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THE *Avon* LAND TRUST
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please check one:

- \$100 Oak Membership
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Please make checks payable to *The Avon Land Trust*.
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THE *Avon* LAND TRUST

Future generations may not remember our names, but they will certainly be glad that we were here.

A NON-PROFIT ORGANIZATION

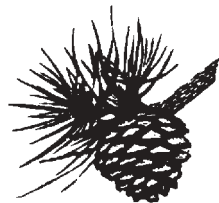
Spring 2003

WELCOME TO THE AVON LAND TRUST

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

Walking a trail in winter is a unique experience, different from any other season: the dog (Moe) finds another deer bed, snow pawed down to leaves, the sides melted into an impression of the deer's backbone. Certain trees, here and there, have had their bark chewed; a sign of one of the toughest winters in years. Animal tracks abound—turkey, deer, coyote, rabbit—evidence that we're not alone in this wilderness. A large buck (with hoof prints nearly as broad as my hand) passed this way recently, his tread going deep into the drifts. And here, long S-shaped trails in the powder run parallel to each other—a mystery. I trace them to their source and discover that they begin in turkey tracks. This must be where the birds took flight and dragged their feet along the snow, trying to get some lift in the subzero air. Even the silence has a sound of its own, a singing, like music. The Garvin Trail looks deserted, but the snow tells a different story.

Tom Morganti,
President ALT



THE *Avon* LAND TRUST

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A SPRING WALK

THE AVON LAND TRUST, THE AVON HISTORICAL SOCIETY AND THE FRIENDS OF THE AVON FREE PUBLIC LIBRARY WILL BE CO-SPONSORING A WALK ON THE GARVIN TRAIL ON LOWER AVON MOUNTAIN SUNDAY APRIL 27, 2003 AT 2:00 p.m., RAIN OR SHINE.

[details on page 7]

Open Space Funding Completely Eliminated in Governor's Budget

Now is the Time to Contact the Governor, Lieutenant Governor and Your Legislators to Prevent Open Space Programs from Being Permanently Abolished.

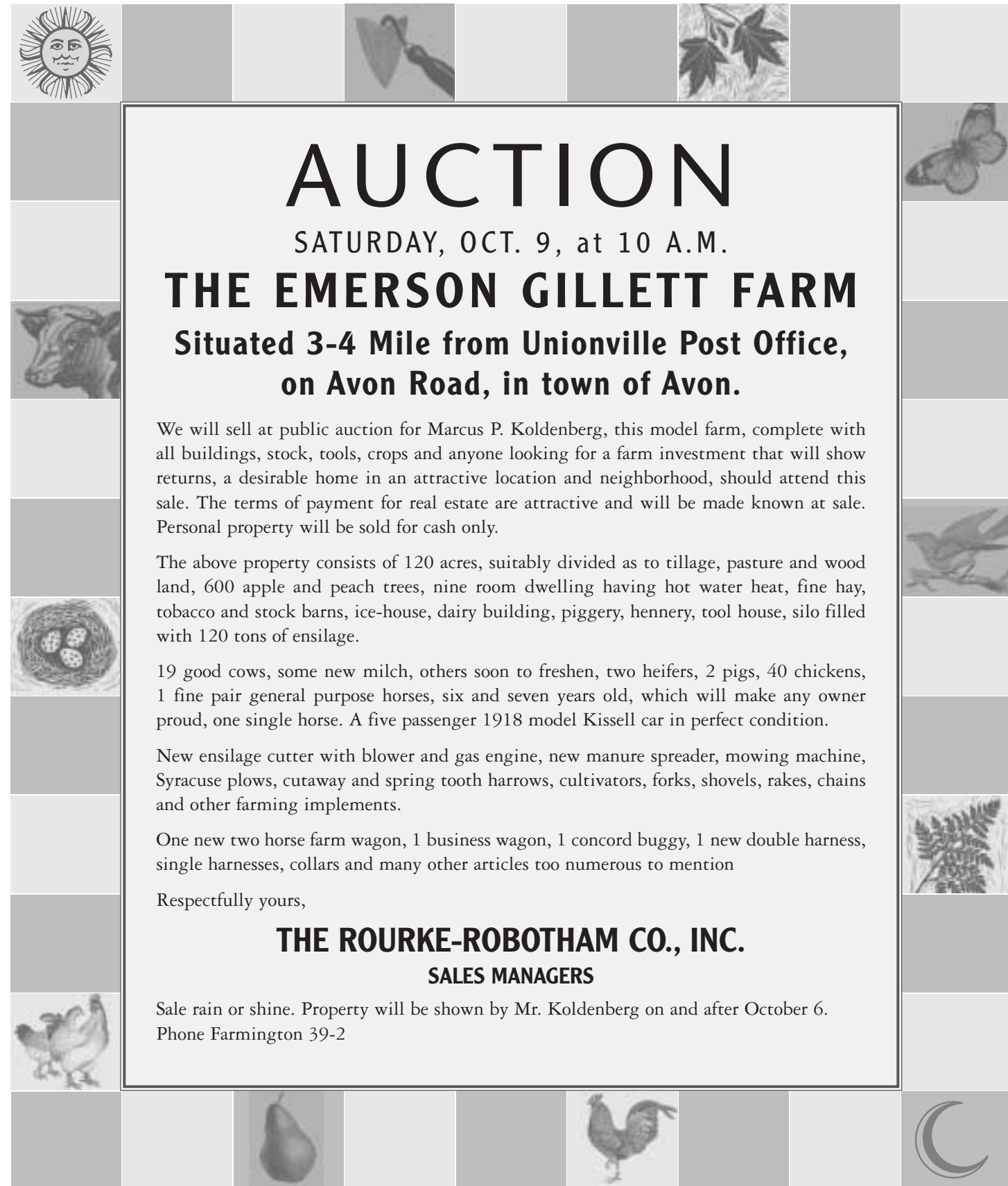
In his proposed budget for the next two years Governor Rowland eliminated funding for the Recreation and Natural Heritage Trust program, the Open Space Matching Grants program and the farmland Purchase of Development Rights program. This was done in the context of announcing "a moratorium on discretionary bond projects..."

