

Gorham Farmland, Open Space and
Resource Conservation Plan

**Property Owners Survey
Report**

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prepared by
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INTRODUCTION AND METHODOLOGY

In September 2003, the Gorham Farmland, Open Space and Natural Resource Conservation Committee surveyed Town of Gorham property owners. The survey was conducted for two purposes: one, to gauge public perception about the need for preservation efforts in the Town of Gorham and two, to determine the level of support for various measures available to the Town Board for preserving farmland, open space and natural resources.

One of the questions asked property owners to identify the location of land that, in their opinion, should be given priority for preservation. The survey questionnaire also contained three demographic questions. These questions were designed to provide a profile of the survey respondents. The demographic questions were cross tabulated with the other questions to determine if the perceptions about the need for preservation efforts and support for various preservation measures varied among different segments of Gorham property owners.

Survey packets containing a questionnaire, a comment sheet, a postage-paid, business reply envelope, and a transmittal letter from the Town Supervisor explaining the reason for the survey, were mailed to all Town of Gorham property owners on September 9, 2003. The business reply envelope was addressed to Stuart I. Brown Associates, the Town's consultant responsible for tabulating the survey results. The names and mailing addresses of property owners were obtained from Town real property assessment records. Survey respondents were not asked to provide their names and addresses on their responses in order to maintain anonymity.

A total of 664 responses were received out of a total mailing of 1,984. This represents a response rate of 33.5%. In addition, 191 comment sheets containing written comments were returned and were transcribed by Lynne McCoy, a member of the Gorham Farmland, Open Space and Natural Resource Conservation Committee. Copies of the survey questionnaire and transmittal letter are attached as Appendix A to this report.

The following narration has been prepared to summarize the key findings of the survey. For ease of interpretation, the overall results of the survey are presented in graphical form in Appendix B. A graphical presentation of the results of the cross-tabulations are presented in Appendix C. The three demographic variables used in the cross-tabulation include: residency, amount of land owned and involvement with agriculture. Residency was divided into three categories: (1) year round resident, (2) seasonal resident, and (3) non-resident. Land ownership was divided into four categories based on the amount of land owned: (1) up to five acres, (2) 5.1 to 20 acres, (3) 20.1 acres to 100 acres, and (4) more than 100 acres. Involvement in agriculture was divided into two categories: (1) persons involved with agriculture and related businesses, i.e., agricultural support businesses, and (2) persons not involved with agriculture.

SURVEY RESULTS

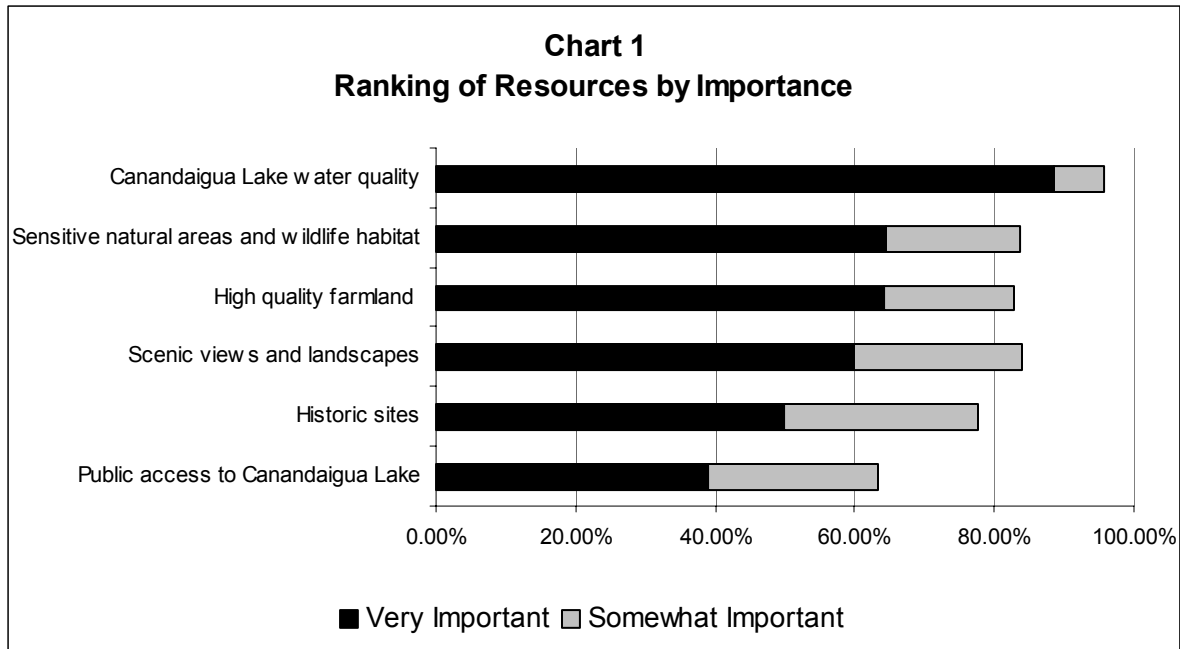
Importance of Protecting and Preserving Resources

