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**FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE**

**Massachusetts' Urban Park Advocates Held a "Meeting of the Minds" at the  
*Urban Land Protection Forum4*  
Held at the Doyle Conservation Center on May 19th  
EEA Undersecretary Phillip Griffiths & City of Fitchburg Mayor Lisa Wong  
Shared Wisdom and Encouragement to a Passionate Audience**

\* Photos available upon request

Leominster - June 4, 2009 - On May 19, 2009, 75 urban park advocates gathered for the *Urban Land Protection Forum4*, hosted at The Trustees of Reservations' Doyle Conservation Center in Leominster. This gold-rated green building was filled with advocates for greener cities and urban parks from across Massachusetts and beyond. They came together to discuss the importance of urban parks plus the skills, techniques, and processes necessary to create and maintain them. Converting vacant or abandoned land into to urban parks helps us reclaim our cities and make them more livable, healthy, and sustainable.

"Urban parks" are outdoor places within cities that are open to the public. They include, but are not limited to, community gardens, trails and community paths, recreational fields, urban wilds, picnic sites, pocket parks, school yards, and playgrounds. Likely owned and/or managed by municipalities, the state, and/or nonprofit organizations, urban parks add to our quality of life by providing many tangible and intangible benefits. They can:

- encourage economic development by "anchoring" neighborhoods;
- provide savings in health care costs by increasing opportunities for more physical activity;
- provide locally-grown, culturally unique produce for residents, including recent immigrants;

- foster social capital by being common ground and free gathering places for neighbors, friends and families;
- serve as sponges during heavy precipitation thereby reducing flooding;
- help minimize the urban heat-island effect created by structures and pavement; provide places to relax, decompress, and unwind;
- connect people to the natural world while providing habitat for birds, amphibians, and small mammals;
- provide free places for kids and adults to play and exercise; make it safe and enjoyable for people to walk/bike more and drive less; and
- improve overall physical and mental health.

A study recently released by The Trust for Public Land measured the direct use value for Boston's park system to be more than \$354 million per year.<sup>1</sup> The same study also calculated that Philadelphia saves nearly \$6 million per year in wastewater treatment expenses thanks to the stormwater retention that its urban parks provide.

The Urban Land Protection Forum<sup>4</sup> participants represented urban park groups, land trusts, municipal planning offices, community development corporations, environmental justice organizations, and public health interests as well as community gardeners, students, and residents interested in revitalizing urban greenspace, trails, and parks in their cities. While the vast majority of the participants were from Massachusetts, advocates from New York, Maine, Connecticut, and Rhode Island also travelled to Leominster to share success stories, pose questions, and to create new partnerships with peers in the Bay State.

**Massachusetts' Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs' (EEA) Undersecretary for the Environment Philip Griffiths** launched the Forum by relaying Governor Deval Patrick's continued commitment to invest \$50 million in land conservation, particularly in three target areas: working landscapes (farms and woodlands); critical habitat protection; and urban land protection. The Undersecretary was interrupted with cheers and applause from the audience when he said, "This administration set out to do the most land conservation in the state's history and we're going to keep that commitment."

To address the unique challenges of providing and managing parks and greenspaces in many of Massachusetts' cities, EEA developed the "Gateway Park Program" for cities with populations over 35,000 and per capita income under the state average. The goal of the program is to find projects where "a little extra financial and technical support can help make new community assets a reality—these are projects that take many partners and many years to happen." But when they do happen, they make a big difference.

Fitchburg, Leominster, Lawrence, Lowell, and Worcester are among the 22 cities that meet the criteria for the Gateway Park Program. Mr. Griffiths admitted that due to the current economic challenges and a \$16 billion state budget gap, "the next few weeks will be a wild ride; we're going to everything we can to protect the capital budget for land conservation."

**Executive Vice President for The Trustees of Reservations Kathy Abbott** spoke about the state of urban Parks greenspace in Massachusetts. Fifty percent of Massachusetts' population now lives

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<sup>1</sup> *Measuring the Economic Value of a City Park System*, 2009. The Trust for Public Land, Harnick, P., Welle, B., Keenan, L  
[http://www.tpl.org/tier3\\_cd.cfm?content\\_item\\_id=22879&folder\\_id=3208](http://www.tpl.org/tier3_cd.cfm?content_item_id=22879&folder_id=3208)

in cities; nationally the number is 70%. “Urban parks are a priority for The Trustees of Reservations,” said Ms. Abbott. “This organization was founded in 1891 to improve the quality of life for city dwellers. While The Trustees will continue to preserve for public use and enjoyment exceptional properties in rural and suburban areas across the Commonwealth, our work in Holyoke, Fall, River, Leominster, Fitchburg, and Boston is indeed a return to our roots.”

**City of Fitchburg Mayor Lisa Wong** delivered an inspirational speech about the importance of having a vision for greener cities and the commitment to persevere in the face of adversity. Mayor Wong told engaging stories of lessons she learned while traveling abroad—lessons that she applies to her work as Mayor and to her earlier position with the Fitchburg Redevelopment Authority to create awareness among residents of the city’s innate assets and potential. “Fitchburg is absolutely gorgeous, but too many people can’t “see” our beautiful buildings and bridges...we want a beautiful city that people can see immediately.” She encouraged the Forum’s participants to stay focused on the rewards of their work--the ultimate satisfaction to enhance thousands of people’s lives by giving them a place of inspiration and enjoyment that they never thought could be a reality.

Other speakers at the *Urban Land Protection Forum4* included:

Pedro Arce, President and Founder, Veritas Bank

Jane Calvin, Executive Director, Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust

Kevin Case, Northeast Regional Director, Land Trust Alliance

Melissa Cryan, Grants Manger, MA Exec. Office of Energy & Env. Affairs

Steve Conant, Board Member, Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust

Kurt Gaertner, Director of Sustainable Development, MA Exec. Office of Energy & Env. Affairs

Andrew Loew, Assistant Brownfields Coordinator, MA Dept. of Environmental Protection

Colin Novick, Executive Director, Greater Worcester Land Trust

Kate O’Brien, Executive Director, Groundwork Lawrence

Marc Rudnick, Board Member, Waltham Land Trust

The *Urban Land Protection Forum4* was organized and co-sponsored by Urban Land Protection Council members [Greater Worcester Land Trust](#), [Groundwork Lawrence](#), [Lowell Parks & Conservation Trust](#), and [Waltham Land Trust](#) in partnership with [The Trustees of Reservations’ Putnam Conservation Institute](#) and the Massachusetts’ Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. Financial support came from the Jesse B. Cox Charitable Lead Trust and an anonymous foundation.

\* Photos available upon request.



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