During the past few months most citizens have realized that all programs would need to be significantly reduced. Complete elimination of all open space funding, however, is poor policy on a number of levels. Unlike delays in road or building projects, a delay in an open space project often means the project will never be accomplished. Critical parcels of land will be sold for permanent private use or development. The absolute nature of the Governor's proposal threatens to derail open space efforts for many years to come.

Since the earliest growth of cities, our predecessors have wisely recognized that open space is important to the physical, mental and emotional health of the people. For many towns it may already be too late to set aside space for an Elizabeth Park, a Central Park,

[continued on page 7]

In large bold letters a full-page notice quoted here was published in The Farmington Valley Herald of September 30, 1920:



AUCTION

SATURDAY, OCT. 9, at 10 A.M.

THE EMERSON GILLETT FARM

**Situated 3-4 Mile from Unionville Post Office,
on Avon Road, in town of Avon.**

We will sell at public auction for Marcus P. Koldenberg, this model farm, complete with all buildings, stock, tools, crops and anyone looking for a farm investment that will show returns, a desirable home in an attractive location and neighborhood, should attend this sale. The terms of payment for real estate are attractive and will be made known at sale. Personal property will be sold for cash only.

The above property consists of 120 acres, suitably divided as to tillage, pasture and wood land, 600 apple and peach trees, nine room dwelling having hot water heat, fine hay, tobacco and stock barns, ice-house, dairy building, piggery, hennery, tool house, silo filled with 120 tons of ensilage.

19 good cows, some new milch, others soon to freshen, two heifers, 2 pigs, 40 chickens, 1 fine pair general purpose horses, six and seven years old, which will make any owner proud, one single horse. A five passenger 1918 model Kissell car in perfect condition.

New ensilage cutter with blower and gas engine, new manure spreader, mowing machine, Syracuse plows, cutaway and spring tooth harrows, cultivators, forks, shovels, rakes, chains and other farming implements.

