

Topic:	Conservation Districts & Subdivisions; Affordable Housing; Wetlands & Watercourse Protection; Farmland Protection & Preservation
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State:	Massachusetts
Jurisdiction Type:	State
Municipality:	N/A
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Community Type – applicable to:	Urban; Suburban; Rural
Title:	State of Massachusetts Conservation Restrictions Ordinance
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Abstract

This statute grants the authority to “any governmental body” to acquire and hold conservation restrictions for purposes including conservation of land or water area. The restriction is subject to approval by the secretary of environmental affairs. In determining whether the restriction is in the public interest, the governmental body shall take into consideration the public interest in conservation and any national, state, regional, and local program as well as any public state, regional, or local comprehensive land use or development plan affecting the land.

Resource

MASS. GEN. LAWS ch. 184, § 32 (2004)

§ 32. Conservation, Preservation, Agricultural Preservation, Watershed Preservation and Affordable Housing Restrictions; Acquisition and Effect of Restrictions; Approvals and Releases, Etc.

No conservation restriction, agricultural preservation or watershed preservation restriction as defined in section thirty-one, held by any governmental body or by a charitable corporation or trust whose purposes include conservation of land or water areas or of a particular such area, and no preservation restriction, as defined in said section thirty-one, held by any governmental body or by a charitable corporation or trust whose purposes include preservation of buildings or sites of historical significance or of a particular such building or site, and no affordable housing restriction as defined in said section thirty one, held by any governmental body or by a charitable corporation or trust whose purposes include creating or retaining or assisting in the creation or retention of affordable rental or other housing for occupancy by persons or families of low or moderate

income shall be unenforceable on account of lack of privity of estate or contract or lack of benefit to particular land or on account of the benefit being assignable or being assigned to any other governmental body or to any charitable corporation or trust with like purposes, or on account of the governmental body the charitable corporation or trust having received the right to enforce the restriction by assignment, provided (a) in case of a restriction held by a city or town or a commission, authority or other instrumentality thereof it is approved by the secretary of environmental affairs if a conservation restriction, the commissioner of the metropolitan district commission if a watershed preservation restriction, the commissioner of food and agriculture if an agricultural preservation restriction, the Massachusetts historical commission if a preservation restriction, or the director of housing and community development if an affordable housing restriction, and (b) in case of a restriction held by a charitable corporation or trust it is approved by the mayor, or in cities having a city manager the city manager, and the city council of the city, or selectmen or town meeting of the town, in which the land is situated, and the secretary of environmental affairs if a conservation restriction, the commissioner of the metropolitan district commission if a watershed preservation restriction, the commissioner of food and agriculture if an agricultural preservation restriction, the Massachusetts historical commission if a preservation restriction, or the director of housing and community development if an affordable housing restriction.

Such conservation, preservation, agricultural preservation, watershed preservation and affordable housing restrictions are interests in land and may be acquired by any governmental body or such charitable corporation or trust which have power to acquire interest in the land, in the same manner as it may acquire other interests in land. Such a restriction may be enforced by injunction or other proceeding, and shall entitle representatives of the holder to enter the land in a reasonable manner and at reasonable times to assure compliance. Such a restriction may be released, in whole or in part, by the holder for such consideration, if any, as the holder may determine, in the same manner as the holder may dispose of land or other interests in land, but only after a public hearing upon reasonable public notice, by the governmental body holding the restriction or if held by a charitable corporation or trust, by the mayor, or in cities having a city manager the city manager, the city council of the city or the selectmen of the town, whose approval shall be required, and in case of a restriction requiring approval by the secretary of environmental affairs, the Massachusetts historical commission, the commissioner of the metropolitan district commission, the commissioner of food and agriculture, or the director of housing and community development, only with like approval of the release.

No restriction that has been purchased with state funds or which has been granted in consideration of a loan or grant made with state funds shall be released unless it is repurchased by the land owner at its then current fair market value. Funds so received shall revert to the fund sources from which the original purchase, loan, or grant was made, or, lacking such source, shall be made available to acquire similar interests in other land. Agricultural preservation restrictions shall be released by the holder only if the land is no longer deemed suitable for agricultural or horticultural purposes or unless two-thirds of both branches of the general court, by a vote taken by yeas and nays, vote that the restrictions shall be released for the public good. Watershed preservation restrictions shall

be released by the holder only if the land is deemed by the commissioner of the metropolitan district commission and the secretary of environmental affairs to no longer be of any importance to the water supply or potential water supply of the commonwealth or unless two-thirds of both branches of the general court, by a vote taken by yeas and nays, vote that the restrictions shall be released for the public good.

