

# Woodstock's agreement with the Village Conservancy explained

By Emma Stanton  
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At the end of February, the Woodstock Selectboard and Woodstock Village Board of Trustees signed a “letter of agreement” with the Woodstock Community Trust regarding its newest project — the Woodstock Village Conservancy.

The letter of agreement documents the town and village's long-term vision, potential projects spearheaded by the Woodstock Village Conservancy, and articulates the expected roles and responsibilities of each party.

The Standard spoke to Wendy Spector, project team member for the Woodstock Village Conservancy, and Tesha Buss, executive director of the Woodstock Community Trust, about the letter of agreement and what residents can expect from the organization.

Spector said, “A letter of agreement is a very general statement of principles [between the conservancy and the Town/Village of Woodstock].”

She explained that one principle outlined in the agreement is that the town and village boards must be informed throughout the planning process. Another is that only one person

from the conservancy (Spector) can speak to one person at Town Hall (municipal manager Eric Duffy). Another principle is that no taxpayer funds can be used to finance a conservancy initiative; only funds raised by the conservancy itself can be used.

“So those are sort of large principles,” Spector added. “Now we must tackle how to shepherd an initiative from conception to completion. That level of detail is not laid out in the agreement.”

Following the signing of the agreement, Spector submitted a second document outlining the process for pursuing initiatives. “In order to make it easier for us, we came up with this idea of an initiative outline. This is a document that has a number of details in it that we want to be able to remember to do every time we have an initiative to bring to the boards.” The initiative outline will serve as an overview of the project, Spector explained. Once the project is presented to the board and they approve the outline, the conservancy will get to work fundraising, engaging the community, and establishing a proper proposal for the town to later vote on.

“In the first phase [of an initiative], the con-

servancy will be doing a lot of the background work without any town staff or board involvement. And then in the second phase, we will start to involve [the selectboard/trustee's] time. Then we can go to the public and say that this is something that the town is interested in looking into. That is when we will take public feedback and discussion, knowing that our initiative could go through several iterations before any step is finalized. Once we go through the entire process, we will have a final proposal presented to the board, answer any more questions, and then the board will vote on it.”

The selectboard and trustees have yet to publicly comment on the initiative component of this proposal, but residents can expect a discussion in the coming months.

This week, vice chair of the trustees, Jeffrey Kahn, spoke with the Standard about what this agreement means for local governing officials. “The Woodstock Village Conservancy is really a bunch of concerned public citizens who would like to make improvements that fit in with our town and village plan that would not require taxpayer funding,” he said. “We would, of course, be able to say no to any project that

does not align with the board's goals. Our hope is that this agreement streamlines communication and keeps [both boards] and our community involved in the process. I think it's a wonderful form of philanthropy.”

Kahn mentioned that longer-term goals include renovations to the Village Green and the desire to plant trees in the greater Woodstock Village. Spector confirmed that those are areas of interest for the conservancy, but no plans have been formally drafted.

To conclude, Buss said, “I just want to add that it's really important that everyone feels that the Woodstock Community Trust is a community-based organization that supports multiple projects, and we always welcome feedback. If anyone has a project in mind that might fit under the umbrella of the trust, reach out! Our door is always open, and we're always growing and evolving to support the needs of the community.”

Those interested in the Woodstock Village Conservancy initiatives or any other community-based projects should contact the Woodstock Community Trust through its website: [woodstockcommunitytrust.org](http://woodstockcommunitytrust.org).