Question No. 1 was formulated to measure Gorham property owners' perceptions about the importance of preserving and protecting various resources that contribute to the rural, agricultural character of the Town. The resources include:

- High-quality farmland
- Sensitive natural resources and wildlife habitat
- Water quality of Canandaigua Lake
- Public access to Canandaigua Lake
- Scenic views and beautiful landscape
- Historic sites

Chart 1 summarizes the responses to Question No. 1. Chart 1 ranks the importance of protecting these resources based on the responses given by individuals. As Chart 1 illustrates, nearly 90% of the respondents indicated they think it is very important to protect the water quality of Canandaigua Lake. Nearly two-thirds indicated it is very important to preserve and protect high quality farmland as well as sensitive natural areas and wildlife habitat, while 60% indicated protecting scenic views and beautiful landscapes is very important.

Less than half of the respondents expressed the opinion that it is very important to preserve and protect historic sites or public access to Canandaigua Lake. However, when the responses of very important and somewhat important are combined, it is apparent that a majority of respondents would support protecting and preserving historic sites and access to Canandaigua Lake to some degree.



The cross tabulations for Question No. 1 revealed that the responses of the various demographic group generally mirrored each other. There were, however, a few exceptions as follows:

- Seasonal residents were less inclined to view the preservation of public access to Canandaigua Lake as important
- Landowners with more than 100 acres were less inclined to view the preservation and protection of sensitive areas and wildlife habitat or the preservation of scenic views and landscapes as important
- Respondents involved in agriculture and related businesses were less inclined to view the protection and preservation of environmentally sensitive areas and wildlife habitat or the protection of scenic views and landscapes as important, and
- Respondents involved in agriculture and related businesses were more inclined to view the preservation of farmland as important

Support for Measures to Preserve Farmland, Open Space and Natural Resources

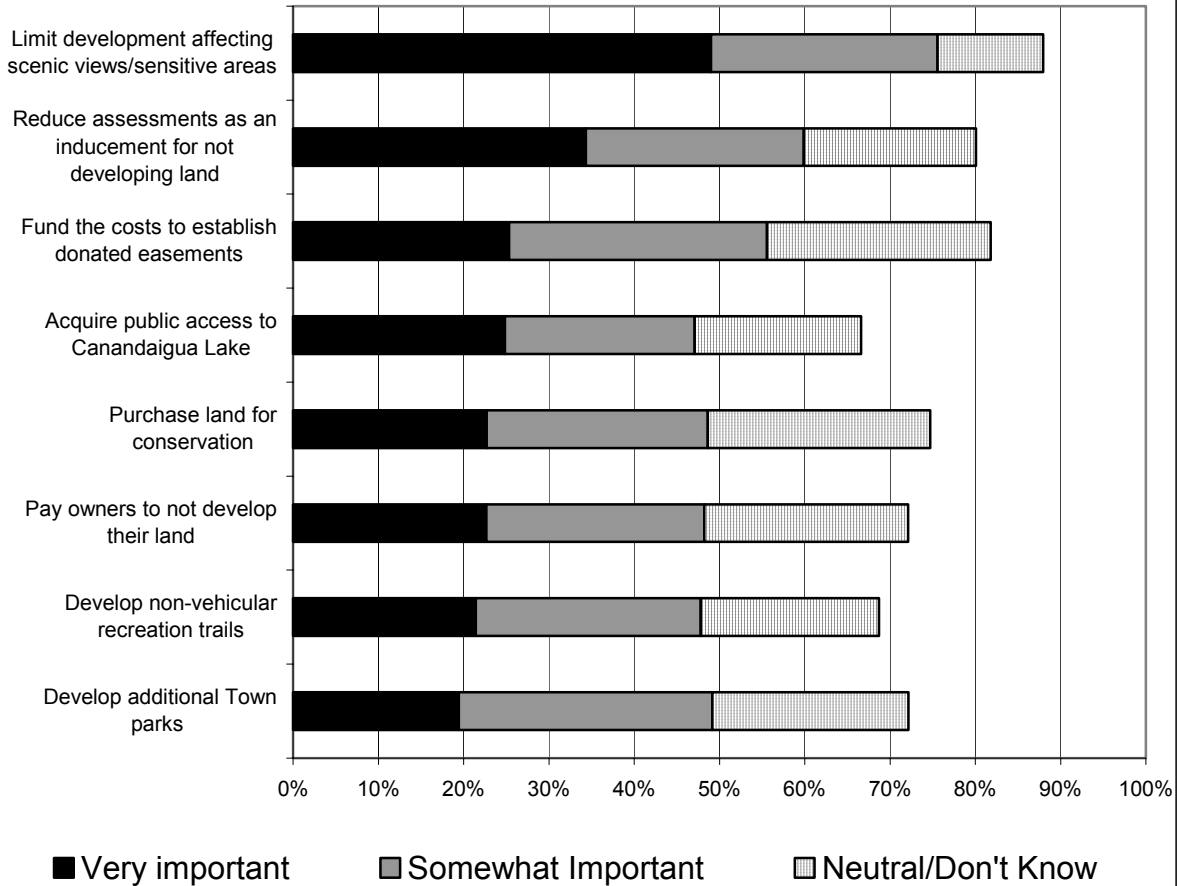
The second question was designed to gauge the support of property owners for various measures available to the Town to preserve farmland, open space and natural resources as well as to gauge support for the development of additional recreational resources. The measures identified included the following:

- Provide property assessment reductions to landowners who agree to leave their land undeveloped
- Purchase land for conservation
- Pay land owners to not develop their land or to not sell it for development

- Encourage private donations of conservation easements by funding the costs associated with establishing the easements
- Modify Town regulations to limit development affecting scenic views and environmentally sensitive areas
- Acquire public access to Canandaigua Lake
- Develop additional parks or recreational areas
- Develop trails for non-vehicular recreational use

Chart 2 on the following page summarizes the responses to Question No. 2. The identified measures have been ranked from highest to lowest based on the responses given by individuals. Information regarding “neutral / don’t know” responses is also included as the proportion of such responses is significant.

Chart 2
Ranking of Resources by Importance



Nearly one-half of the respondents identified modifying Town regulations to limit development that would affect scenic views and environmentally sensitive areas as very important. The combination of responses of very important and somewhat important demonstrate that approximately three-quarters of respondents support this measure to some degree. This is not the case, however, for the remainder of the preservation and protection measures identified. It is significant to note that the percentage of respondents who selected the “neutral / don’t know” option for the remainder of the measures ranges from 19.51% to 26.90%.

The reason so many property owners indicated they are neutral or undecided is not readily apparent. One possible explanation is that survey respondents are, in fact, neutral and do not support or oppose such measures. Another possible explanation is that respondents are not familiar with the measures identified and need more information before being able to make up their minds. Regardless of the reason, the foregoing results do not provide a clear-cut

indication of public sentiment with regard to the preservation and protection measures identified.

The cross-tabulations revealed the following differences in responses among the various demographic segments of landowners:

- Seasonal residents were less inclined to support:
 - reducing property assessments as an inducement for property owners to not develop their land, or
 - measures that would increase public access to Canandaigua Lake
- Property owners with than 100 acres were more inclined to oppose:
 - the purchase of land for conservation
 - funding the cost of establishing donated conservation easements
 - modifying Town regulations to limit development that would affect scenic views and environmentally sensitive areas
 - developing additional Town Park and recreational areas, and
 - developing trails for non-vehicular recreational trails.
- Property owners with five acres or less were more inclined to support providing property assessment reductions to property owners who agree to not develop their land.
- Respondents not involved in agriculture were less inclined to support providing reductions in property assessments to property owners who agree to not develop their land.
- Respondents not involved in agriculture were more inclined to support:
 - purchasing land for conservation, and
 - modifying Town regulation to limit development that would affect scenic views and sensitive environmental areas.

Willingness to Provide Financial Support for Preservation and Protection Measures

The final substantive question asked landowners about their willingness to provide financial support for the Town to implement the preservation and protection measures that respondents had identified as very important in Question No. 2. Approximately 28% of the respondents indicated that they would not be willing to contribute financially to the cost of undertaking preservation and protection measures. Nearly one-third (31.7%) indicated they would support the Town setting aside a portion of its budget surplus each year to use for preservation and protection measures. Slightly more than 28% indicated they would be willing to contribute various amounts annually for such efforts, and slightly less than 12% indicated that they were undecided about whether they would or would not be willing to provide financial support.