

COUNTY OF SUFFOLK



OFFICE OF THE COUNTY EXECUTIVE

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News Release

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**Levy, Shelter Island Officials, Peconic Land Trust Announce
Preservation of Historic 26.4-Acre Site on Shelter Island**

*County and Town Partner with Federal Government to Purchase Sylvester
Manor Rights*

Site Slated to be 76th Farm Preserved During Levy Administration

Shelter Island, NY – Suffolk County Executive Steve Levy was joined by Town of Shelter Island officials and the Peconic Land Trust in announcing the planned purchase of development rights to a 26.4-acre farm field at Sylvester Manor that is part of a family-owned, 243-acre educational farm on Shelter Island.

The Historic Sylvester Manor was established in 1652 on fertile land at the head of a protected harbor on Shelter Island, and it is one of the few places in America to have been in the hands of the same family since it was first set up. The site has served as a residence for one of America's first food industrialists (and the inventor of baking powder), Eben Norton Horsford, as well as functioning as a farm for the past two centuries, serving regional markets. The manor also sponsors educational programs that explore the history and culture of food, both on Shelter Island and across the region.

“The purchase of development rights at Sylvester Manor for \$2.4 million is, in effect, the preservation of 358 years of Long Island’s history,” said Levy, noting that this will be the 76th farm preserved during his administration. “The agriculture and the educational program at the farm are a blessing to Suffolk and to Shelter Island residents and visitors who regularly support the facility, and we are proud to preserve all of this for future generations.”

According to Congressman Tim Bishop’s office, there was an infusion of a \$1.09-million federal grant from the Farm and Ranch Lands Protection Program. Suffolk and Shelter Island Town are providing the additional funding to preserve this unique, 26.4-acre tract, with approval anticipated by the county legislature.

Congressman Tim Bishop said he was “pleased to help secure these federal funds which will help us preserve and protect Shelter Island. As an East End native, I have a special appreciation for protecting our heritage.”

Sylvester Manor’s role as an East End history and education center is well founded. In addition to being a working farm, the site is an important early American archaeological site complemented by over 10,000 primary documents – family papers, books and letters – describing its changes through the centuries. The University of Massachusetts in Boston has held an archaeological field school on the property for much of the last decade, and next year Houghton Mifflin is publishing a book exploring the Manor’s early history.

Shelter Island Supervisor Jim Dougherty noted, “Sylvester Manor is the crown jewel in Shelter Island’s crown. I am delighted to be partnering with Steve Levy and Suffolk County in this historic move to preserve the Manor. All Shelter Islanders join me in thanking our county and federal partners for their enlightened and generous action in helping us to preserve our unique Island heritage and environment.”

Bennett Konesni is founder and resident executive director of the Sylvester Manor Educational Farm, and he represents the fifteenth generation in a long line of family members that have lived in and protected the property since 1652. “This collaboration—to preserve 26 acres of our historic fields—reflects what Sylvester Manor Educational Farm is all about: bringing people together to celebrate and explore history, food, culture and place.”

Konesni continued, “We’re bringing farming back to Shelter Island, and with it the pot-luck dinners and timber frame barns, the pig roasts and the community dances that have made life great on the East End for hundreds of years.”

Eben Fiske Ostby, Sylvester Manor owner and president of the Board of Directors of Sylvester Manor Educational Farm, agreed. “We are very excited to be partnering with the county and the town to preserve these wonderful lands.”

John V.H. Halsey, president of the Peconic Land Trust, stated, “Suffolk County and the Town of Shelter Island are playing a key role in this effort, one that represents a wonderful legacy for this family. The future of this property, as envisioned by Eben and Bennett, not only preserves the family’s rich traditions but also creates an educational program linked to a working farm that sustains our agricultural heritage for future generations.”

Manor operations currently include the management of a flock of 65 fertile hens and a flock of guinea fowl, and 60 acres of old field are being cleared. Future plans include widespread livestock management on the property and the production of wheat via wind-powered gristmill from the year 1810, plus the growth of the facility into a fully diversified small farm selling direct-to-market vegetables and meats.

Since Levy’s inauguration in 2004, when he revitalized a nearly dormant and scandal-ridden open space program, Suffolk has spent more than \$400 million to purchase or preserve nearly 8,000 acres of land, which is more than eight-and-a-half times the size of New York’s Central Park. Under Levy, Suffolk has acquired 916 parcels of land and preserved 75 farms to date—and the aggressive pursuit of environmentally significant parcels and farmlands continues.

Levy has implemented a number of measures to revitalize and reinvigorate the county’s open space and water protection programs, including use of a Master List of properties to speed up the planning and appraisal processes and to take the politics out of land acquisition; streamlining the contract process; increasing the number of attorneys in the Division of Real Estate for closings; implementing a \$75 million Save Open Spaces (SOS) Bond Act; and expanding the number of acquisitions done with other municipalities, environmental agencies or private land trusts.

In 2006, Levy created a \$50 million Environmental Legacy Fund in the county’s capital budget, which is earmarked for acquisitions in which other municipalities or private interests apply matching funds. The Legacy Fund was recognized in 2008 by the National Association of Counties and the National Land Trust with a County Leadership in Conservation Award, and Levy recently received a Leadership Award from the Long Island Farm Bureau.

Levy also led the charge in extending the quarter-cent sales tax through 2030 to be used exclusively for environmental preservation.