

# **Dane County Exec Parisi: County grants over \$1.6 million from Conservation Fund to improve water quality, increase local food production**

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Today, County Executive Joe Parisi announced Dane County will allocate over \$1.6 million through its Conservation Fund to support projects that improve water quality and increase local food production. Dane County will allocate \$1,004,900 to the Town of Westport to acquire 105 acres of property in the Sixmile Creek Watershed. Madison Area Food Pantry Gardens, Inc. will receive \$660,000 to acquire 15 acres of property for a food pantry garden and related activities next to Pope Farm Park in the Town of Middleton.

“The Conservation Fund is one of many ways Dane County works to preserve land with clear quality of life, conservation, and recreational benefits in our rapidly developing community,” said Dane County Executive Joe Parisi. “Through these partnerships, we will be able to improve water quality in the Sixmile Creek Watershed and increase local food production and educational opportunities around sustainable agriculture.”

The Town of Westport, in partnership with Groundswell Conservancy, will acquire approximately 105.45 acres of land from Lena LLC. The land is located off County Highway M and Woodland Drive, lying between DNR Six Mile Creek Fishery Area lands to the west and the Westport Town Hall and Daleo soccer fields to the east. It contains a mixture of grasslands, wetlands, and woods.

The Town's acquisition of this parcel connects a corridor of public lands that surround the north side of Lake Mendota. The property will protect existing wetlands, provide opportunities for wetland enhancement and restoration, and offer stormwater management benefits to enhance Lake Mendota water quality. The parcel creates additional open space for passive and organized public recreation, trail connections, native vegetation restoration, and wildlife and pollinator habitat.

The estimated project costs for this acquisition total \$6,009,724. The Town has committed \$5 million and applied for a grant award. The Dane County Park Commission recommends up to \$1,004,900 in county matching funds for the acquisition and related transaction costs.

Another organization receiving support from the Dane County Conservation Fund is Madison Area Food Pantry Gardens, Inc. (MAFPG). MAFPG has been leasing land for one of its network gardens, known as Forward Garden, from Elizabeth Pope and the Pope Family Trust since 2020, but now has the opportunity to purchase the land.

MAFPG strives to provide local food pantries with first-choice, fresh, nutritious, and culturally relevant produce. This non-profit organization—with its thousands of volunteers—creates nutrition security for those who rely on the Dane County emergency food system by collecting surplus produce from area farms and markets and by growing produce in its network of gardens for food pantries and other emergency food programs.

These 15 acres of land are located on the Pope Farm Homestead in the Town of Middleton off of West Old Sauk Road, adjacent to the Town of Middleton's Pope Farm Conservancy. The parcel lies within the southern boundary of the county's Black Earth Creek Natural Resource Area.

Through this purchase, MAFPG will be able to increase operations at Forward Garden and also provide educational opportunities revolving around sustainable agriculture, food, and wildlife ecology to the community. The Agriculture, Gardening, and Foraging Initiative in the 2018-2023 Parks and Open Space Plan supports grants to non-profits for the protection of lands for sustainable agriculture, local food production, and creating opportunities to bring people outdoors and connect to the land.

The estimated project costs for this purchase are \$1,570,000. MAFPG applied for a grant award, and the Dane County Park Commission recommends up to \$660,000 in

county matching funds for the acquisition and related transaction costs. Donations and fundraising will cover the balance of the acquisition cost.

Resolutions to approve these grant allocations will be introduced to the Dane County Board at tonight's meeting. Both resolutions are expected to be approved in the coming weeks.