

Effort seeks to preserve rural site and its vista

By **Karen Robinson**

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The view from the 60-acre farmstead along Mill Road is breathtaking, overlooking the rural, hilly terrain just outside the Village of East Aurora.

If a local group has its way — and gets enough money — people will be able to see that view forever.

The Closs and neighboring Sievenpiper families are each willing to sell individual portions of their acreage that would total a combined 60 acres.

Essentially, the families would sell the land to the Town of Aurora, which would purchase it with money raised by the newly formed grass-roots Friends of Mill Road group, which is organizing a major capital campaign that has not yet gone public. If successful, the town would ultimately own the land.

The effort requires a capital drive to raise \$550,000 to help the town acquire the property. Beyond that, another \$100,000 is needed to secure a conservation easement that would be held by the Western New York Land Conservancy to ensure the land be protected in perpetuity.

“We have the most scenic view in the area and did not want to see it built on,” said Clinton Closs, 85, who grew up on the land. “We are happy with the project being planned.”

The Closses are willing to sell 40 of their remaining acres, and the Sievenpipers would be selling 20 of their acres, which they had purchased from the Closs family.

On a clear day, downtown Buffalo is visible. The ridges that can be seen lead to Knox Farm State Park, and from Knox park, one can see the Mill Road land.

“They are linked in a wonderful way,” said Nancy Smith, a member of the Friends of Mill Road, which is looking to soon embark on an ambitious capital campaign to raise at least the \$550,000 so the town can buy the land. “It’s pretty breathtaking.”

It’s not just the view, but also the value of protecting wildlife habitats, she said.

“There’s not just the meadow, but a very mature forest,” Smith said, noting that there’s a hemlock grove, native hardwood forest and some ravines.

“This action is part of a broader solution to save tax dollars by curbing the cost of infrastructure associated with sprawl. It’s a balance between developing land and maintaining open space,” Smith said.

The tentative arrangement has taken four years to craft since the town’s Open Space Committee first approached the families about the scenic overlook idea.

The challenge will be to raise the private money to make the project work. Smith is hoping that the town is successful in securing a state parks grant of approximately \$200,000 that it plans to apply for in May.

If that occurs, the \$200,000 or so would offset the \$650,000 cost, with the remainder to be raised in the community. The agreement, approved in concept by the Town Board last week in a 4-1 vote, calls for the money to be raised and the land purchased by December 2012.

Aurora Supervisor Jolene Jeffe praised the effort. “If we don’t attempt to get the state park money, some other community will,” she said. “I think it’s a great thing. In the community, everyone knows that view on Mill Road.”

krobinson@buffnews.com

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