One new two horse farm wagon, 1 business wagon, 1 concord buggy, 1 new double harness, single harnesses, collars and many other articles too numerous to mention

Respectfully yours,

THE ROURKE-ROBOTHAM CO., INC.
SALES MANAGERS

Sale rain or shine. Property will be shown by Mr. Koldenberg on and after October 6.
Phone Farmington 39-2

People ^{OF} Avon

THE MAX SMITH FAMILY & FARM
by Ruth Maher

Between 1920 and 1922 deeds show a few changes in ownership, but these 120 acres became Avon's beautiful Smith Farm at 841 West Avon Road, where we still buy our favorite varieties of apples. It was known as "Pine Grove" because of an impressive stand of tall pines on the south side of West Avon Road. It was probably around the time when World War I ended that Leon W. Smith came to Connecticut from Richford, Vermont. According to a 1975 article in The Farmington Valley Herald, Leon worked as manager of Belden Farm in Rockville, then Longview Farm just east of the present Westfarms Mall. Later he became manager of Sunset Farm for a Dr. Smith (unrelated). Sunset Farm was off Farmington Avenue in West Hartford. When other family members joined Leon, they lived on South Main Street, across the road from what is now the site of Rockledge Country Club. Leon's wife was Bertha Maude Mc Kenney Smith. She preferred to be called "Maude." (The name "Bertha" seems to have declined in popularity after the big WW I German cannon was nicknamed "Big Bertha.")

In 1922 Leon was urged by his good friend Joseph Thompson, father of Avon's Oliver Thompson, to buy the farm on West Avon Road. The deed was signed on October 25, 1922. It described sections of the property as partly in Avon and partly in Farmington. In several areas

both pieces of the property (70 acres and 50 acres) were described as "bounded on the North" (or South or East or West) "on the Highway" or "on an old highway... Said premises" were declared "subject to two (2) mortgages (1) to the Farmington Land Bank for the principal sum of six thousand (6000) Dollars, and (2) to Michael

Brogard for the sum of Two Thousand (2000) Dollars, upon which Seventeen Hundred (1700) Dollars with interest from September 20, 1922 remains unpaid." The Smith copy of the deed bears handwritten notations of receipt of mortgage payments, usually in the amount of \$100 each, made on February 9 and August 9 of each year, with small extra amounts now and then to cover interest due. These notations are dated through 1935.

After the deed was signed in 1922, Leon and Maude moved to West Avon Road. At this time the six Smith children were Conway 24, Bernice 21, George

19, Evaline 18, Max 14, and Florence 11. A large family album clearly indicates that members of this close-knit family were attuned to the world well beyond the borders of their farm. The album contains a great many pictures and news clippings about family, friends and historical or current events. The family kept in close touch with friends and relatives in Richford as well as Avon. They enjoyed music, and three of the children played instruments.



Maude Smith

When Leon bought some cows in West Hartford, George and Max were assigned the task of guiding the herd along New Britain Avenue (Route 6) to the present Westfarms Mall area, then to Route 4, on to Unionville and finally up West Avon Road to the farm. It was a long trek for both man and beast, a fact readily acknowledged by anyone who has ever herded cows.

Leon and Maude ordered a new wood-burning cast iron kitchen stove, "Home Comfort, Model 1864." The cooking surface was entirely black, but the rest of the stove had, and still has, a gleaming white porcelain enamel finish. It still keeps the kitchen toasty warm with heat to spare. A year or so before Max died at the age of 93, I went to the farm to pick up some apples, and I stepped into the kitchen to chat briefly with him. It was a pleasant sunny day, but there was a roaring fire in the stove. The temperature in the kitchen must have been about 160 degrees. Max looked



A very young Leon Smith, second from left, with parents and siblings.

very thin and frail as he stood close to the grand old stove, still comfortably warmed by his old friend. I felt as if I were being cooked.

New Englanders were well aware that the most plentiful products of most farms were rocks. As the last glacier had moved over the land, leveling some mountains and creating others, and changing the course of the Farmington River, it had moved many huge boulders and crushed others. In 1922, thousands of years after the glacier had reached the sea and melted, farmers were still hauling away rocks to make their soil tillable. Resourceful people built miles of stone walls but still had more rocks than they wanted. Bob Smith, son of Conway, recalls that there were huge piles of rocks throughout the pine grove. Tons of rocks from the Smith farm were used in constructing the old Methodist Church on School Street in Unionville. Some years later a beautiful piece of the

Smith acreage was sold for the new Methodist Church on West Avon Road.

