

explore

MASS AUDUBON



Mass Audubon

Fall 2023



Reimagining a Beloved Farm with the Lowell Community

When Rollie Perron and other family members decided it was time to sell Rollie’s Farm, their 20-acre Christmas tree and vegetable farm, it was the last family farm in Lowell. The family wanted to ensure that the beloved property remained a meaningful resource to the community.

In collaboration with the City of Lowell, Mass Audubon has partnered with Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust (LP&CT) and Mill City Grows (MCG), a Lowell-based food justice organization, to purchase and protect Rollie’s Farm in perpetuity. The project, known as Pawtucket Farm Wildlife Sanctuary, will bring the benefits of nature to the people of Lowell for generations to come.

Nature in the City of Lowell

We know that access to nature and the benefits it provides—from clean air and water to shade, recreation, and more—are critical for healthy communities,

especially in urban environments. And yet, open green space is an increasingly rare commodity in urban areas; Lowell ranks 304 out of 351 towns in Massachusetts in the percentage of protected open space. The opportunity to protect a parcel of land in Lowell the size of Pawtucket Farm is unlikely to come around again.

With support from federal, state, municipal, and private donors, Mass Audubon will be purchasing the property in the fall of 2023 and granting a conservation restriction to be held jointly by LP&CT and the City of Lowell.



Bringing the Community Together

By working with our partners, we want to build a vibrant neighborhood destination that is accessible to all. Our first priority was to understand the needs of the community. Agency Landscape + Planning—a mission-driven design agency committed to social equity—helped Mass Audubon and our partners create a plan to make sure all the voices in the community were heard.

We held nine different community listening sessions and focus groups in the locally predominant languages of Spanish, Portuguese, and Khmer, as well as English. During these sessions, Lowell residents and community organizations provided rich insights into how they would like to interact with the property.

As a result, the vision for Pawtucket Farm will prioritize putting in place a working farmland that engages and supports the surrounding community, restoring the natural forested landscape to benefit people and wildlife, and creating opportunities for learning and gathering.

Community and Ecological Benefits

The numerous trees at Pawtucket Farm provide health benefits to the community and surrounding wildlife. By restoring and maintaining the tree canopy, the forest can absorb greenhouse gases, cool surrounding neighborhoods, and provide habitat for birds and wildlife. Diversifying the tree species will also improve habitat function and connect protected lands between the adjacent 1,100-acre state forest and the Merrimack River.

Also, by making this area available for community farming, Pawtucket Farm can also improve food justice in the region. With the help of the community farming

experts at MCG, farming activity is planned to continue uninterrupted through the seasons, shifting the current tomato and corn fields into a more diverse and sustainable system. This system will include crops that are culturally relevant to the surrounding communities, a “food forest,” and community garden plots.



Next Steps

The final site plan, which will be completed by the end of 2023, will include a nature center and farm stand, a universally accessible All Persons Trail, and a Nature Play Area. We are also planning educational programs which, based on the focus groups, are of high interest to the community, including a future summer camp, gardening and cooking classes, bird and nature walks, and opportunities for multi-generational interaction, learning, and gathering.

Fundraising has begun for the development of the trails and facilities, and the property is expected to open to the public in 2024. To learn more, get involved, and support the Pawtucket Farm project, visit massaudubon.org/lowell.