Approvals of restrictions and releases shall be evidenced by certificates of the secretary of environmental affairs or the chairman, clerk or secretary of the Massachusetts historical commission, or the commissioner of food and agriculture, or the director of housing and community development or the city council, or selectmen of the town, as applicable duly recorded or registered.

In determining whether the restriction or its continuance is in the public interest, the governmental body acquiring, releasing or approving shall take into consideration the public interest in such conservation, preservation, watershed preservation, agricultural preservation or affordable housing and any national, state, regional and local program in furtherance thereof, and also any public state, regional or local comprehensive land use or development plan affecting the land, and any known proposal by a governmental body for use of the land.

This section shall not be construed to imply that any restriction, easement, covenant or condition which does not have the benefit of this section shall, on account of any provisions hereof, be unenforceable. Nothing in this section or section thirty-one and section thirty-three shall diminish the powers granted by any general or special law to acquire by purchase, gift, eminent domain or otherwise to use land for public purposes.

Nothing in this section shall prohibit the department of telecommunications and energy from authorizing the taking of easements for the purpose of utility services provided that (a) said department shall require the minimum practicable interference with farming operations with respect to width of easement, pole locations and other pertinent matters, (b) the applicant has received all necessary licenses, permits, approvals and other authorizations from the appropriate state agencies, (c) the applicant shall compensate the owner of the property in the same manner and the same fair market value as if the land were not under restriction.

MASS. GEN. Laws ch. 184, § 31 (2004)

§ 31. Conservation, Preservation, Agricultural Preservation, Watershed Preservation and Affordable Housing Restrictions; Defined.

A conservation restriction means a right, either in perpetuity or for a specified number of years, whether or not stated in the form of a restriction, easement, covenant or condition, in any deed, will or other instrument executed by or on behalf of the owner of the land or in any order of taking, appropriate to retaining land or water areas predominantly in their natural, scenic or open condition or in agricultural, farming or forest use, to permit public recreational use, or to forbid or limit any or all (a)

construction or placing of buildings, roads, signs, billboards or other advertising, utilities or other structures on or above the ground, (b) dumping or placing of soil or other substance or material as landfill, or dumping or placing of trash, waste or unsightly or offensive materials, (c) removal or destruction of trees, shrubs or other vegetation, (d) excavation, dredging or removal of loam, peat, gravel, soil, rock or other mineral substance in such manner as to affect the surface, (e) surface use except for agricultural, farming, forest or outdoor recreational purposes or purposes permitting the land or water area to remain predominantly in its natural condition, (f) activities detrimental to drainage, flood control, water conservation, erosion control or soil conservation, or (g) other acts or uses detrimental to such retention of land or water areas.

A preservation restriction means a right, whether or not stated in the form of a restriction, easement, covenant or condition, in any deed, will or other instrument executed by or on behalf of the owner of the land or in any order of taking, appropriate to preservation of a structure or site historically significant for its architecture, archeology or associations, to forbid or limit any or all (a) alterations in exterior or interior features of the structure, (b) changes in appearance or condition of the site (c) uses not historically appropriate, (d) field investigation, as defined in section twenty-six A of chapter nine, without a permit as provided by section twenty-seven C of said chapter, or (e) other acts or uses detrimental to appropriate preservation of the structure or site.

An agricultural preservation restriction means a right, whether or not stated in the form of a restriction, easement, covenant or condition, in any deed, will or other instrument executed by or on behalf of the owner of the land appropriate to retaining land or water areas predominately in their agricultural farming or forest use, to forbid or limit any or all (a) construction or placing of buildings except for those used for agricultural purposes or for dwellings used for family living by the land owner, his immediate family or employees; (b) excavation, dredging or removal of loam, peat, gravel, soil, rock or other mineral substance in such a manner as to adversely affect the land's overall future agricultural potential; and (c) other acts or uses detrimental to such retention of the land for agricultural use. Such agricultural preservation restrictions shall be in perpetuity except as released under the provisions of section thirty-two. All other customary rights and privileges of ownership shall be retained by the owner including the right to privacy and to carry out all regular farming practices.

A watershed preservation restriction means a right, whether or not stated in the form of a restriction, easement, covenant or condition, in any deed, will or other instrument executed by or on behalf of the owner of the land appropriate to retaining land predominantly in such condition to protect the water supply or potential water supply of the commonwealth, to forbid or limit any or all (a) construction or placing of buildings; (b) excavation, dredging or removal of loam, peat, gravel, soil, rock or other mineral substance except as needed to maintain the land and (c) other acts or uses detrimental to such watershed. Such watershed preservation restrictions shall be in perpetuity except as released under the provisions of section thirty-two. All other

customary rights and privileges of ownership shall be retained by the owner, including the right to privacy.

