



## Farmland Protection and Open Space Grant Program

2024

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**Background:** The Saratoga County Farmland Protection and Open Space Preservation grant program was established in 2003 by the County Board of Supervisors to aid farmers in meeting the required local match to the New York State Farmland Protection Implementation Grant Program (FPIG) which enables the purchase of development rights (PDR) on eligible farmland. The program has been expanded to provide funding for lands containing natural areas, wildlife habitats, natural parkland, preserves, and other important open spaces within Saratoga County.

For fiscal year 2024, the Saratoga County Board of Supervisors allocated \$400,000 to the Farmland Protection and Open Space Grant Program to provide matching funds for the FPIG program and in addition to acquire farmland or open space lands whose preservation is deemed to be of significant public benefit. The County Board of Supervisors and the Trails and Open Space Committee encourage all municipalities within Saratoga County to consider applying for project funding.

Please contact the County Planning Staff with any questions or for assistance with an application at 518-884-4705.

**Eligibility:** All Saratoga County municipalities, not-for-profit land trusts, and conservation groups are eligible to apply for this program. All applications must provide a resolution of support by the municipality in which the project is located or a letter of intent signed by the chief elected official on the municipality's letterhead. Eligible projects include conservation easements, trail easements, and fee title land acquisitions. Transactions acquired through full donation, purchase by full compensation, or bargain sale (partial donation / partial compensation) are eligible for this funding. Transactional costs (surveys, title searches, etc.) that are part of an overall project likely to result in the permanent protection of farmland or open space within 12 months are also eligible.

Eligible open space projects may include lands that offer a unique recreation opportunity for a community such as natural parkland, preserve, nature trail, bikeway or a project that provides a trail connection or access to a waterway or waterbody. The Saratoga County Green Infrastructure Plan provides a comprehensive overview of unique open space resources eligible for County funding and which may receive a high project ranking during the application review process.

Lands identified in local comprehensive plans or in an open space inventory, a municipal Farmland Protection Plan, or the New York State Open Space Plan are also eligible.

Grants for farmland protection and open space acquisition are contingent on the applicant's demonstration of the commitment of matching funds from Federal, State, and/or local funding programs and/or private contributions. Private contributions may be in the form of a "bargain sale" or donation.

**Funding Levels:**

Farmland protection projects are eligible for up to 90% of the project's total cost, with a maximum single year grant award of \$400,000.

Open Space acquisition projects are eligible for up to 90% of the project's total cost, with a maximum single year grant award of \$200,000.

Farmland and Open Space projects that involve a full donation of the value of the land or easement are eligible for up to 100% of the project's total transactional costs, with a maximum grant award of \$50,000.

**Eligible Costs:**

Grant funds can be used by the applicant towards transaction costs associated with the purchase of development rights or the acquisition of open space including title search, title insurance, appraisal, survey, environmental or ecological assessments, project management, preparation of baseline documentation for a property, and any recording, closing or legal fees incurred. Eligible costs may be incurred up to 12 months prior to submission of an application and up until the time of closing.

Stewardship fees or costs associated with stewardship for the project are not eligible for funding under this program but may be included in the project budget as eligible local share match (See below.).

County payments shall be made directly to Saratoga County Municipalities which will, in turn, convey the County funds to the applicant entity.

**Eligible Local Share:**

The following expenses may be used as the required local match to grant monies received:

- Local funds expended within 12 months prior to submission of the application and up until the time of closing
- Stewardship fees related to the proposed project
- Local funds utilized for the purchase of development rights or a fee interest in additional parcels of land if the applicant has demonstrated a clear linkage between the parcel and the proposed project

## **Project Ranking Criteria:**

Proposed projects will be evaluated based on the following criteria adopted by the Open Space and Trails Committee (Ranked from 1 to 5, 1 being the lowest, and 5 being the highest ranking):

1. Agricultural Importance:
  - a. Soil quality
  - b. Economic viability of farming operation
  - c. Protection of natural resources
  - d. Inclusion in a County Agricultural District
  - e. Proximity to a critical mass of productive farmland
  
