



THE FOWWOS NEWS

Newsletter of *FRIENDS OF WEST WINDSOR OPEN SPACE*

Vol. 4, No. 2 • SPRING-SUMMER 2003

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SATURDAY ON THE MILLSTONE

The Millstone River forms West Windsor's common border with Plainsboro Township from the D & R Canal to a point just east of Southfield Road, a distance of nearly five miles. The river provides some of our area's most scenic natural views, but few have ever seen them. The problem is that most of this portion of the river can only be seen and appreciated from the river itself, preferably in a kayak.

A couple of weeks ago, FOWWOS trustees Ken Carlson and I (Dick Snedeker) ventured forth on the river to see for ourselves. Our entry point was on Millstone Road just east of the bridge on the West Windsor side. This is on the recently acquired open space property once known as the Yeger tract. It will eventually become a part of the developing Millstone River Trail.

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The Millstone River at the Millstone Road bridge.

WEST WINDSOR'S OPEN SPACE INVENTORY II: THE UNPURCHASED PART

In the last issue we summarized the progress West Windsor has made in acquiring open space properties from the inventory established nearly a decade ago. Acquisition of these properties has not only preserved a large portion of township land, but has also eliminated its future use for housing and the higher tax burdens that typically result. To date, over 1600 acres of undeveloped property have been acquired, or 62 percent of the inventory. But what of the remaining properties? Where are they and when will they be acquired?

Before addressing these questions it is useful to review just what the inventory is and how and why it came about. The inventory is a list of undeveloped properties in the township that meet certain criteria of size and zoning. It was compiled by the planning board in 1994.

Initially, there were 91 properties in the inventory, all of at least five acres. Over the years, eight more—with a few of less than five acres—have been added for a current total of 99. A major benefit of the inventory is that it makes the township eligible for 50-percent reimbursement funding provided by the state Green Acres

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ROUTE-1 BRIDGE PROPOSED FOR CYCLISTS AND PEDESTRIANS

The FOWWOS Recreational Trails Committee and Mayor Hsueh's Bicycle and Pedestrian Task Force, which work closely together, are currently focused on improving bicycle and pedestrian mobility, and making West Windsor a safer place to walk and bicycle. An immediate goal of the task force is the development of a safe way for

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Friends Of West Windsor Open Space

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Meetings: First Tuesday at
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Saturday on the Millstone, cont.

Conditions on the beautiful Saturday were ideal, with the river full from an overnight rain. We worked our way upstream, past the homes of Old Mill Farms on Melville Road, to a point a little beyond the Cranbury Road bridge. On the way it was easy to feel totally cut off from the sometimes busy world of suburban development. We heard no sounds but the birds and the splashing of our paddles. What a treat.

Just before reaching the Cranbury Road bridge we passed under the remains of the bridge on the old "fast line" trolley that until 1937 connected Trenton and New Brunswick. A concrete pier identified it as bridge 4096, built in 1921. Since the trolley ran even before then, the concrete and steel bridge may have replaced an earlier less substantial one. All along the way the only other man-made objects were the occasional birdhouses mounted on poles by the water. We could only guess at their origin. Fallen trees, low-hanging branches, and the occasional beaver lodge, all connected by the silent river, created a sense of being far away from civilization.

On our return trip downstream with the current—easier paddling, but trickier in avoiding small obstacles—we finally saw the blue heron known to frequent the area. She tried to lure us away, but our kayaks remained in the water, and she had to trust that we would not disturb her nest. Of course we never saw it.

We continued downstream to the starting point, and kept going under the Millstone Road bridge to the Amtrak line, where the current accelerates as the river passes through narrow openings under the tracks. Finally, we turned upstream again and reached our starting point after an hour and a half in another space.

