

The benefits of maintaining Roger Sherman's Clover Hill Farm (the former Country Club of Woodbridge) as open space

Woodbridge, Connecticut

March 24, 2022



This PowerPoint was developed by the Woodbridge Land Trust and the Woodbridge Park Association as a source of information for the people of Woodbridge, Connecticut.

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Woodbridge, CT 06525

Woodbridge Park Association
PO Box 3883
Woodbridge, CT 06525

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The offer from the Woodbridge Land Trust and Woodbridge Park Association

On November 30, 2021, the Woodbridge Land Trust and Woodbridge Park Association jointly submitted a proposal to the Town of Woodbridge Board of Selectmen.

They offered to purchase a Grant of Conservation Restriction on the former Country Club of Woodbridge (aka The Historic Roger Sherman Farm) for \$250,000.

The offer excluded a 10-acre development parcel around the current club house, parking, and tennis courts.

The offer was voted down by the Board of Selectmen

- The WLT and WPA hope to bring it back again at a later date

Woodbridge Land Trust, Inc.
P.O. Box 3699
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P.O. Box 3883
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November 30, 2021

Board of Selectmen
Town of Woodbridge, Connecticut
11 Meeting House Lane
Woodbridge, CT 06525

DEC 01 2021


Re: Offer to purchase Grant of Conservation Restriction
Country Club of Woodbridge (Historic Roger Sherman Farm)

To the members of the Town of Woodbridge Board of Selectmen:

The Woodbridge Land Trust, Inc. (WLT), and Woodbridge Park Association, Inc. (WPA) hereby offer to purchase for the amount of Two Hundred Fifty Thousand dollars (\$250,000), a Grant of Conservation Restriction (GCR) on the property known as the Country Club of Woodbridge (a.k.a. the Historic Roger Sherman Farm). Said offer excludes the approximate 10 acre development parcel depicted in the shaded area on the map attached as Appendix A. The conveyance of the GCR allows for the maintenance of the agricultural soils and grasses, and of the walking trails over the existing golf cart paths for passive recreation and public enjoyment.

If this offer to purchase is accepted by the Town of Woodbridge, a formal contract will be prepared and signed by all parties within 30 days of the execution hereof.



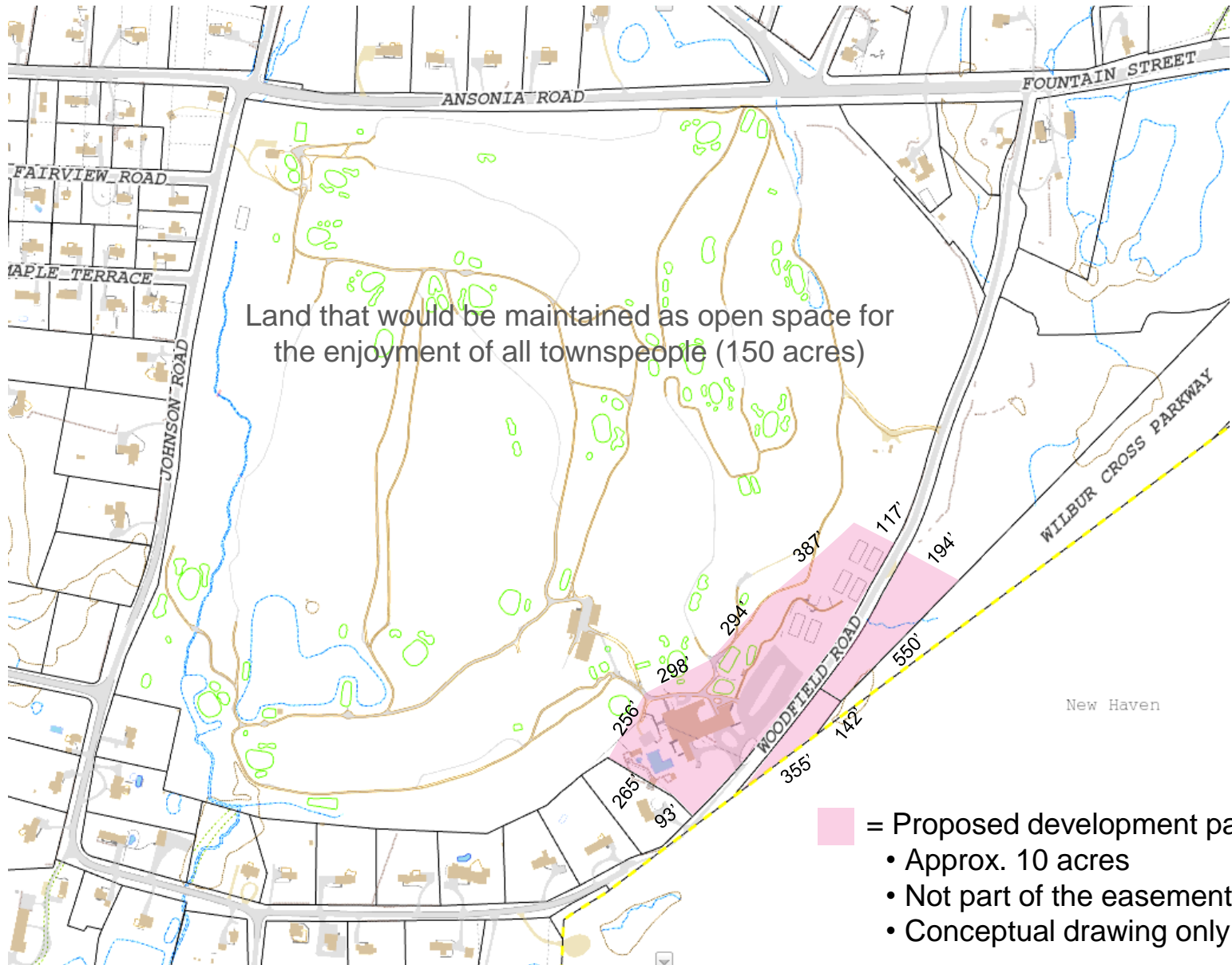
Bryan Pines,
WLT President
duly authorized



