



THE FOWWOS NEWS

Newsletter of *FRIENDS OF WEST WINDSOR OPEN SPACE*

Vol. 8, No. 1 • WINTER 2007

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GROVERS MILL POND DREDGING WILL START THIS YEAR

After more than four decades of planning, debate, and on-again, off-again project proposals, the rehabilitation of Grovers Mill Pond is set to begin later this summer, probably at the beginning of August. In fact, the preliminary work to prepare a lower portion of adjacent Community Park to receive the spoil from the dredging of the pond is set to begin in June.

Grovers Mill Pond was originally impounded about 250 years ago when an earthen dam was constructed across Big Bear Brook at the site of the grist mill operated by Jacob Bergen, one of the earliest Dutch settlers of the area. Today, the 37-acre pond is, with the exception of the recently impounded Lake Mercer, the only one of a dozen sizable lakes in west-central New Jersey that has never been restored. As a result, over half its original depth is filled with silt. Over the years, the silt, which contains nutrients from farm runoff, has supported the unchecked growth of aquatic vegetation that has badly damaged the pond's ecology and made it a poor habitat for fish and other aquatic wildlife.

When the water lilies and other plants are in full growth during warm weather, the pond's value as a recreational resource is badly compromised, since much of its surface is inhospitable even to kayaks and canoes. When surface vegetation begins to decay in the summer heat, foul odors permeate the area.

The restoration will involve hydraulic dredging to remove much of the silt and produce new bottom contours that will provide a much improved habitat for fish and amphibians. The

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TRUSTEES OFFER COMMENTS IN TRANSIT VILLAGE DEBATE

The FOWWOS board of trustees has submitted a detailed account of its reactions to the four Princeton Junction area redevelopment proposals to Hillier Architecture, the firm hired by the township to guide the planning and construction of the project.

The FOWWOS account addresses six areas of concern: (1) the status of wetlands within the redevelopment area, (2) the proposed development of a portion of the "Sarnoff woods" in three of the plans, (3) the need to preserve proposed greenbelt areas, (4) the possibility of using the transfer-of-development-rights (TDR) process to preserve the Sarnoff woods in exchange for denser development elsewhere, (5) the desirability of keeping open space areas contiguous with one another, and (6) the location of an environmental education center within the open space area.

The trustees pointed out that wetlands are areas that under normal circumstances cannot be developed, so it is misleading to show them on the plans as if to imply their preservation is a special attribute of the plan. They have to be preserved anyway.

The Sarnoff woods cover a large area north and west of the railroad, and bounded by the Millstone River on the east. These woods were established by Sarnoff's predecessor on the site, Radio Corporation of America (RCA). Most of the trees were planted on open land in the 1940's and 50's. Today, they constitute an attractive wooded oasis in the Princeton Junction area that FOWWOS believes should be preserved with no commercial development.

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Friends Of West Windsor Open Space

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The newsletter *The FOWWOS News* is produced three times a year by Dick Snedeker and Alison Miller, co-editors
FOWWOS is a nonprofit organization incorporated under Section 501(c)(3) of the Internal Revenue Code, E.I.N. 22-3419086

Transit Village Debate, cont.

One incentive that can be used to assure preservation of land in its natural state is the process of transfer-of-development-rights (TDR). In such a case, the owner of developable property A can sell the development rights for that property to the owner of property B, who is then allowed to increase the degree of development on property B. The first owner gains financially for keeping property A undeveloped, and the second owner benefits from the greater development potential on property B. The FOWWOS trustees believe this process should be considered in the effort to preserve the Sarnoff woods.

The West Windsor greenbelt consists of natural, largely wooded areas that in most cases follow the natural stream corridors in the township. These areas provide a buffer along the streams within which development is either discouraged or prohibited. There are two greenbelt categories: "proposed" and "designated." Proposed greenbelt areas are chosen by the township to provide continuous buffers along the waterways and to provide continuity of such areas, including upland forests, across the township. Within these areas, although property owners are asked to limit development, the township has no legal means to enforce such prohibition. However, if a property owner agrees to have part of the property become "designated" greenbelt, then the township can enforce a prohibition against development in that area. FOWWOS would like to make sure that the greenbelt areas within the redevelopment zone are given proper status and treated accordingly.

Despite the desire to keep the Sarnoff woods free of commercial development, FOWWOS does support the idea of establishing an environmental education center somewhere in that area. Not only would that use take up minimal space, it would also be open to the public and easily accessible via adjacent Washington Road.

Funding for such a center has already been committed by the developers of The Renaissance, the new age-restricted housing development on the former Baker farm on Old Trenton Road.

The FOWWOS trustees will continue to monitor the development of plans for the transit village area to make sure they reflect the FOWWOS mission of supporting the township in preserving open space to the greatest extent possible. ☺

PROGRESS IN TRAIL DEVELOPMENT

The joint trail-building effort of FOWWOS and the West Windsor Bicycle and Pedestrian Alliance continues, with new progress reported on trails at both the Rogers and Millstone River Preserves.