2. Resource Protection:
  - a. Proximity to a protected waterbody, waterway, or aquifer
  - b. Proximity to a wildlife habitat or corridor
  - c. Proximity to a significant wetlands complex
  - d. Provides protection of a scenic viewshed
  - e. Proximity to other conserved lands
  - f. Provision of public access to a significant resource
  - g. Proximity to National, State, County, Municipal, or private park or forest lands
  
3. Development Pressure:
  - a. Importance of the project to the rural character of the municipality
  - b. Proximity to expanding residential growth
  - c. Proximity to public infrastructure
  
4. Local Support:
  - a. Designation of the proposed project area as an important community resource
  - b. Inclusion of the proposed project area in the New York State Open Space Plan
  - c. Inclusion of the proposed project area in the Saratoga County Green Infrastructure Plan
  - d. Inclusion in a municipal or county farmland, open space, or trail system plan
  - e. Project provides public access or passive recreation
  - f. Inclusion in any municipal comprehensive plan or land use plan
  - g. Matching funding sources confirmed as evidenced by a letter from those providing the matching funds
  
5. Timeline:
  - a. The applicant shall provide a reasonable timeline and documentation of landowner commitment to expediently complete the transaction. Once an award has been made the County will provide the awardee with a list of submission requirements needed to receive grant funds. At a minimum, the timeline should reflect benchmarks for:
    - i. All due diligence steps leading to a closing.
    - ii. Within six months of a county-municipality contract for a grant award, a binding contract between applicant and landowner must be signed and submitted to the County Planning Dept.

- iii. Within 24 months of a county-municipality contract for a grant award, the transaction documentation for reimbursement must be submitted to the County Planning Dept.
  - iv. Prior to the release of grant funds, if full or partial compensation is being provided, the project applicant shall submit an appraisal of the property certifying the value of the development rights to be purchased with grant funds or the value of the land to be purchased in fee. Successful applicants will also be required to submit copies of all conservation easements and/or deeds and title search of title insurance commitment prepared in conjunction with the awarded project. An environmental audit may be required if the proposed property's environmental integrity has the possibility of being compromised through a previous use or uses in the vicinity.
  - v. Closing must take place within 30 days of the receipt of County funds by the applicant entity. Subject to extenuating circumstances, such as other funding being used as a match, extensions may be requested; extensions will be granted at the Planning Dept.'s discretion.
- b. Failure to meet any of the above timeline requirements may result in cancellation of the grant award at the discretion of the County Trails and Open Space Committee.
- 6. Expertise: Applicant's experience, capacity, professional expertise, and track record for successful conservation transactions and land stewardship.
  - 7. Other: Applicant may provide an additional narrative regarding the proposed project to assist the Trails and Open Space Committee in understanding the project's importance to the surrounding landscape and community.

## **Application submission requirements:**

### **Project Cover Sheet:**

- Title of proposed project
- Project type: farmland or open space protection
- Land Acquisition Type: Fee Title OR Conservation Easement
- Transaction Type: Donation, Bargain Sale, or Full Compensation
- Location of proposed project
- Tax map number, acreage, and landowner name
- Project contact and sponsoring organization address, telephone number and email address

### **Project Summary-Brief proposal description:**

- Description of the property and its current use
- Property's local and regional importance as an agricultural or open space resource
- Description of development pressure
- Proposed project's compliance with local plans such as comprehensive plan, green infrastructure plan, or farmland protection plan
- Proposed type and level of public access, if any

### **Timeline:**

- Realistic timeline for completing the proposed project, with benchmarks for all due diligence steps

### **Entity Credentials:**

- Description of the applicant entity's capacity, expertise and track record related to successful land conservation projects and ongoing stewardship of conserved lands

### **Required Project Maps and Supporting Documentation:**

- Location map showing street names and important landmarks
- Aerial photo with tax map overlay
- Soils map showing prime farmland soils and statewide significant soils and acreages
- For Open Space applications, notable environmental features warranting protection, including locations of connecting trails and associated amenities
- Resolution or Letter of Endorsement from the Supervisor of the municipality in which the project is located.