Christopher Dickerson,
WPA President
duly authorized

cc: Beth Heller, First Selectman
Sheila McCreven, Deputy First Selectman
Joseph J. Crisco, Jr.
Paul Kuriakose
David Lober
David Vogel

The map that accompanied the WLT/WPA offer



A Grant of Conservation Restriction explained



A conservation easement (also known as a conservation restriction or agreement) is a voluntary, legal agreement between a landowner and a land trust or government agency, that:

- Permanently limits uses of the land in order to protect its conservation values
- Allows landowners to continue to own and use the land, and they can also sell it or pass it on to heirs (the easement stays in force)



A conservation easement on the Roger Sherman Farm would allow for:

- The maintenance of agricultural soils and grasses
- Walking trails for passive recreation and use by the people of Woodbridge for public enjoyment
- The town to still sell the land along with the conservation easement
- Revenue to be generated from the 10-acre parcel



Conservation easements are common in Woodbridge, and across the state. For instance, the Woodbridge Land Trust has easements on 14 town properties including:

- Massaro Farm on Ford Road (57 acres)
- The Alegi athletic fields on Pease Road (40 acres)
- The Elderslie tract on Peck Hill Road (198 acres)
- As well as Townline Farm on Baldwin Road (86 acres) which is privately held land

A mockup of the Arbor Haven proposal: 145 dwellings



■
145 dwellings

■
Land to be deeded back to the town, land that, in large measure, is impervious rocky land poorly suited for development or recreational purposes

~
Public trails through backyards have resulted in encroachment challenges in other Woodbridge developments

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Roger Sherman owned the farm from 1766 to 1773

Roger Sherman (1721 – 1793) was the only founder to sign all four of the founding documents⁽¹⁾ and he played a significant role in the drafting of each of them.

He served in the Connecticut state legislature, and as Connecticut's representative to the Continental Congress.

He purchased the farm in 1766 during the time he was mayor of New Haven

- The previous owner was Captain John Beecher (who descended from the original New Haven colonists)



The farm could be tied to its history with a plaque for visitors with a link to website historical information and recognition of this historic aspect as a part of the town.

(1) The Articles of Association, The Articles of Confederation, The Declaration of independence, and the U.S. Constitution.

