



ALBANY COUNTY
LAND BANK CORPORATION



Albany County Land Bank and Town of Bethlehem Preserve Green Space for Future Generations

*Partnership supports Town's efforts to conserve natural assets
and balance development pressure*

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BETHLEHEM, NEW YORK – In the historically agricultural area of Bethlehem near the intersection of Wemple Road and Route 9W, development is on the horizon, but not on a special eight-acre parcel of open land. Through a creative partnership, the Town of Bethlehem and the non-profit Albany County Land Bank have worked together to conserve an important green space as a haven for nature and as a community benefit for generations to come.

“This partnership will enable the Town to preserve the open space that makes it so attractive”, **said Adam Zaranko, Executive Director of the Albany County Land Bank.** “This is yet another great example of how a land bank can help achieve outcomes that benefit our communities now and for the future.”

“Fields, forests, and farms are vital parts of Bethlehem,” **noted Town Supervisor David VanLuven.** “But places that are green today will not be in 5 or 50 years unless we step up and work with interested landowners to protect them. The Albany County Land Bank has been a great partner, and we’re so pleased to know that this oasis of nature will remain as protected green space forever.”

Conservation of forests and farms is a priority for the Town of Bethlehem. A recent survey of Bethlehem residents determined that a vast majority support the conservation of green spaces and farmland. The parcel’s conservation value was rated as “high” using the 25-point Conservation Criteria in the Town’s Open Space Plan. Under this partnership, the Albany County Land Bank conveyed the eight acre property to the Town as natural open space, which forwards the goals within the Town’s Open Space Plan.

“Since we established the Albany County Land Bank years ago, it has been an essential resource to revitalize and enhance our communities for future generations, and I applaud this partnership as the latest example,” **said Albany County Executive Daniel P. McCoy.** “While economic development is important, we can’t miss the forest for the trees, knowing that open spaces like this are important to our quality of life and will help protect our precious natural resources.”

The eight-acre undeveloped parcel, located near the crossroads of Wemple Road and Route 9W, was initially acquired by the Land Bank from Albany County through tax-foreclosure. Land banks are non-profit organizations designed to facilitate the process of acquiring, improving, and redistributing tax-foreclosed, vacant, or abandoned properties. The Albany County Land Bank is one of the largest and most active land banks in New York State and is approaching its 1000th property acquisition.

“Protecting this parcel creates a natural ‘anchor’ in a rapidly developing neighborhood,” said **Mark King, Executive Director of the Mohawk Hudson Land Conservancy**. “The protection of wetlands is vital to the functioning of natural ecosystems, as they play an essential role in filtering pollutants and slowing down floodwater created by impervious surfaces, as well as providing valuable wildlife habitat, particularly for reptiles, amphibians and songbirds. Too often communities allow wetlands to be altered, compromised or destroyed. We are thrilled that the Town of Bethlehem recognizes the value of wetlands and are taking a proactive step to preserve these critical natural systems.”

The Town has no immediate plans to develop passive recreation on the land. The parcel will simply remain protected open space, allowing the property’s wetlands, trees, and soils to continue providing important “natural systems services” such as water quality protection, flood protection, and wildlife habitat. In the future, a walking trail could be considered to enhance public enjoyment of this natural area. To learn more about planning for the conservation of green space and farms in Bethlehem, visit www.townofbethlehem.org.

About the Albany County Land Bank Corporation

The Albany County Land Bank was established in 2014 by Albany County to facilitate the process of acquiring, improving, and redistributing tax-foreclosed, vacant or abandoned properties. The Land Bank is a nonprofit organization committed to revitalizing neighborhoods and strengthening communities throughout Albany County. The Albany County Land Bank uses funding from the Office of the New York State Attorney General, Albany County and the City of Albany to support property demolitions, acquisitions, stabilizations, lot improvements and renovation projects. The Albany County Land Bank works in partnership with local and state government, non-profits, residents, community groups, and responsible developers and investors to return properties to productive use and support community development. To learn more about the Albany County Land Bank please visit: www.albanycountylandbank.org.

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