



Date: June 20, 2025

To: Dane County Park Commission

From: Alison Volk, Director BPS+ and Easement Acquisitions, American Farmland Trust

Cc: Sharene Smith, Land and Water Real Estate Coordinator, Dane County Land and Water
Resources Department
Yimmuj Yang, Community Director, Groundswell Conservancy

Re: Requesting Easement Funding to Facilitate a Buy, Protect, Sell Project in Verona, Wisconsin

Background

AFT is a national nonprofit with the mission to save the land that sustains us by protecting farmland, promoting sound farming practices, and keeping farmers on the land. In furtherance of its mission AFT launched a Buy-Protect-Sell (BPS) program several years ago to increase farmland protection and the transfer of affordable land to emerging farmers.

Under the BPS program, AFT purchases farmland, permanently protects that land with an agricultural conservation easement, and transitions the land to new farmers. AFT's easements under the BPS program typically include affordability provisions to protect the future availability of the farm for farmers. These provisions limit the resale price to the property's agricultural value and allow for AFT to purchase the property if a future buyer tries to sell the land to a non-farmer. Through the terms of the easement, AFT also works with the farmers to develop an agricultural practices management plan that encourages the adoption of regenerative farming practices. By connecting with farmers who might not have opportunities to purchase high quality agricultural land in appropriate geographic areas, AFT aims to accelerate land access and tenure for emerging generations of farmers. Since the program's launch, AFT has completed several projects across the country, including two in Wisconsin and Minnesota.

In 2022, AFT began working with Yimmuj Yang and Groundswell Conservancy on a BPS project in the Town of Verona, Dane County. The farm is owned by Erica Makar (they/them), who is interested in selling the property so that the land may be available for a local farmer who might not otherwise have access to suitable agricultural land.

The farm is a good fit for a BPS project based on its size, high quality soils, and proximity to Madison. Located in the Town of Verona, approximately 12 miles from the city, the property is comprised of two parcels totaling 21 acres. The farm contains flat, tillable farmland, a small hayfield, and a woodlot. Over 90% of the land is classified as prime or statewide important by USDA. There are currently no structures on the property. It is being rented by a farmer who is growing corn on the tillable acreage and haying the back field. Due to its size, location, and characteristics, AFT anticipates that the farm will provide an excellent opportunity for a producer looking to build their farm business.

Earlier this year, AFT and Groundswell undertook a public process to identify a resale buyer. To be eligible, the buyer needed to be in the early stages of their career and looking to support or expand their operation through the acquisition of the property. Applicants also needed to qualify as a “small farmer” as defined by the Farm Service Agency (FSA) and have between 3 and 10 years of farming experience. Farmers with more than 10 years of experience would be eligible as well, provided they were land insecure and did not own land.

From the applications, we have identified a resale buyer who is well-positioned to take over the property from AFT. We anticipate selling the property to the new farmer in late 2025, after the farmer secures FSA financing.

Timeline

- September 11, 2025: AFT and Makar will close on the purchase of the property.
- September 12, 2025: AFT will begin renting the property to the new farmer
- September—November, 2025: AFT will finalize the terms of the agricultural conservation easement protecting the farm
- November 2025: AFT will close on the easement and simultaneously sell the property to the new farmer.