The farm has a rich history of ownership

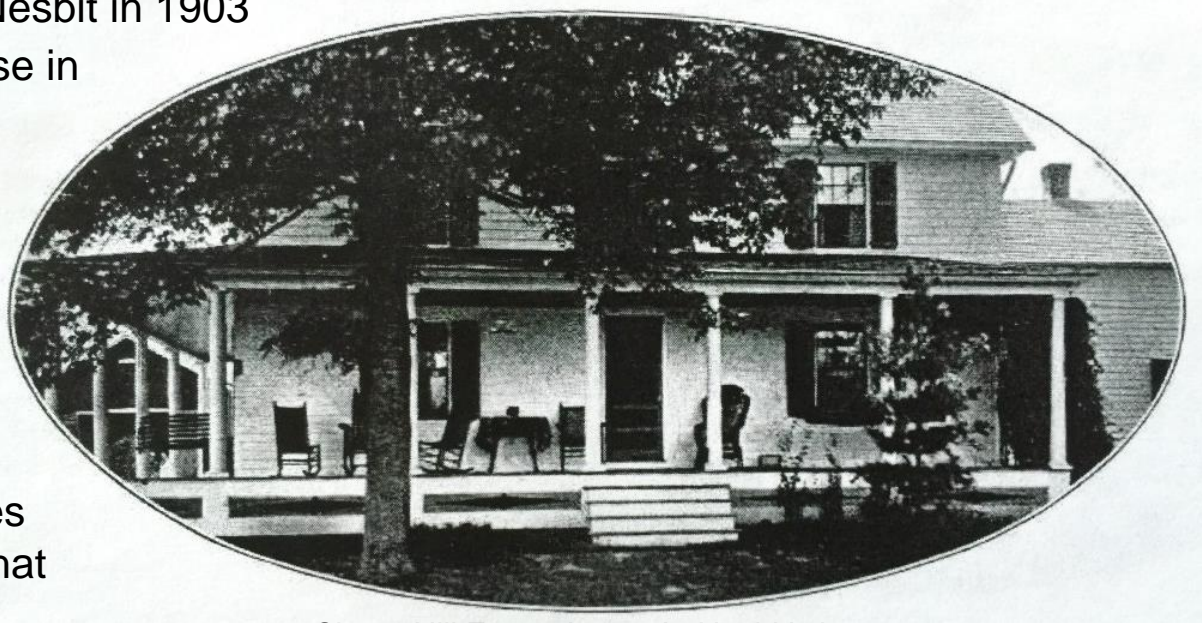
The Farmhouse was built between 1745 – 1750 by Captain John Beecher. The farm and farmhouse was purchased by Roger Sherman in 1766. It was then:

- Purchased by James Abraham Hillhouse in 1773
- Given by Widow Hillhouse, in 1801, to nephew James Hillhouse
- Purchased by Timothy Fowler in 1835
- Purchased by James L. Nesbit in 1903
- Developed as a golf course in 1931 and 1935.

The club thrived until World War II, then closed.

After the war, a group of 100 men financed the revival of the country club.

One of the founding principles was to have a country club that was open to all.



Clover Hill Farm, James L. Nesbit's home

The Amity and Woodbridge Historical Society has established a subcommittee to research the history and has established contact with the Sherman Historical Society in Sherman CT that is working on a "Roger Sherman Trail" through the state.

