



THE FOWWOS NEWS

Newsletter of **FRIENDS OF WEST WINDSOR OPEN SPACE**

Vol. 1, No. 3 • AUTUMN 2000

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FARMLAND PRESERVATION IN NEW JERSEY

One of the ways New Jersey promotes farming in the face of development pressure is through its Farmland Preservation Program. The program allows farmers to keep their land while selling the right to develop it to another party such as the local government. Development rights are usually worth about 80 percent of the land's market value. Land preserved in this way must be kept available for farming.

Land enters the program through a multistep process. First, the owner asks the County Agricultural Board to be included. The County rates the desirability of the property and forwards its selections to the State for consideration. Priority is given to larger farms and those in close proximity to others that have already been

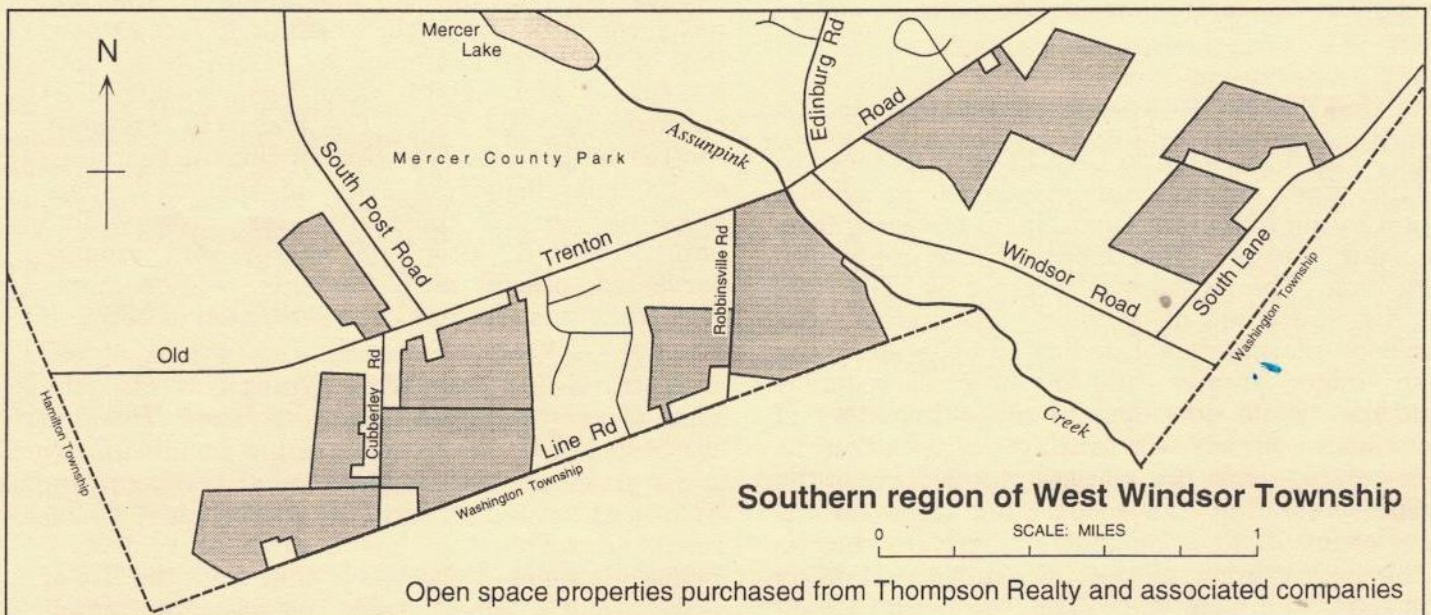
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MAJOR OPEN SPACE PURCHASE

The largest single purchase of open space by West Windsor was approved by the Township Council in August. Ten properties totaling 538 acres in the southern part of the township were purchased from Thompson Realty and its associated companies. The purchase doubles the open space acreage preserved in the Township since the inception of the open space tax in 1993. The total preserved to date is 1,079 acres. The cost of the property was \$22,000 per acre, for a total of nearly \$12M. Reimbursements from the State Green Acres and Farmland Preservation Programs and Mercer County will reduce the cost to the Township to less than \$4M.

At this time, the plan is to have about 64 percent of the new purchase funded through the

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Friends Of West Windsor Open Space

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In Memoriam

Bernt Midland (1927-1998), Founder
Gil Gilmore (1922-1998)
Ron Rogers (1929-1999)

E-mail: ek61@juno.com

Web site: www.princetonol.com/groups/fowwos/

Meetings: First and third Tuesdays at
Town Hall, 7:30 p.m.

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Farmland Preservation, cont.

preserved. Each county can submit up to nine farms to the State for consideration. An appraisal is then made to establish the value of the development rights for the submitted farms.

