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## **Saratoga PLAN acquiring land in Saratoga Springs to create a “community farm”**

Saratoga Springs, NY – Saratoga PLAN announced today that the nonprofit conservation organization has reached an agreement with the Pitney family to purchase the 166-acre Pitney Farm on West Avenue in the City of Saratoga Springs. The well-known and cherished farm landscape, with its cluster of rustic gray barns and large open corn field, is one of the last remaining, and the most visible, of active farms remaining within city limits.

Conservation of the Pitney Farm has been a top priority of the land trust organization and the City of Saratoga Springs for over two decades. The site was identified as an open space asset in both the original 1994 open space plan for the city and the updated plan adopted in 2002. After fielding many inquiries and proposals over the years, the Pitney family decided that the time was right and Saratoga PLAN’s proposal matched their interests for the farm. The family has been steadfast in their resolve that the land would never be developed and would always be available for agricultural purposes. Saratoga PLAN has agreed to ensure that the family’s wishes for the farm to remain a farm will be upheld.

“The Pitney Family is pleased and proud to partner with Saratoga PLAN, Michael Kilpatrick and Sandy Arnold in an effort to develop our farm property located on West Avenue as a ‘Community Farm’,” said Kathy Pitney, spokesperson for the family selling the land. “If this effort is successful, it will ensure that the farm that has been in our family since the late 1800s will continue to be a vital agricultural resource for the City of Saratoga Springs and Saratoga County. This initiative is fully in keeping with our forbearers’ commitment to responsible stewardship and community service.”

The farm has been in the family for over 150 years. Over time, the land has been used as a truck farm growing vegetables for the former Pitney Hotel on Grand Avenue, the Pitney’s Meadow Dairy Farm, and a horse boarding operation. The farm field was even used as the first airplane landing strip in the city at one time. It is currently being leased to a local egg operation for growing feed corn.

Accomplished farmers Kilpatrick and Arnold were instrumental in creating a shared vision with the Pitney family over the past several years. It was agreed that the Pitney Farm was the perfect location to house a farm hub serving the regional agricultural

industry as a year-round farmers' market site, agricultural training farm, distribution center, and processing/training kitchen. They approached Saratoga PLAN in 2013 and asked if the organization would work with them to purchase and conserve the land to keep it forever in agriculture.

“The site lends itself to all kinds of agricultural pursuits and community activities,” said Maria Trabka, Executive Director of Saratoga PLAN. “The fields, woods and creeks offer plenty of space for an agricultural training program for beginning farmers, incubator farmettes for apprentice level farmers, community gardens, plots for pick-your-own, an arboretum and nursery of native and nut trees, and hiking trails. We are developing the concept of a “community farm,” a place where people are welcome to participate in a variety of ways. The farm is near the high school, the Y, Saratoga Spa State Park, and the planned Greenbelt Trail. This project will really be a place for people and keep the ‘country in the city’ for this town which desires to remain a ‘city in the country.’”

“Five years ago, when I first drove by the Pitney property, I was struck by the potential that the land held”, says Kilpatrick, a local farmer, food policy advocate and international agricultural speaker. “Over the next several years, I developed this idea into a multi-faceted vision. Sandy Arnold and Saratoga PLAN have been key in working with me to take that original vision and help turn it into a sustainable and feasible plan. My brother and I started a farm business when we were 16 and 17, which blossomed into a successful and profitable enterprise within a few years. Creating opportunities for the next generation of farmers to try their hand and learn from experienced mentors is a part of our vision for the community farm that really excites me.”

Saratoga Institute, another nonprofit organization that nurtures new nonprofits during the start-up phase, has also been partnering with Saratoga PLAN and the farmers and will serve as the umbrella organization for developing the plans for phasing in the uses and programming for the community farm. “We are delighted to assist in devising a viable, sustainable plan for creating a community farm. We anticipate that many individuals, organizations, institutions, and local farm businesses will want to partner on this exciting project. Over the next year, we will be gathering input through a facilitated process to bring out ideas and construct a feasible plan of action,” said Barbara Glaser, founder and Board member of the Saratoga Institute.

“The possibilities are only limited by our imaginations and resources,” said Arnold, a successful local farmer for over 25 years and national speaker at agricultural conferences. “We are delighted to be able to secure this land for this exciting project. This will be a wonderful place to celebrate our agricultural heritage and leave a legacy of the land to future generations of farmers. My husband Paul and I started Pleasant Valley Farm from just a cornfield in 1988 and we are thrilled to be on this new endeavor to teach young farmers in the years to come. I look forward to working with Michael, Saratoga PLAN, Saratoga Institute, and many others that will be on the team as we focus on raising the necessary funds and performing all the due diligence for the land acquisition.”