The job most dreaded by both George and Max was the annual drive of the spring calves to their summer pasture, which was on the east side of Old Farms Road, north of Old Farms School. Behaving as youngsters of most species would on a springtime excursion, the frisky calves were curious about every new sight they encountered as they rambled through unfamiliar scenery. Max and George devoted most of their time and sweat to rounding up the more rambunctious strays, who were enjoying every minute. By summer's end the growing calves would be a little more settled, a little less juvenile, a little easier to herd back to the farm, but there would be another crop next year.

Max and George were well suited for working the farm together. According to Russell Muller, son of Evaline Smith Muller, "Max disliked working with cows, and George had little interest in growing apples." Richard Thompson, son of Florence Smith Thompson, recalled that his grandfather Leon had a "pair of high-strung Percherons and a pair of gentle Belgians." Among his favorite memories are those of riding the Belgians while they were in harness.

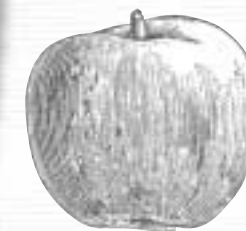
George was a skilled woodsman. When he was about to chop down a big tree he would place his hat in a carefully chosen spot and promise that the tree trunk would crush his hat as it fell exactly where he intended. Nobody remembered a time when the hat escaped unscathed. Max enrolled in courses at the University of Massachusetts to learn all he could about the scientific and practical aspects of growing apples. At the time of year when our favorite varieties of apples were ripe I used to go to Max's orchard and pick up a bushel or two of "drops." One day I asked Max, "Who goes through the orchard taking just one bite from an apple and leaving the rest uneaten on the ground?"



George Smith



Max Smith



The old Methodist Church in Unionville. Photo supplied by William M. Vibert, formerly of Unionville, through courtesy of Bill Goralski of Avon.

"Oh that's done by the deer," Max said. "They take a bite of an apple, and when they've finished that mouthful, they just pick another from the tree." As I gathered my apples, I came upon a tree that made me take a second look, and a third, and a few more. On one side the branches were loaded with big bright red fruit. On the other side they were heavy with huge Golden Delicious. I knew it was a fine example of successful grafting, but it certainly was an unexpected sight. I later learned that Max had grown as many as five grafts on a single tree. What a stunning mixed bouquet that tree must have been when all those varieties were ripening!

Max was also known for his mechanical ability. He devised farm implements that greatly increased efficiency in the handling of both apples and hay. He also created "doodle-bugs" from old Model A Fords. Max was generally a shy, quiet man, not very talkative. One evening, however, Caroline LaMonica, Avon Town Clerk, stopped to notarize a paper for him. He had known her father, John Battistoni, many years before, and he spent two hours sharing his memories with her.

The part of the farm north of West Avon Road, including the house, is now owned by Lou and Fran Witkowski. Fran is a loyal friend who worked with Max for fifteen years. Max often expressed his determination that the land he loved would always be farmland, never to be

developed. With the help of family and friends, Fran will do everything possible to carry out his wishes. She knows firsthand the history of the farm and family. As a result of her work with Max, she is knowledgeable and experienced in the fine points of growing apples: planting, fertilizing, cultivating, pruning, spraying and safe handling of chemicals, picking, sorting and storing. Fran and Lou and Lucienne are proficient in the use and maintenance of tractors and all other farm equipment. They have also planted red and black raspberries and blueberries. In season, customers can find the most delectable fruits and vegetables for sale at the Smith Farm stand, including more than 30 varieties of apples. The family also produces more than 30 single or blended flavors of home-made jam and jelly. I know from personal experience that these are beautiful to see and delicious to eat. The stand, identified by a big red apple sign, is in the apple shed at the end of the driveway beside the Smith house. The roadside sign shows "Smith Farm" painted on a big red apple.



The Smith family home, built in 1807, is a story in itself. Among previous owners of the property, or sections of it, the records name Gillett, Carpentier, Zeno Forbes and Michael Brogard. Neighboring landowners included such familiar Avon names as Thompson, Hayes, Hubbard, Luther Eddy, Peter Murry, Burt Recor and Luther Parsons. In 1981 artist Thomas Eugene Dutton created beautifully detailed line drawings of northwest and southeast views of the farm. He presented them as a gift to his friend, Max Smith. On each drawing he noted that the farm is listed on the National Register of Historic Places.