The State Agricultural Development Committee then ranks all the properties submitted by all the counties. Normally, this is done once a year, although this year it has been done twice. At this point the issue of funding becomes important. Because properties are approved from the top of the ranking list down until funding for a cycle runs out, position on the list is all-important. A major criterion is cost per acre; a lower cost puts the property higher on the list. For this reason, farm owners and municipalities wishing to obtain development rights through the program often apply to the State for less than the appraised value in funding. This is called the "bid-down" process. If the bid-down value does not raise the farm high enough on the list to gain selection in a given year, the farmer may apply again two years later. ☺

FOWWOS WINS DEP AWARD

On June 5 at Atlantic City FOWWOS received the first annual Environmental Excellence Award in the Abundant Open Space Category from the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. The award was received by FOWWOS for "its initiation of a voter referendum that increased the municipal dedicated open space tax to an amount greater than any other New Jersey municipality; its development of an inventory of open space parcels warranting preservation as open space; and its success in bringing the necessary funding and cooperation from various state, county, and municipal and private sources to the preservation of the township's remaining open space and farmland." The Township Council passed a resolution commending FOWWOS on the award at its September 18th meeting. ☺

NEW FOWWOS DIRECTORS CHOSEN

Two new members of the FOWWOS Board of Directors were appointed at the July 18th meeting to replace Bob Bruschi and Jim Ruch who had resigned. The new directors are Rhea Rogers and Ken Carlson.

Rogers is a native of West Windsor. She holds a PhD in anthropology and has worked as an archaeologist and taught at the college level for 12 years. She replaces Jim Ruch as Assistant Secretary. Carlson, a seven-year resident of West Windsor, is a research scientist with Bristol-Myers Squibb. He enjoys cycling, tennis, coaching baseball, and kayaking. ☺

MORE ON OUR BIG TREE(S)

The large swamp white oak tree we reported on in our last issue has been confirmed as the largest or Champion Tree of its species known in New Jersey. A state inspector has confirmed its species (*Quercus bicolor*) and made an informal measurement of its girth, which at 17 feet exceeds that of the listed champion by several feet. Both its spread and height have been measured at approximately 95 feet. The tree was originally spotted by the late Ron Rogers several years ago as he was inspecting some of the open space properties being considered for preservation. Later this fall, after the nearby corn crop is harvested, official measurements will be made. The age of this tree has been estimated at between 250 and 275 years.

It turns out that West Windsor is also the home of another listed Champion Tree. This one has been known for some time, but has just come to our attention. It is a green ash (*Fraxinus pennsylvanica*) located in the Port Mercer area of the Township. This tree has a girth of 17 feet, 2 inches. It seems remarkable that from the list of nearly one-hundred tree species for which champions have been determined, two have been found in West Windsor. ☺

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE:

LIAO-LIN PROPERTY NOW WEST WINDSOR'S

Last July 12 the 29-acre Liao-Lin parcel on North Post Road was officially added to the list of open space properties preserved by West Windsor. In the Township's purchase of this land, FOWWOS acted as the intermediary in a "bargain sale" to the Township. In such a sale, the owners sell the land to a nonprofit organization at less than the market value and donate the difference between that value and the sale price to the nonprofit, which then passes ownership to the Township. This saves the Township money and provides the owners with a tax deduction for the donation.

In addition, both Mercer County and the State Green Acres program will contribute reimbursement funds to the Township for the purchase. About 65 percent of the approximately \$400,000 cost will be reimbursed.

With its purchase, the property becomes a part of the Duck Pond Run greenway, a group of parcels spanning the central and western parts of the Township in the Duck Pond Run watershed. Collectively, these parcels will be known as the Duck Pond Run Greenway and Open Space Preserve. The area is a known habitat of the great horned owl, a species known for its preference for secluded and contiguous forest. In addition to the usual woodland animals found in this part of New Jersey, it is also the home of spotted and snapping turtles.

