

Open-space plan honored

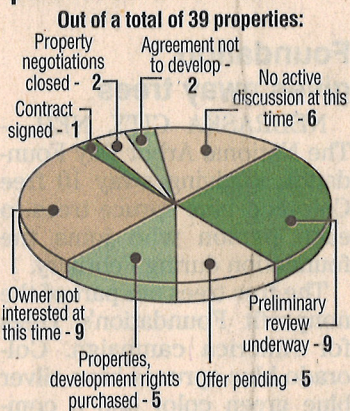
◇ A New York planning group recognized Penfield for its land preservation efforts.

By Amy Cavalier
Messenger Post Staff

Dan Willmes' grape farm belonged to his father before he took over. Last year, Willmes sold the development rights to his farm on Sweets Corner to the town of Penfield.

Thanks to an incentive from the town of Penfield, Willmes' property will remain undeveloped. Willmes sold the development rights last year to the town as part of the Penfield's

Status of open space purchases in Penfield:



source: www.penfield.org

open-space preservation plan. He still owns the property but has agreed to never develop

the land. Future owners are also limited in what they can do with the land.

"It's like putting a \$10,000 car for sale in your driveway, and then taking the engine and transmission out of it," Willmes said. "The value of the car drops drastically and less people want to buy it."

It's moves like this that have helped Penfield gain recognition from the American Planning Institute's New York Chapter. The group recently awarded Penfield the award for 2002 Outstanding Planning Project. Purchasing the development rights on key properties in Penfield is part of the town's \$10 million open-space plan, which Penfield voters approved on April 23, 2002.

The plan calls for the town purchase and protect as many as 39 properties. In all, the town has identified about 950 acres of land to possibly be protected under the program.

Since the plan was adopted, Director of Planning Doug Fox said the town has closed on five properties totaling 750 acres. Negotiations are underway on at least 14 more. Of the 39 original properties identified in the project, nine property owners have indicated that they are not interested in selling at this time, Fox said.

Supervisor Channing Philbrick said the town is about 70 percent through the project. Fox said the town has spent close to \$6 million of the \$10 million appropriated by

voters.

Philbrick said that the \$10 million dollars won't be enough to purchase all the properties.

"We knew that and the voters knew that when we presented them with the plan," he said. "We'll buy up as many of the properties as we can with that money, but we never expected to see 100 percent of the properties purchased." Philbrick said that perhaps there will be another open space project five to 10 years down the road.

The open-space plan is part of Penfield's efforts to preserve it's land, to ensure farming remains strong in the community, and to save money in

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the long run.

Philbrick said one goal is to protect the undeveloped, special lands in the community.

"The wooded areas, the highlands, the wetlands, are just some of the areas that deserve preserving because of their uniqueness," he said.

Fox said preserving land has

long-term benefits.

"Development creates the need for wider roads, more plows to clear those roads, more street lamps, parks, schools and sewer systems," he said.

Fox said development is not always a good thing. "Unless you are building very expensive houses, you are not gaining a lot from a tax standpoint. Mid-range, family homes don't pay their way," he said. "A \$200,000 home may cost the

owners \$3,000 a year in taxes. When you consider the cost of providing services to the homeowners, the home and educating the children of the home, it's a net loss."

Fox said about 92 percent of the town is zoned for residential development - about 50 percent of the town is already developed.

"This is a long range effort and hopefully generations down the road will see it as a wise move," Fox said.