

## State grants funding to purchase 41 acres of open space in East Lyme's Oswegatchie Hills

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East Lyme — A state grant, slated to be approved by the State Bond Commission Thursday, will help preserve a 41-acre land parcel in the Oswegatchie Hills, Gov. Dannel P. Malloy announced on Tuesday.

The land for preservation, the "Bayreuther Property," is private property that abuts the 420-acre Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve, in the hills along the Niantic River. The undeveloped property is on the preserve's east side with frontage on Quarry Dock Road.

The nature preserve will total 461 acres of open space with the proposed acquisition. The preserve was created through efforts of the town, the Friends of the Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve and the East Lyme Land Conservation Trust, as well as the state Department of Energy and Environmental Protection and other agencies, according to the governor's news release.

The anticipated acquisition would provide a buffer against residential development, said Mike Dunn, the director of land acquisition and board member of the nonprofit Friends of Oswegatchie Hills. The property would also preserve additional acreage in an important migratory bird flyway, he added.

The State Bond Commission is slated to approve a requested amount of \$200,000 on Thursday, with \$100,000 being released for the purchase of the Bayreuther property, according to the governor's office. The remaining amount was requested for an additional parcel under consideration, but it turns out only the Bayreuther property is available at the moment, explained state Rep. Ed Jutila, D-East Lyme.

A private foundation, The Thompson Family Foundation, has pledged \$150,000 toward the purchase of the Bayreuther property, said Dunn. The Friends and the town are expected to contribute the remainder of the roughly \$300,000 purchase price, he said.

"Land conservation is an important investment in our future, and this undeveloped property in East Lyme will add another great segment to Oswegatchie Hills, ensuring that residents have access to this land for generations to come," Malloy said in a written statement.

"Preservation projects are key to maintaining our high quality of life, protecting the immense natural beauty of our state, and making Connecticut a great place to live, work and raise a family."

Jutila, state Sen. Andrea Stillman, D-Waterford, and state Rep. Betsy Ritter, D-Waterford, worked toward the grant.

"This funding will bring us a major step closer to the goal of preserving all of Oswegatchie Hills and protecting the Niantic River against further damaging runoff," Jutila said in a written statement.

In an interview, Jutila said the pristine woodlands, with a terrain of ledge and hills that lends itself to runoff into the Niantic River, should be protected from development. The hills provide trails and attractive scenery of the cove and river.

"It makes a beautiful nature preserve," he said.

Developers Landmark Development and Jarvis of Cheshire have been working for years to build residential units in land they own north of the preserve. The developers are appealing East Lyme's rulings of their applications.

"This funding is a big step toward ensuring the Oswegatchie Hills remain pristine and beautiful forever," Ritter said in a statement. "We are closer than ever to realizing the goal of preservation of our shoreline."