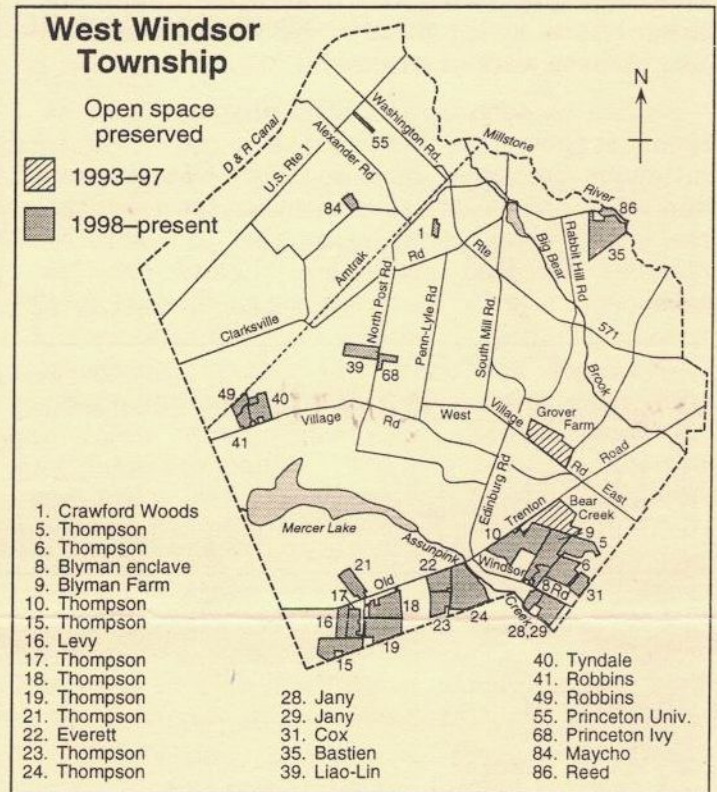
Approximately half the property is under cultivation. The remainder will be available for passive recreation such as hiking, fishing, and wildlife observation. The lands adjacent to the stream constitute a lowland forest buffer, with a dense overstory of sweet gum, red maple, and pin oak between 30 and 40 years old. The understory consists mainly of gray birch, highbush blueberry, willow oak, greenbrier, and white ash. Retention of this forested buffer is an important element in avoiding significant stream water quality degradation.

Public access to the property is provided by an existing gravel road opposite Jacob Drive on North Post Road. Acquisition of this property adds an important link in a greenway across the Township connecting the Delaware and Raritan Canal on the west with the Big Bear Brook to the east.

To honor their contribution to West Windsor's open space preservation effort, the former owners' names will appear on a plaque at the entrance to the property. ☺

UPDATE ON OPEN SPACE ACQUISITIONS

Culminating with the recent approval by the Township Council of the purchase of the 69-acre Bastien property, West Windsor has, in the space of 17 months, committed to acquire and preserve 26 properties as open space. Together with the Grover and Blyman Farms, purchased earlier, a total of 1,079 acres of residentially-zoned land have now been preserved and eliminated from potential development.



The map identifies each property by its number from the West Windsor open space inventory of properties for possible preservation. On the basis of zoning at the time of preservation, the construction of 299 new houses will be avoided. At a rate of 1.5 school-aged children per house, that amounts to an additional 449 students that will not be added to our school system. A potential saving of 7 cents per hundred on the tax rate has been estimated, in addition to the saving on new construction needed to house those students. This has been accomplished with only 40 percent of the inventory acreage having been preserved.

Present plans call for 518 acres of the land to be preserved under the Farmland Preservation Program, with the remaining 561 acres purchased with the help of state and county reimbursement funds. The latter acreage, which will be accessible to the public, is equally divided between environmentally constrained land and land that is open and available to help satisfy West Windsor's future needs for active recreational space. ☺

Major Open Space Purchase, cont.

Farmland Preservation Program. The rest will be purchased outright and be available to the public for recreational use. In either case, the land will remain undeveloped in perpetuity.

The purchase was accomplished mainly through the efforts of the Township Administration and FOWWOS director Bill Benfer, Chairman of the Mayor's Open Space Preservation Task Force, who negotiated the deal with Thompson. Earlier efforts by the State and County to arrange this purchase were unsuccessful.

As can be seen on the map on page 3, these properties give the Township a large block of contiguous preserved land south of Old Trenton Road. Not shown are several other tracts in the area either already owned by the Township or preserved by deed restriction. Zaitz Park is nearby. ☺

UNDERSTORIES

Membership renewal: Reminders will be sent to all FOWWOS members in November urging renewal of their membership and payment of dues for 2001.

Volunteer tree planters needed: Reforestation of a portion of Community Park will take place on October 7 and November 18 from 9:30 a.m. to 3:30 p.m. The project is being directed by the Stony Brook-Millstone Watershed Association. Call Mike Schuit at 799-4868 for details.

Bluebirds at Blyman Farm: The bird boxes made and installed by the Webelos Scouts last spring did indeed attract bluebirds as hoped. The birds were seen using the boxes during the summer.

FOWWOS Caps and T-shirts: These can be purchased for \$10 each from Harley Pickens. Proceeds support the Ron Rogers Arboretum. ☺

To join FOWWOS	Enclose dues check made out to FOWWOS for one of the following memberships:
Send name and address to:	
FOWWOS	Regular (family) \$25.00 per year
P.O. Box 73	Silver \$50.00 " "
Princeton Junction, NJ 08550	Gold \$75.00 " "
Membership dues and contributions are fully tax deductible.	



Address service requested

To: