

Essex County Greenbelt Association
Conservation Easement Policies and Procedures
(Approved 9/21/09)

Overview

Oversight of conservation easements and communication with easement landowners is a primary function of land stewardship at Greenbelt. The process begins with the documentation of baseline conditions on the property. Monitoring visits are then conducted on an annual or bi-annual schedule. Easement violations and potential enforcement actions are handled on a case-by-case basis.

Baseline Documentation

The first action taken by Greenbelt is to document the conditions and the conservation values to be protected on the property. Site visits and a baseline documentation report are completed at the time of acquisition. In addition, a hard file is set up and placed in fireproof file cabinets, an electronic record is created in the database, and a field notebook is created and stored in a centralized location.

1. Baseline Documentation

- a. 1-2 staff persons visit the property, walking and photo-documenting (digitally) conditions of the property including all the boundaries, portions of the interior and other notable natural or man-made feature.
- b. A baseline report is generated that contains a copy of the written easement, a map of the easement, a written description of the inspection, a landowner acknowledgement form, a photo affidavit, a photo key with photo-point locations, lat/long coordinates for the photo-points and a copy of all the photos taken. One copy is provided to the landowner, one copy is placed in the hard file, and one copy is placed in the field notebook.

Monitoring

Monitoring easements is an ongoing activity with a goal of physically visiting each property annually or bi-annually, documenting current conditions and maintaining contact with the landowner.

1. Monitoring

- a. Monitoring visits occur bi-annually for most easements, and annually for some easements that have a higher level of activity associated with them.
- b. Monitoring visits are generally conducted in the winter, spring and fall, primarily in an effort to maximize visibility when leaves are off trees and shrubs. Landowners are contacted initially by mail, with a follow-up phone call to set a time and date for the site visit. Landowners are always invited to accompany staff during the visit.
- c. 1-2 staff persons visit the property, walking and photo-documenting (digitally) conditions of the property including portions of the boundaries and interior, primarily looking for alterations to the landscape.
- d. A monitoring inspection report is generated that contains a description of the inspection, a photo affidavit, a photo key with photo-point locations, lat/long coordinates for the photo-points and a copy of all the photos taken. One copy is provided to the landowner, one copy is placed in the hard file, and one copy is placed in the field notebook.

Violations and Enforcement

Conditions or activities that are discovered during a monitoring visit ,or by other means, that appear to be inconsistent with the terms of the easement are documented and immediately brought to the attention of the landowner. Resolution is pursued through direct communication, additional site visits and other available remedies, including legal action.

Easement Owner Communications

Greenbelt maintains regular communication with easement landowners. This communication involves periodic mailing of newsletters and other information of interest, and invitations to programs and events.