Our trip covered 3.9 miles, although the little twists and turns surely accounted for a bit more. Without a doubt, the trip was a revelation—to think this kind of scenery is right in our midst! All we have to do is go and see it. ☺

WWW.FOWWOS.ORG

FOWWOS member David Westbrook has been kind enough to complete an extensive upgrading of our web site. Our new Internet address is www.fowwos.org. In addition to updating all sections, the site now includes our current newsletter *The FOWWOS News* with graphics, a list of our trustees and officers, links to related organizations, articles on the Rogers Arboretum and the Clean Streets Program, and forms and instructions pertaining to our ongoing Bike Contest. We are working to set up an archive of all previous newsletters in the near future. Announcements of upcoming events and timely news will be posted on a regular basis.

The new site can be accessed directly by typing www.fowwos.org on your browser or by going through links at the West Windsor-Plainsboro Today of Princeton Online sites, as before. You can now reach Mike Schuit, our president, at president@fowwos.org.

We welcome your suggestions for additional content or features. Please send your comments about the site to Paul Murphy at webmaster@fowwos.org. Check it out and tell us what you think! ☺

FEDERAL FUNDS FOR GROVERS MILL POND

On July 8, Representative Rush Holt presented Mayor Hsueh with a ceremonial check for \$500,000, symbolizing a contribution by the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers toward the cleanup of Grovers Mill Pond. The money will be used to help restore the pond to good health and attractiveness. Concern over its poor condition has been voiced for over 40 years. Yet until Mayor Hsueh made its cleanup a priority, little had been done to remove the layers of silt and vegetation that clog its flow and produce the foul odors that discourage its use for recreation. How and when the money will be used is not yet known, but it's an important step in the right direction. ☺

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE: WYETH PROPERTY TESTING

BY GUEST COMMENTATOR BETH FEEHAN

Many thanks to the Stony Brook Millstone Watershed Association for their diligence and attention to the state Department of Environmental Protection testing on the Wyeth property, formerly owned by American Cyanamid and more recently occupied by BASF.

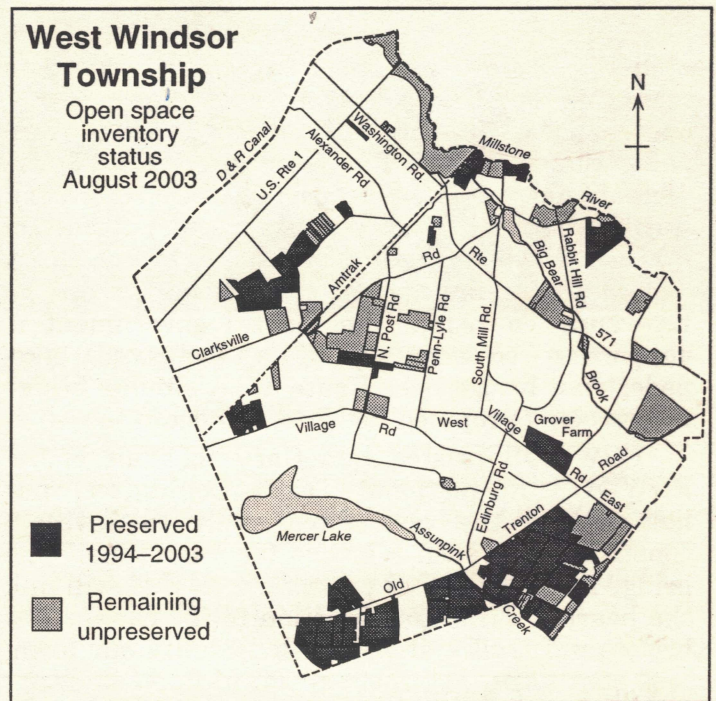
Development of this 614-acre parcel at the intersection of Clarksville and Quaker Bridge Roads is now in the planning phase. It will be developed by the Rouse Company, known for projects such as Baltimore's Inner Harbor. The association's analysis of DEP pesticide data has played an important role in the ongoing discussion of past and future use of the property. FOWWOS greatly appreciates the expertise and willingness of the association to comment on this important matter facing residents of West Windsor and surrounding communities, ensuring that public health is at the forefront of any decisions being made about this parcel of land. ☺

Open Space Inventory, cont.

program as an incentive for communities to preserve their open space. The state requires such a list as evidence that a community has an open space preservation program, and unless a property is on the list, the state will not provide the funds. With Mercer County putting up another 15 percent, the township's share toward the preservation of an open space property is only 35 percent. In some cases, contributions by FOWWOS or other nonprofits can reduce that amount still further.