The house is gradually being repaired and restored with emphasis on preserving its original character and style. In some of the back rooms

Smith family – left to right
back row: George, Max, Conway.
front row: Evaline, Bernice, Florence.

Smith family home, West Avon Road



where work has begun, inner walls have exposed narrow laths with mortar packed tightly between them. Around the place where a big icebox was built in, charcoal was used as insulation, and where a wall has been removed charcoal dust has been much in evidence. One door frame is incredibly crooked, but it seems not to have diminished the structural integrity of the building, perhaps because most of the other doors and windows are also crooked to some degree. The house has stood securely for almost 200 years, so there must be some kind of overall balance.

Slide bolts are common on inside doors. In two of the first-floor rooms there are identical white wooden mantelpieces with scroll-like supports that appear to be wrought

iron painted white. If there were fireplaces below these mantelpieces, they have been covered over by solid walls. Above one of the mantelpieces there is evidence that a stovepipe once entered the wall at that spot. Perhaps a pot-bellied stove once warmed that room.

Thanks to the gracious hospitality of the Witkowski family, I was privileged to sit at the dining room table with

Fran, Richard Thompson and Russell Muller. All very generously shared their personal collections of treasured family pictures and other memorabilia. They recounted tales of family history and unforgettable childhood experiences at the farm. Allie, the cat, refused to be left out of this wonderful meeting. She spread herself out in the center of the table and claimed her share of attention. Despite being put down on the floor a few times, Allie persisted until finally we all just stroked her gently and acknowledged her queenship. She knew her place, and we finally accepted ours. Surrounded by walls that had witnessed so many family celebrations, and perhaps an occasional wake in the tradition of long ago, it was easy to feel like a part of the Smith family.

In at least two locations there are what appear to have been pass-through openings between rooms. Each is neatly framed by a precise arrangement of blocks of wood. The openings were about 18" by 24" but have been completely filled in or covered. It is not uncommon to find evidence of such openings in very old homes. They must have served a useful purpose, since our New England forebears wasted little time or money on things that were not functional.

Gathering information for this article has led to visits with many friendly people who still live by traditional farmers' precepts of neighborliness and helping one another. If Fran and Lou ever need to build a new barn, I hope the entire community will be on hand for an old-fashioned "barn raising." Maybe we could even get the doors and windows straight.

It takes a whole family, and more, to operate the Smith farm. Fran, Lou and their daughters, Lucienne and Nicole, are essential to its success. Whenever needed, Gil Thibodeau has been an indispensable help for more than

25 years. Other loyal friends who appear almost automatically when help is needed are Doug Thompson, Doug Williams and Max's nephew, Bob Smith.

Max was a farmer who loved and understood the land. He appreciated its beauty. Throughout his life he worked hard to enrich the soil and reap its harvest. He was a life member of the Avon Land Trust, to which he donated almost five acres of his pine grove area on the south side of West Avon Road. The Max Smith farm is a familiar part of Avon's history. It will be a vital part of Avon's future as well.

OPEN SPACE [continued from page 1]

A SPRING WALK

[continued from page 1]

This walk is suitable for all ages, including children, and should last one to two hours. There will be a "Look and See" scavenger hunt to highlight the special natural features of the landscape including the Garvin Bench which is dedicated to the memory of Bob and Sally Garvin. The Garvin Trail is located on property owned by the Avon Land Trust above the Hunter's Run condominiums.

Directions: Rt. 44 East to Avon Old Farms Inn. Left (north) on Nod Rd. Right on Nod Way. Right on Gatewood Rd in Hunter's Run. The walk will leave the gravel access behind the second set of mailboxes on Gatewood Rd at 2:00PM. No preregistration is required. For more information call Jennifer Aldag (ALT) at 673-3005 or Nora Howard (AHS) at 678-1043.

a Forest Park or even smaller, scattered parks. Casinos and roller-coaster amusement parks are not substitutes for the quiet beauty of natural open space.

We've seen open space funding stalled before. We've also seen what can be accomplished IF enough people care enough to contact their elected officials and urge them to include at least SOME funding for open space. Preservation of open space is a critical component of preserving our quality of life.

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