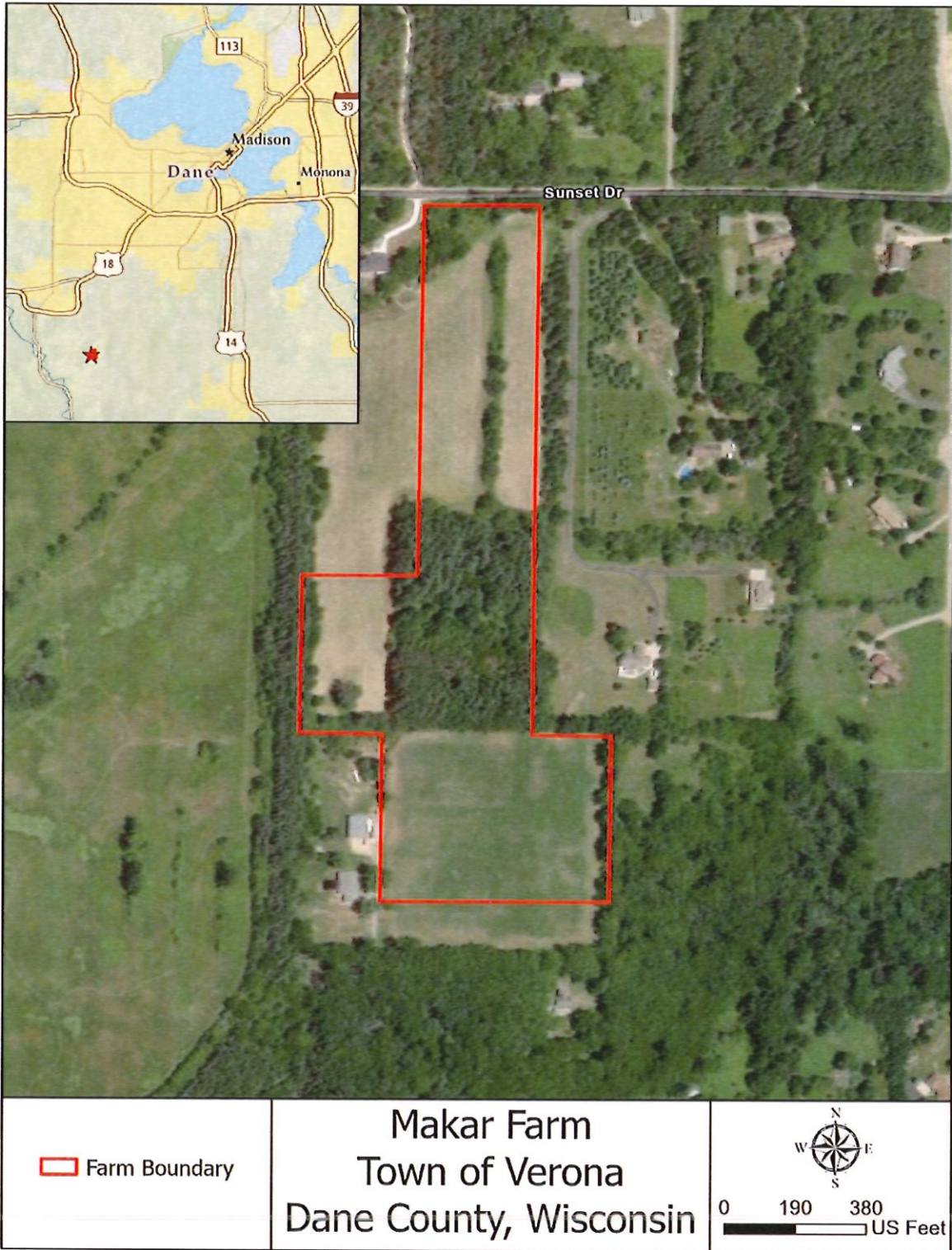
Funding Request

A before and after appraisal was completed earlier this year. The before-easement value of the property is \$1,069,300 and the after-easement value is \$299,300, resulting in an appraised easement value of \$770,000. The landowner has agreed to sell the property to AFT for \$550,250 and AFT will sell the property to the farmer at its after-easement value. As a result, AFT is requesting Dane County’s assistance in covering the difference between AFT’s purchase price and the protected value of the property, totaling \$250,950. A detailed budget is included with this memo.

