

A Proposal to Establish an ARPA-Chester Land Trust Fund

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Proposal Information

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Description of project:

Background: The Chester Land Trust (CLT) is a volunteer non-profit 501(C)(3) organization established in 1987. Its mission is for “Protecting irreplaceable forests, farmlands, wetlands and wildlife for the purpose of enjoying our natural resources, open spaces and unique environment for present and future generations.” The CLT currently manages approximately 100 acres on 17 property preserves. A list of these properties can be found on the CLT website (<http://www.chesterlandtrust.org>).

Two of the most frequently visited CLT properties are the Carini Preserve (30 Water Street) and the Constance Baker Motley Preserve (100 Cedar Lake Road). Although these properties have vastly different topography, they share the characteristic of being threatened by invasive plant species. In addition, these and other CLT properties have dead trees and other maintenance needs that, due to their size or need for heavy equipment, require hiring contractors in order for work to be safely performed. For these reasons, the CLT is proposing use of American Rescue Plan – State and Local Fiscal Recovery Funds (ARPA-SLFRF) in order to address its most critical needs. The current proposal is to utilize an allocation of \$25,000 from the Town’s ARPA funds to establish a Chester Land Trust Fund (ARPA-CLTF).

The primary focus of the ARPA-CLTF program would be on management of invasive plant species and removal of hazardous trees, particularly at the Carini and Constance Baker Motley Preserves. Similar efforts would be initiated at other CLT properties as needed. In addition, funds would be utilized 1) to pay fees for contractors in order to remove large dead trees or perform necessary maintenance tasks that CLT volunteers are unable to perform on their own and 2) to purchase eco-friendly power equipment (for example, rechargeable trimmers and saws) that CLT volunteers could use to undertake “lighter” projects. A summary of planned activities is provided below.

Carini Preserve Knotweed Control Program (\$10,000): The Carini Preserve is a 6.5-acre property at the confluence of the Great Brook and the Pataconk Brook. Visitors can park at the property or the adjacent Town owned Water Street parking lot. Individuals enter the preserve and walk along the brook, relax, picnic at the property’s gazebo or go fishing. **Unfortunately, the property currently has a serious infestation with a highly invasive plant called Japanese knotweed. The knotweed invasion is apparent on the banks of the brook, which poses a significant threat to downstream locations because of the ease of its spread.**

Japanese knotweed can grow from 3-15 feet tall, has an extensive continuously growing horizontal underground stem system (rhizomes) and has characteristics similar to bamboo. The presence of a Japanese knotweed problem on the Carini property has been a known for many years and a challenge for the CLT to manage on its own; it has increased in severity despite efforts of the CLT to control it. For this reason, **the CLT believes an intensive, professionally managed interventional program is not only justified but required to avoid a Japanese knotweed invasion that is more severe and widespread.**

Based on published information, a combination of root excavation, above ground cutting, plant drying and carefully controlled disposal of dead material has the greatest chance of success in reducing knotweed spread. Although glyphosate-based weedkillers are known to be effective for Japanese knotweed eradication, the proximity to the Carini Preserve to brooks likely precludes their use.

It will probably take at least 3 years to undertake a professionally managed knotweed mitigation program at a cost of approximately \$10,000. This cost estimate was considered appropriate based on review by the company Invasive Plant Solutions, which is one of the few companies located in Connecticut that has extensive experience with knotweed mitigation. **Conducting the program at the Carini Preserve presents an educational opportunity for Chester residents and visitors to the Preserve. This has great potential value since homeowners are also experiencing problems due to Japanese knotweed invasion.**

Constance Baker Motley Preserve Garden Restoration Project (\$7,500): The CLT purchased the former property of Judge Constance Baker Motley in 2016. It was selected as a historic site for the CT Freedom Trail, a state designation to celebrate extraordinary individuals whose lives expanded the circle of freedom and opportunity for all Americans.

Following purchase of the property, CLT volunteers cleared the land space near the street to create a parking area with a picnic table for the public to enjoy. **There is a large garden area that still requires extensive rehabilitation including removal of invasive plant species. Although volunteers will continue to work on the property, professional assistance will greatly improve this treasured CLT property.**

Fortunately, the degree of difficulty in eradicating invasive species from the garden is substantially less when compared to the magnitude of the Japanese knotweed problem at the Carini Preserve. With the proper tools, maintenance of the garden and adjacent property can be carried out by CLT volunteers once a professionally managed rehabilitation plan is completed.

Equipment Needs and Contracted Services Support (\$7,500): Although CLT volunteers can cut down trees and perform many smaller maintenance tasks, there are properties that have dead trees or tracts of land that require periodic mowing that are too large for volunteers to handle. An example of the latter was the recent need to clear an 8-acre parcel of land on the Elise Piquet Preserve (28 Wig Hill Road). A CLT volunteer recently spent 9 hours clearing brush from the property using rented equipment, which was a herculean effort. **The CLT is aware of several large, dead trees on its preserves that will require removal for safety reasons over the next few coming years. For these reasons, this proposal includes a request for \$5,000 in order to pay contractors, when needed, to perform work on CLT properties.**

The CLT does not currently own any equipment – it “borrows” equipment owned by CLT members or volunteers to perform routine maintenance projects. Most of this equipment (weedwackers, leaf blowers, chain saws, etc.) is gas powered and not particularly eco-friendly. For this reason, purchase of rechargeable battery- operated power equipment by the CLT for use in routine maintenance projects is proposed at an estimated cost of \$2,500. The CLT will be responsible for maintenance and any repairs of this equipment.

ARPA funds requested:

The proposal is for allocation of \$25,000 in ARPA funds in order to establish the ARPA-CLTF. Since the CLT is an eligible non-profit based on ARPA-State and Local Fiscal Recovery Act (ARPA-SLFRF) guidelines, the project could fall into the negative economic impacts of COVID-19 eligible

use category. Alternatively, it could fall into the government services eligible use category since our Town government provides funding for recreational activities.

The CLT will monitor expenses and follow relevant reporting guidelines. It is projected that costs associated with the program will be incurred over a period of 3 years and include 1) \$10,000 for the Carini Reserve project 2) \$7,500 for the Motley Preserve project and 3) \$7,500 for costs associated with payment for contracted services (\$5,000) and equipment purchases (\$2,500).

No recurring costs to the Town will occur following completion of these projects, which would be completed by December 31, 2026 (the last day of eligible spending under ARPA-SLFRF rules).

Who would most benefit from the project if approved:

The COVID-19 pandemic exposed the need for preservation of open spaces and the value of outdoor activity. Since the Carini and Motley Preserves are open to the public, all Chester residents as well as town visitors are potential beneficiaries of the ARPA-CLTF program.

Positive impact of project to the Chester Community

The 2019-2029 Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD) document indicated that efforts to enhance our village area and our outdoor recreational facilities were high priorities by respondents to a long-range planning survey. ARPA-CLTF related activities are entirely within the scope of stated goals for the future of our town.