



THE FOWWOS NEWS

Newsletter of *FRIENDS OF WEST WINDSOR OPEN SPACE*

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TWO PROJECTS POSTPONED UNTIL 2007

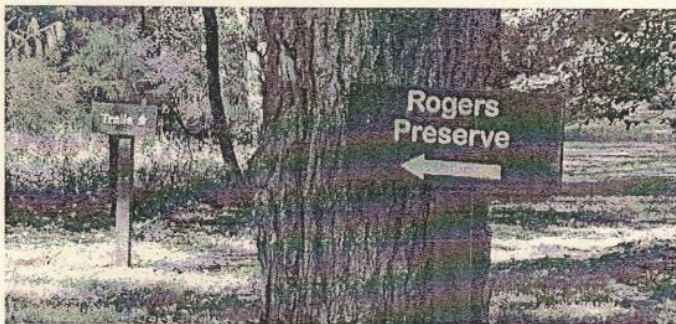
Two major rehabilitation projects that were expected to be accomplished in 2006 have been postponed until the new year. These are the dredging and restoration of Grovers Mill Pond and the resurfacing of Millstone Road. In conjunction with the latter, a paved path from the parking lot at the entrance to the Millstone River Trail down to the new boat launch area on the Millstone River will be constructed.

The dredging of Grovers Mill Pond will be the final step in the three-part rehabilitation of the Grovers Mill area that began in 1993 with

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TRAIL SIGNS INSTALLED

New signs have been installed that mark the entrances and key intersections of the Rogers Preserve and Millstone River Trails. Both trails are in the Grovers Mill area. The Rogers Preserve Trail, which has two branches, can be entered from Clarksville Road, Landing Lane, or Berkshire Drive. The Millstone River Trail, also with two branches, connects Millstone Road with Melville Road. Its lower branch overlooks the Millstone River.



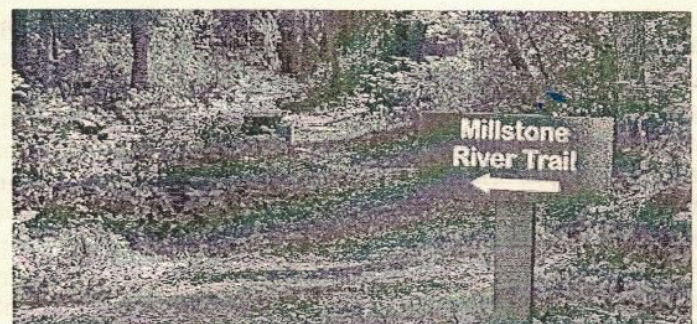
NOVEMBER REFERENDUM WILL PROPOSE FURTHER REDUCTION OF OPEN SPACE TAX

The West Windsor Township Council and Administration have agreed to ask voters in a referendum on November 7 to approve a reduction of the open space tax from the present 5 cents per hundred dollars of assessed value to 3 cents per hundred. Now that the results of the recent property reevaluation are known, it has been estimated that the revenue needed by the township to continue its open space acquisition program will be available with the 3-cent rate.

In the referendum, voters will also be asked to approve an increase in the percentage of the tax revenue that can be spent for development and maintenance of the preserved properties. At present up to 10 percent of the revenue can be spent for this purpose. The referendum will seek to increase the amount to 25 percent.

As a result of a referendum held last November, a reduction of the rate from the original value of 7 cents per hundred to 5 cents was approved with the stipulation that a new referendum could be held this year if it was felt that a further

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Friends Of West Windsor Open Space

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November Referendum, cont.

adjustment was necessary based on the reevaluation results. It was also stipulated that if no referendum were held this year, or if the new referendum were to be disapproved by the voters, the rate would revert to its original value of 7 cents. The 5-cent rate approved last November went into effect last month. If the 3-cent rate is approved in November, it will go into effect next August (2007).

The FOWWOS trustees support the rate reduction to 3 cents, but oppose the increase in the development and maintenance percentage (see separate story). ☞

DEVELOPMENT AND MAINTENANCE OF PRESERVED OPEN SPACE

Much has been said recently about the issue of development and maintenance of preserved open space. In fact, in the November 7 referendum on the open space tax, voters will be asked to approve an increase in the portion of the tax revenue that can be used for such development and maintenance. Since 1998, that portion has been set at 10 percent. The referendum proposes an increase of this portion to 25 percent.

The principal impetus for the increase is the desire by several organized recreation groups for the township to develop additional facilities for their activities, which include youth sports programs. According to the terms of the 1998 referendum that created the 10-percent limitation, money from the tax revenue can be used for this purpose as long as the improvements apply to land that was itself purchased with the tax proceeds. In the case of major facilities, it is also permissible to use the tax proceeds to supplement the township's capital budget, which, in the absence of open space tax revenue, would normally be used for this purpose. Maintenance of such facilities also qualifies as a permitted use of these funds.

An increase of from 10 to 25 percent is substantial, and it is the FOWWOS trustees' view that this will take too much away from the revenue share available for purchase of further open space. There are still several dozen properties on the qualified list of potential preservation candidates that have not been acquired, and which if developed for residential housing will inevitably add to the township's tax burden. Since the last increase of the open space tax rate to 7 cents in 1998, land values have risen dramatically, so the purchasing power of the tax revenue has been reduced accordingly. A further reduction resulting from an increase in the development and maintenance share will only make it more difficult to acquire new properties.

It is important to realize that the West Windsor open space acquisition program has been extremely effective in bringing the runaway development of the 80s and 90s to a virtual halt. Since 1998, there have been no applications for the development of sizable subdivisions of single-family homes in the township—not one. This is due entirely to the fact that the properties that might have been developed have been taken off the market through their acquisition as open space. This has resulted in substantial savings for the taxpayers of West Windsor.

Maintenance of preserved open space has been widely misunderstood. Most open space properties require no maintenance at all. This is true of woodlands, wetlands, and most open lands not under cultivation. These lands are intended to remain in their passive, natural state as wildlife habitat or for natural reforestation. In fact, of the over 1600 acres preserved to date, only 12 acres have been subject to any maintenance at all. If a property is developed or improved, of course, then there is the need for maintenance. But this applies to only a small fraction of the total. Preserved farmland is automatically maintained through its cultivation by the farmer. ☞

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE

INDIVIDUAL PARCEL PLANS (IPPs) RECOMMENDED FOR PRESERVED PROPERTIES

The FOWWOS trustees have recommended to the township that individual parcel plans (IPPs) be developed for many of the 42 open space properties acquired since the program began eight years ago. The only exceptions would be the 24 properties that are currently farmed. For each of the remaining 18 parcels, a plan for its ultimate use should be drafted at this time. In some cases, the plan will call for development of the property for active recreational use. Other properties will remain in their existing natural state and serve for passive use.

At an August meeting, FOWWOS trustees Ron Slinn, Bob Murray, and Harley Pickens met with Township Administrator Chris Marion and other township officials to discuss the IPP idea. It was agreed that FOWWOS would take the lead in drafting the plans and that the township would then review them. Through a series of meetings, the group would finalize the plan for each property. This process will provide a badly needed systematic approach to the disposition of the preserved open space properties.

The development of each IPP will follow a five-step process: (1) review of the 2003 report of the Open Space Utilization Task Force, (2) decision on whether the property's use should be classified as passive, active, or a combination, (3) set priority for utilization of the specific property, (4) determine a budget for accomplishing the necessary improvements to the property, if any, and (5) continue joint meetings of FOWWOS and the township as required to complete each IPP.

By initiating this process, FOWWOS has demonstrated its continuing commitment to the highly successful and beneficial open space preservation program in West Windsor. ☺

OBJECTIONABLE SIGNS AT 9/11 MEMORIAL REMOVED

Earlier this summer, the township installed two large highway-style signs next to the 9/11 Memorial at the Rogers Arboretum. The signs called attention to the township's leash law and its enforcement. A number of people objected to the presence of the signs so close to the memorial, which many feel should be kept free of such ugly and intrusive notices. In response, the township promised to install smaller, more tasteful signs, and to remove the objectionable ones as soon as possible. Finally, just in time for the fifth-

anniversary commemoration of 9/11, the signs were removed.

The installation of the signs grew out of an incident several months ago in which someone was observed allowing his dog to swim in one of the reflecting ponds. When told that dogs were not allowed in the ponds, the owner stated that since there was no notice to that effect, he thought it should be allowed. It was pointed out to no avail that the ponds have plastic liners that can be easily punctured by dogs' claws. Unfortunately, despite the signs, others have since been observed allowing their pets access to the ponds.

It is hoped that the new signs will have the desired effect and that pet owners will show responsibility and proper respect for the memorial and control their dogs when passing nearby. Pet owners should also note that in the near future the township will open a fenced dog exercise area at Community Park. ☺

MANAGEMENT PLAN PROPOSED FOR THE ROGERS PRESERVE

FOWWOS trustee Ron Slinn has proposed a plan for the management of the Rogers Preserve. If adopted by the township, the plan could serve as a model for the care of other preserved open space properties having similar characteristics.

The Rogers Preserve covers 12.6 acres of woodlands in the Grovers Mill area west of Clarksville Road. The plan would also apply to the adjacent 9.6-acre parcel along Big Bear Brook, also owned by the township. These parcels are characterized by mature native hardwood forest, with some conifers remaining from the one-time Rogers ornamental tree farm. The plan includes the following elements:

1. Develop the preserve's potential as a passive recreational woodland.
2. Maintain the existing walking trails annually or as needed to keep them passable.
3. Provide the public with a pocket-sized map of the preserve and its trails.
4. Recognize the wildfire risk to the woodlands and neighboring homes during dry periods.
5. Prune dead limbs from the open-spaced white pines to a height no greater than one-third the tree's height.
6. Remove dead and suppressed trees from the area of the open-spaced white pines.
7. Since the pruned limbs represent a fire hazard themselves, remove them from the site.

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Two Projects Postponed, cont.

improvements to Van Nest Park. The second step, the reconstruction of Grovers Mill Dam, was completed earlier this year. The dredging project is under the direction of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers. The plan calls for the removal of the heavy layers of nutrient-rich silt from the bottom that have caused the pond to become choked with surface vegetation for many years. This year, of course, because the pond was lowered temporarily during the dam reconstruction, the vegetation has been less noticeable. Similar short-lived effects have been noted in the past whenever the pond has been lowered for other reasons. But periodic lowering of the pond is not an ecologically sound method of avoiding the weed cover, since it causes other undesirable effects such as harm to the pond fishery. The silt also causes poor circulation in the pond, which accounts for its poor water quality and stagnation in some areas.

The Corps of Engineers expects to have the necessary funding in place by early next year. It has been estimated that the project will cost approximately \$4.6M. The township's \$1.7M share of this has already been allocated. The plan has gained the approval of the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection and the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service. &

Management Plan, cont.

8. Consider options for restoring problem areas with large concentrations of dead trees.
9. Discourage neighboring property owners from depositing yard waste on the preserve.
10. Consider transplanting to other township sites of large conifers that may soon be suppressed by larger nearby trees.
11. Remove fallen limbs and mow grassy areas in the regions with mature native hardwoods.
12. Review this plan every five years. &

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