It will take a broad coalition of partners and donors to help finance the purchase of the land, as well as to develop viable complementary programs for use of the land. In order to create a reliable foundation for investing in the different components of this project, protecting the land with a conservation easement is an essential requirement from the outset.

The Pitney family has entertained many offers for the land over the years but was resolute in its commitment that it remains a farm and made that a condition of the sale. Saratoga PLAN is proposing that the City of Saratoga Springs partner with them to make this project happen by purchasing the land's development rights at the same time as PLAN purchases the title. The city can use its Open Space bonding authority passed by voter referendum in 2003 to invest in the project. If the city decides to partner with PLAN, the city will hold an agricultural conservation easement on the land that will ensure that the property can never be developed for non-agricultural purposes, or used in any way that impairs future agricultural operations.

Agricultural conservation easements run with the land in perpetuity and define the restrictions and rights for all future owners of the property. Agricultural conservation easements allow for the type of agricultural endeavors to change over time, and they permit structures that support agriculture such as barns and agricultural support facilities but limit the extent of total impervious surfacing on the property.

Conservation of the Pitney Farm would be a premier partnership project for the City and PLAN, who share a long history of successful collaboration for many other conservation projects, including Spring Run Trail, Bog Meadow Trail and Conservation Area, Greenbelt Trail, Railroad Run, Farmer's Market Pavilion on High Rock, Ramsdill Preserve, Lake Lonely Boat Livery easement, and the city's Open Space plans.

"In both the 1994 and 2002 Open Space Plans for the City, this property is identified as a critical view shed and farmland to be preserved," said Joanne Yepsen, Mayor for the City of Saratoga Springs. "I am very excited that this opportunity to create a Community Farm Partnership is becoming a reality. I thank the Pitney family and Saratoga PLAN for all their work to get to this point. I am thrilled to be leading the City's efforts to partner with Saratoga PLAN to ensure this area of our city be maintained for agriculture and open space. The establishment of an agricultural center will add jobs and a great deal educationally and economically to our City and region. This is a longtime dream coming true."

The 166-acre tract of land is separated into three main sections, a 12-acre portion on West Avenue where the house and barns are located, a 119-acre tract on West Avenue south of the former rail line where the county water and sewer lines run underground, and a 35-acre wooded tract west of the railroad tracks. Parts of the property fall under different zoning regulations. Rowland Hollow Creek borders the property and becomes Geysers Creek before continuing on its way to Saratoga Spa State Park.

The land was recently appraised at a fair market value of \$2.425M for its highest and best use. The Pitney family has generously offered to donate approximately 25% of the value and sell the land to Saratoga PLAN for roughly 75% of its value. The value of the conservation easement (i.e. development rights) is set at a little over 50% of the total value of the land. If everything falls into place, Saratoga PLAN will secure loans for the other 25% of value, in addition to its costs for due diligence, transaction, interest, and initial start-up and property maintenance costs. A substantial Stewardship Fund will also need to be raised to care for the land in perpetuity. Estimates for the additional expenses are still being calculated and PLAN will embark on a capital campaign to raise the monies needed for the project. The Pitneys' donation, the potential conservation investment by the city, and the balance to be raised can all be used as matching funds for applying for private and public grants to advance the next phases of the project. The purchase is expected to close in the fall.

"This is a big undertaking, but one that many people are ready to rally around to bring to fruition," said John Munter, Chair of the Board of Directors for Saratoga PLAN. "We feel confident that the community will come together and get involved, contributing in the many ways they can, to make this farmland acquisition a reality and a permanent asset for the enjoyment of everyone today and in the future."

*Saratoga PLAN preserves the rural character, wildlife habitats, and scenic beauty of Saratoga County so these irreplaceable assets are accessible to all and available for future generations. PLAN, which stands for preserving land and nature, is a private, independent nonprofit organization that assists landowners and municipalities with conserving farmland, water resources, woodlands, trail corridors, and historic sites and with developing community plans that balance growth with resource protection to maintain quality places to live, work, visit and farm throughout Saratoga County. The 11 year-old organization has an office in Saratoga Springs, and, with the help of 200+ volunteers, stewards 3,600 acres throughout the county, including 10 nature preserves, 23 miles of trails and 27 conservation easements. More information can be found on their website: [saratogaplan.org](http://saratogaplan.org).*

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