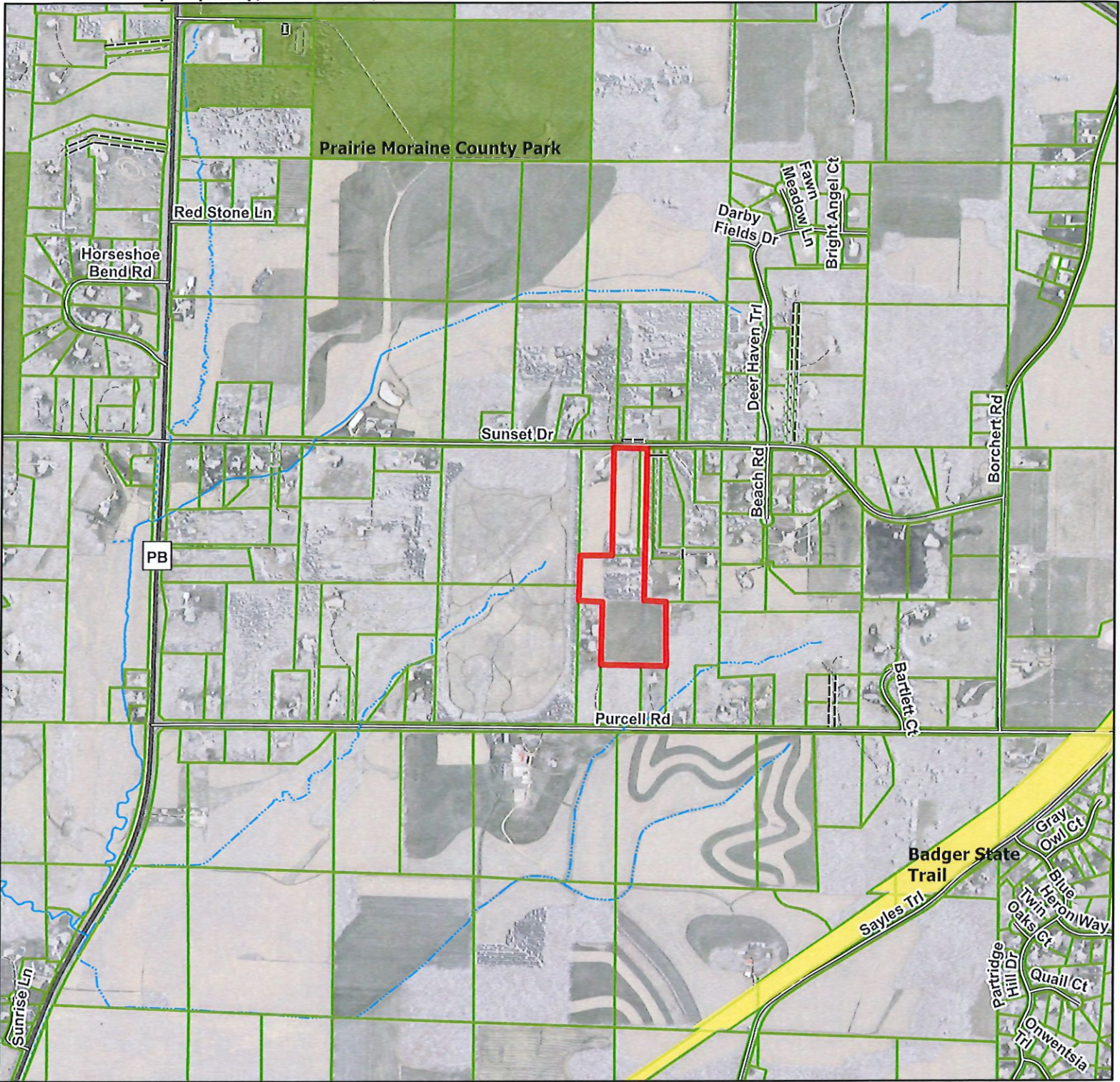
PROJECT BUDGET	
<u>Expense</u>	<u>Amount</u>
Base Purchase Price	\$ 550,250
Appraisal	\$ 5,000
Building Inspection	\$ -
Phase I/ESA	\$ 1,900
Closing Costs	\$ 4,620
Repairs	\$ -
Stewardship	\$ 25,000
Property Taxes ¹	\$ 0/year
Liability Insurance ²	\$ 0/year
Staff Time	\$ 10,000
TOTAL EXPENSE:	\$ 596,770
ESTIMATED REQUEST FROM DANE COUNTY	
Easement Value \$550,250 (<i>Base Purchase Price</i>) – \$299,300 (<i>Resale Price at Ag Value</i>)	\$250,950
Transaction Costs (50% of appraisal, ESA, closing costs)	\$5,760
TOTAL ESTIMATED REQUEST	\$256,710

¹ If a resale buyer needs additional time to secure financing, AFT may rent the property to the farmer. During this time, AFT would charge rent that would cover AFT's holding costs.

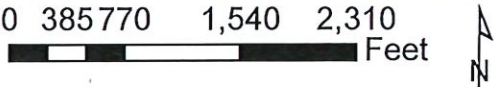
² Liability insurance would only be an expense if AFT owned and rented the property for one or more years.



American Farmland Trust - Buy, Protect, Sell Program
Erica Makar property, 21 acres, Town of Verona



 Makar property



Location in Dane County