*Note: For assistance with the preparation of project maps, please call the Saratoga County Planning Department at 518-844-4705.*

**Project Budget:**

- Total estimated cost of Proposed Project
- Amount and sources of other outside funding sources
- Amount of County Grant funds being requested
- Estimated Cost per acre (if application is successful an appraisal will be required)
- Survey Cost
- Appraisal Cost
- Baseline mapping and documentation
- Title search
- Title Insurance
- Phase 1 Environmental Assessment
- Ecological Assessment and/or Management Plan
- Legal Fees (applicant's, not landowner's)
- Recording fees
- Project Management
- Administrative Costs
- Stewardship/Monitoring Costs

**Letters of Support:** In addition to the resolution of support or letter of intent from the municipality, additional letters of support from local elected officials or other stakeholders may be submitted for consideration.

**Submission:** Applications must be submitted to the Saratoga County Planning Department, 50 West High Street, Ballston Spa, NY by **March 29, 2024**. No submissions will be considered after the closing date.

Following the close of the application period, applications shall be reviewed and prioritized by the County's Trails and Open Space Committee. Upon completion of its review, the Trails and Open Space Committee will vote on the applications and forward its recommendations to the Saratoga County Board of Supervisors Law and Finance Committee. Grant awards shall be awarded by resolution of the Board of Supervisors. Announcement of awards is expected in the spring of 2024.



**Saratoga County Farmland and Open Space Grant Program  
Application Coversheet  
2024**

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**Applicant Information:**

Municipality/Land Trust: \_\_\_\_\_

Name of Primary Project Contact: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone/Email: \_\_\_\_\_

**Landowner Information:**

Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Address: \_\_\_\_\_

Phone Number: \_\_\_\_\_

**Project Description:**

Project Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Street Address/Location of Project: \_\_\_\_\_

Tax Map Numbers: \_\_\_\_\_

Current Use of the Property: \_\_\_\_\_

Project's proximity to other conserved lands: \_\_\_\_\_

**Budget Summary:**

Total Project Cost: \_\_\_\_\_

Total County Funding Requested: \_\_\_\_\_

Outside Funding Expected: \_\_\_\_\_

**Project Summary-Brief proposal description:**

Description of the property and its current use.

Property's local and regional importance as an agricultural or open space resource.

Description of development pressure.

Project alignment with local plans such as comprehensive plan, green infrastructure plan, or farmland protection plan, with NYS Open Space Plan, or other adopted plans. Explain.

Evidence of local support for project.

Project timeline, with benchmarks, and evidence of landowner commitment.

Applicant's experience, capacity, expertise, and track record for conservation transactions and stewardship of conserved lands.



**Project Budget:**

Fill in all cost estimates applicable to your project.									
				Total Cost Estimate	County Grant Request	Landowner	Applicant	Other Source	Total Local Source Match
Land/Easement Value									
Survey									
Appraisal									
Baseline Mapping/Documentation									
Title Search									
Title Insurance									
Phase 1 Environmental Site Assessment									
Ecological Assessment / Management Plan									
Legal Fees (applicant's)									
Recording Fees									
Project Management									
Administration									
Stewardship Fund Investment									
Other: _____									
			<b>TOTALS</b>						
		Acres: _____							
		Cost per Acre: <span style="color: green;">▼</span>							

**Required Project Maps:**

- Location map showing street names and important landmarks
- Aerial photo with tax map overlay
- Soils Map showing prime farmland soils and statewide significant soils and acreages
- For Open Space applications, locations of connecting trails and associated amenities

**Submit one (1) electronic copy and three (3) hard copies of the grant application and materials to:**

Jeffrey Williams, Planner  
Saratoga County Planning Department  
50 West High Street  
Ballston Spa, NY 12020  
518-884-4705  
JWilliams@saratogacountyny.gov