An affordable housing restriction means a right, either in perpetuity or for a specified number of years, whether or not stated in the form of a restriction, easement, covenant or condition in any deed, mortgage, will, agreement, or other instrument executed by or on behalf of the owner of the land appropriate to (a) limiting the use of all or part of the land to occupancy by persons, or families of low or moderate income in either rental housing or other housing or (b) restricting the resale price of all or part of the property in order to assure its affordability by future low and moderate income purchasers or (c) in any way limiting or restricting the use or enjoyment of all or any portion of the land for the purpose of encouraging or assuring creation or retention of rental and other housing for occupancy by low and moderate income persons and families. Without in any way limiting the scope of the foregoing definition, any restriction, easement, covenant or condition placed in any deed, mortgage, will, agreement or other instrument pursuant to the requirements of the Rental Housing Development Action Loan program or the Housing Innovations Fund program established pursuant to section three of chapter two hundred and twenty-six of the acts of nineteen hundred and eighty-seven or pursuant to the requirements of any program established by the Massachusetts housing partnership fund board established pursuant to chapter four hundred and five of the acts of nineteen hundred and eighty-five, including without limitation the Homeownership Opportunity Program, or pursuant to the requirements of sections twenty-five to twenty-seven, inclusive, of chapter twenty-three B, or pursuant to the requirements of any regulations or guidelines promulgated pursuant to any of the foregoing, shall be deemed to be an affordable housing restriction within the meaning of this paragraph.

MASS. GEN. Laws ch. 184, § 33 (2004)

§ 33. Conservation, Preservation, Agricultural Preservation, Watershed Preservation and Affordable Housing Restrictions; Establishment, Form, etc. of Public Restriction Tract Indexes; Filing of Subsequent or Successive Notices, etc.

Any city or town may file with the register of deeds for the county or district in which it is situated a map or set of maps of the city or town, to be known as the public restriction tract index, on which may be indexed conservation, preservation, agricultural preservation, watershed preservation and affordable housing restrictions and restrictions held by any governmental body. Such indexing shall indicate sufficiently for identification (a) the land subject to the restriction, (b) the name of the holder of the restriction, and (c) the place of record in the public records of the instrument imposing the restriction. Maps used by assessors to identify parcels taxed, and approximate boundaries without distances, shall be sufficient, and, where maps by parcels are not available, addition to other maps of approximate boundaries of restricted land shall be sufficient. If the names of the holders and the instrument references cannot be conveniently shown directly on the maps, they may be indicated by appropriate reference to accompanying lists. Such maps may also indicate similarly, so far as practicable, (a) any order or license issued by a governmental

body entitled to be recorded or registered, (b) the approximate boundaries of any historic or architectural control district established under chapter forty C or any special act, ordinance or by-law where a certificate of appropriateness may be required for exterior changes (c) any landmark certified by the Massachusetts historical commission pursuant to section twenty-seven of chapter nine, (d) any other land which any governmental body may own in fee, or in which it may hold any other interest, and (e) such additional data as the filing governmental body may deem appropriate.

Whenever any instrument of acquisition of a restriction or order or other appropriate evidence entitled to be indexed in a public restriction tract index is at the option of the holder of the right to enforce it submitted for such indexing, the register shall make, or require the holder of the right to enforce the restriction or order or interest to make, appropriate additions to the tract index.

The maps shall be in such form that they can be readily added to, changed, and reproduced, and shall be a public record, appropriately available for public inspection. If any governmental body, other than a city or town in which the land affected lies, holds a right to enforce a restriction or order or an interest entitled to be indexed in a public restriction tract index for any city or town which has not filed such an index, or if the secretary of environmental affairs or the Massachusetts historical commission or the commissioner of food and agriculture or the director of housing and community development approves a conservation or preservation restriction or agricultural or watershed preservation restriction or affordable housing restriction held by a charitable corporation or trust so entitled, and the city or town does not within one year after written request to the mayor or selectmen file a sufficient map or set of maps for the purpose, the holding governmental body or approving secretary, director or commission may do so.

The registers of deeds, or a majority of them, may from time to time make and amend rules and regulations for administration of public restriction tract indexes, and the provisions of section thirteen A of chapter thirty-six shall not apply thereto. No such rule, regulation or any amendment thereof shall take effect until after it has been approved by the attorney general. New tract indexes may be filed, from time to time, upon compliance with such rules and regulations as may be necessary to assure against omission of prior additions and references still effective.

<http://www.mass.gov/legis/laws/mgl/184-32.htm>

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