Gorge Preserve is open to the public for passive recreational enjoyment consistent with preserving and protecting the sensitive natural resources and environmental features. We are fortunate to be partnering with the Bedford Riding Lanes Association (BRLA) with its well-maintained trail system which run through the parcel. With the permission of the NYS Department of Corrections and Community Supervision, BRLA has maintained a riders only trail with limited access that runs from Harris Road across correctional facility property (well outside the fence to the prison itself). The trail leads into the Buxton Gorge Preserve. The proposed acquisition would provide the opportunity for a small parking area and trailhead to be installed and additional space for conservation as well as passive recreation for the public to enjoy.

The Open Space Acquisition Committee respectfully requests that the Town Board approve the Supervisor work with the Town Attorney to take initial steps to obtain an appraisal and negotiate a contract with the property owner for purchase of this property. The contract would be presented to the Town Board for approval once drafted, but it is important to know that the Town Board is inclined to move forward with this purchase once this work is completed.

Respectfully submitted,

George Bianco
Co-Chair Bedford Open Space Acquisition Committee