All but three of the 99 properties are residentially zoned, and only one of those might have been commercially viable had its location not made it unattractive to commercial developers. Much of the preserved farmland, especially the large area south of Old Trenton Road, is also of little potential interest for commercial development since it is well beyond the sewered area of the township. Some of the land in this area has been preserved under the state Farmland Preservation Program. Thus the purchase of the inventory properties and their preservation as either open space or farmland has had little if any impact on the township's potential for development of commercially zoned acreage, of which there is still a substantial amount.

What of the inventory properties that remain unpreserved? Fifty properties, comprising 990 acres now remain in the inventory (see map). Three of these are of substantial size, amounting



to a total of 371 acres. Six of the others are less than five acres each. Many owners of the remaining parcels have indicated they are unwilling to sell in the foreseeable future, some because they are in residence on the property, others because they have alternative plans for their land, including the development of a small number of homes. The impact on the tax burden of such development of these acres is likely to be small, however, since many of the properties would support only a few homes, and a substantial fraction of the acreage cannot be developed at all because of environmental constraints.

Of the three largest properties remaining, the Baker Farm on Old Trenton Road is the most likely to support a significant amount of housing. The impact that such housing might have will depend on what type is built. The planning board is currently considering several alternatives. The other two large properties are dominated by wetlands and other environmental conditions that render them unlikely to support more than a few homes, if any at all.

It is noteworthy that a significant portion of the inventory has already been acquired and that a substantial benefit to the township has been achieved in terms of open space preservation and reduction of the potential tax burden of continued residential growth. Nevertheless, there is still progress to be made in seeking the preservation of many of the remaining properties, if not because of their development potential, because of the quality-of-life benefits derived from their preservation as open space. ☺

Route-1 Bridge, cont.

bicyclists and pedestrians to cross Route 1. For a cyclist or pedestrian, there are no safe ways to cross this road that splits our town. For access to open space, it prevents many cyclists and pedestrians from safely reaching one of the recreational jewels in our area—the Delaware and Raritan Canal. West Windsor residents east of Route 1 have no option but to drive there. A solution to a similar problem has been found in Lawrence Township: the federal government is supporting construction of a dedicated bike/pedestrian bridge over Route 1. A similar bridge is now being proposed for West Windsor.

FOWWOS trustee Ken Carlson, chair of the FOWWOS Recreational Trails Committee, has helped lead the task force effort to advocate construction of such a bridge for some time. The bridge is envisioned as part of a trail that will link the heart of Princeton Junction to the canal. The bridge and trail system will help unify our town,

link West Windsor to Princeton, and allow people to commute by bicycle. The task force has lobbied for its inclusion as part of the improvements to Route 1 that accompany the Penns Neck Environmental Impact Statement (EIS). They have succeeded in getting a feasibility study for the bridge into the draft EIS report. If the study concludes the bridge is feasible, and there's local support, then it will be constructed with federal funds.

The task force circulated a sign-on support letter that allowed local organizations and elected officials to show their support of construction. By the July 31 end of the comment period, representatives of 13 local organizations, including FOWWOS and the D&R Canal Commission, had signed, together with 19 local elected officials, including Mayor Hsueh, both Princeton mayors, all members of the West Windsor Township Council, and Representative Rush Holt. An on-line petition for individuals to sign garnered over 420 signatures. ☺

To join FOWWOS

Send name and address to:

FOWWOS
P.O. Box 73
West Windsor, NJ 08550

Enclose dues check made out to FOWWOS for one of the following memberships:

Regular (family)	\$25.00 per year
Silver	\$50.00 " "
Gold	\$75.00 " "

Membership dues and contributions are fully tax deductible.

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