At the Millstone River Preserve, volunteers have met several times this spring to build a mile of new trails on the former Gunther and Astura properties off JoAnne Street. This location offers beautiful views of the Millstone River and Big Bear Brook. Assisting in the work were members of the WW-P High School North cross-country team, which uses the trails for its workouts. Future amenities here will include trail markers and benches. The trails may be reached from the Millstone River Preserve parking lot on Millstone Road. The parking lot now boasts a brand new kiosk built by Boy Scout Ryan Shreves for his Eagle Scout project. The kiosk will display a map of the preserve and its trails, as well as information on the flora and fauna of the area.

At the Rogers Preserve, Girl Scout Troop 600 continues its work to improve the trails. They have blazed a new connecting trail, cleared winter debris from the existing trails, and re-edged them where necessary. They are currently working on trail markers in the form of wooden posts with the trail names carved into the wood. Special thanks are due FOWWOS trustees Ron Slinn and Ken Carlson for their guidance in this work. ☺

PRESIDENT'S MESSAGE A TRIBUTE TO TED

Recently, central New Jersey, if not the entire state, lost a friend to all who cherish the natural wonders of our garden state. Edmund "Ted" Stiles had a strong attachment to forests. Indeed, he saw all parts of these magnificent ecosystems as natural treasures. From his devotion to the natural world came his desire to preserve land. At first, he became a student of land preservation techniques. He then developed his skills and expertise until he became the irrefutable champion of land preservation. We are reminded of the important ways he helped FOWWOS as it started a decade ago, and how he promoted our land preservation efforts and supported our funding requests to the county.

It is with a strong sense of admiration and appreciation that the trustees of FOWWOS thank Ted posthumously for his service to us and the citizens of our township. Many will never know how important Ted was to our community . . . but FOWWOS will never forget. ☺

REFORESTATION: A SLOW PROCESS TWO EXAMPLES IN WEST WINDSOR

Reforestation is the process of renewing the growth of forest trees on land that has long been cleared for cultivation. While much of the eastern part of the United States was once covered by dense forest, the demands of agriculture and the need for timber over more than three centuries have left little of the original native growth today. But, according to the USDA Forest Service, reforestation in New Jersey in recent years has resulted in an *increase* in the land covered by forest. This is partly due to the reduction in land used for agriculture and partly due to increased



The former Liao-Lin property on North Post Rd. The attempt in the Fall of 2001 to reforest the open field in the foreground was unsuccessful. Mainly because of dry weather, virtually none of the young trees survived on this part of the property.

public land ownership, resulting from the proliferation of advocacy groups such as FOWWOS.

Reforestation can occur naturally or with human intervention. In either case it is a slow process, with perhaps a century or more needed for long-lived native tree species to become predominant. There is a certain element of luck, as well. In West Windsor, as shown in the photographs below, there are two cases that illustrate what can happen.

On North Post Road, an attempt was made in 2001 to reforest the open portions—about 15 acres—of the former Liao-Lin property. The Stony Brook Millstone Watershed Association along with FOWWOS and the Boy Scouts cooperated in planting hundreds of seedling trees encased in plastic sheaths to protect them from deer. Unfortunately, because of a prolonged dry period following the planting, virtually none of the seedlings survived on the front portion of the property and very few on the rear portion. Today, the property looks much the same as it did six years ago.

In contrast, Sunrise Park, on Penn-Lyle Road, has undergone substantial regrowth of trees simply by being left alone. Here, over the past 15 years or so, new trees have become established to the point where some reach over 10 feet in height. As is typical with natural reforestation, the new trees are species that grow easily in the particular area and which may be relatively short lived, such as the ornamental flowering pears seen there in great numbers. Other species that can take hold early are sweet gum, wild cherry, red maple, and black locust. It may take decades for the beech, oak, and other longer-lived species to bring a mature native forest back to Sunrise Park, but local environmentalists will be watching with interest. ☺



Sunrise Park on Penn-Lyle Rd. Natural reforestation of this site has resulted in substantial coverage by easily propagated species. The fast-growing ornamental pear trees seen here are one of the predominant varieties.

Grovers Mill Pond, cont.

weed-free pond will then become an attractive site for recreational fishing and boating.

The project is under the direction of the U.S. Army Corps of Engineers, which has developed the plan with the guidance and approval of the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service and the New Jersey Department of Environmental Protection. All the necessary permits for the work have now been issued, and the funding, including township and federal contributions, has been approved. The total cost of the project is estimated at approximately \$4.98M, of which the township will contribute \$1.49M.

Some earlier plans were based on dry excavation of the pond to remove the silt. Although somewhat less expensive than hydraulic dredging, this method was ruled out because of the need to drain the pond for an extended period,

thus severely damaging the resident aquatic wildlife population. Hydraulic dredging does not require removal of the water, and can be timed to avoid critical life-cycle periods. It is expected that if the August start is achieved, the project can be completed by the end of October. ☺

TRUSTEE BOARD CHANGES PROPOSED

A proposal to reduce the number of trustees on the FOWWOS board from 15 to 12 will be voted upon at the May meeting. If approved, the proposal would also change the requirement for a quorum from one-third of the trustees (five) to a simple majority (seven). Under the new plan, the president would only vote on action items to break a tie. The current board as listed on page 2 constitutes full membership under the new plan. Four trustee positions will be subject to renewal at each annual meeting. ☺

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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