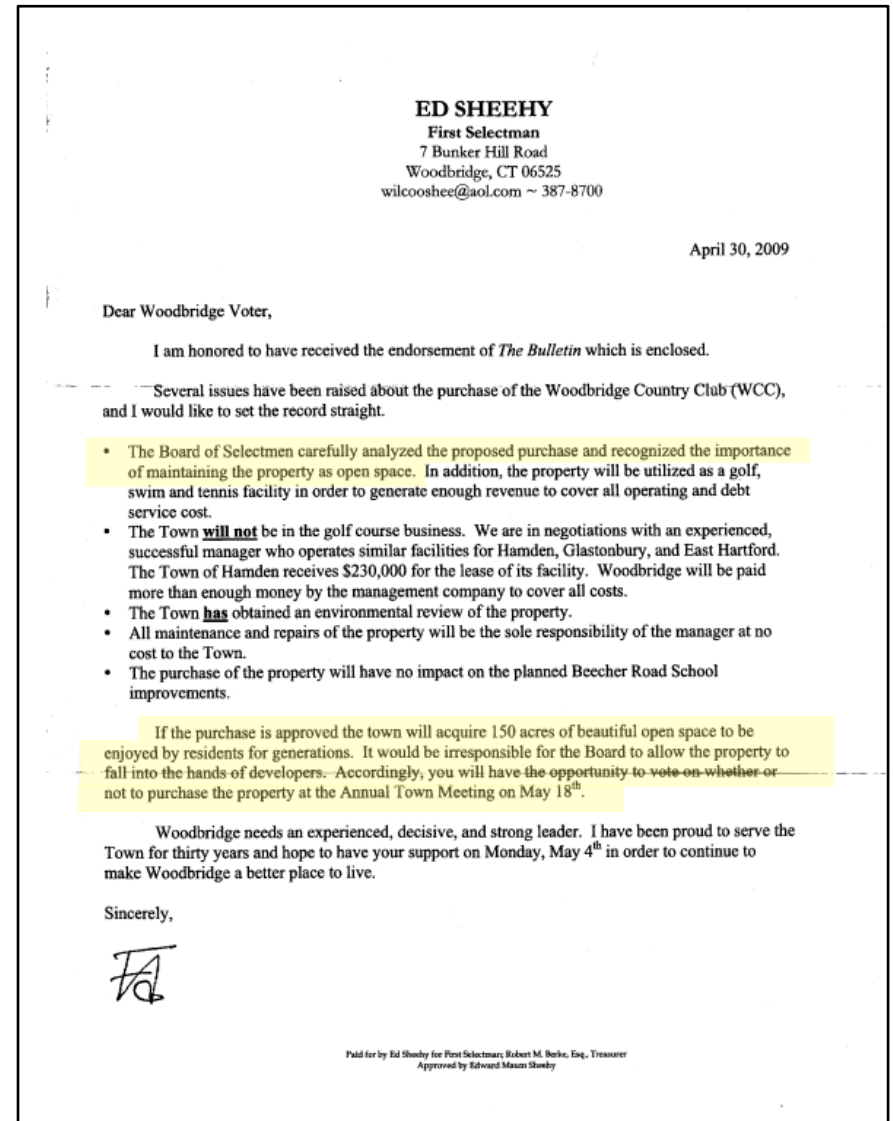
The Town of Woodbridge purchased the property in 2009

Ed Sheehy, First Selectman of Woodbridge at the time, sent this letter to all Woodbridge voters on April 30, 2009, seeking support for his re-election and for the upcoming vote to purchase the Woodbridge Country Club, promising that the land would be preserved as open space:

“The Board of Selectmen carefully analyzed the proposed purchase and recognized the importance of maintaining the property as open space.”

“If the purchase is approved the town will acquire 150 acres of beautiful open space to be enjoyed by residents for generations. It would be irresponsible for the Board to allow the property to fall into the hands of developers.”

Sheehy was re-elected by a wide margin, and a few weeks later the voters overwhelmingly approved the purchase of the property at the 2009 Annual Town Meeting. The sale was finalized on August 28, 2009.



Previous efforts to develop the property have been opposed by the townspeople



A proposal to develop the property by Toll Brothers was defeated in a town referendum by a 2:1 margin

Another development proposal by Toll Brothers was abandoned in the face of overwhelming opposition from the townspeople

A proposal from Brian St. Pierre / InSite was also abandoned in the face of town opposition

A present-day aerial picture of the property



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Multiple water bodies support biodiversity and healthy ecological function



These water bodies are:

- Important sources of food and water for wildlife
- Breeding grounds for amphibians, reptiles, and fish
- Contributors to biodiversity
- Important for reduction in stormwater runoff, soil erosion, and flooding



Early successional habitats on the land provide critical benefits



State and Federal agencies are working in tandem to incentivize the establishment and maintenance of these natural communities. Woodbridge does not have much early successional habitat—this property is therefore playing a critical role in meeting an ecological need.

Early successional habitats are under-represented natural communities that provide critical ecological and societal benefits

They have vigorously growing grasses, shrubs, and trees which provide excellent food and cover for wildlife and are critical for healthy pollinator populations.

These include grasslands, old fields, and young forests.

These are under-represented natural communities in Connecticut and across the U.S. Northeast.

The land has multiple ecotones—which support wildlife and biodiversity



- Ecotones are transitions between field, woodland, water—different types of biological communities
- These support wildlife, plant, and tree diversity
- And add beauty to the land

This land is sequestering carbon and, as such, it is providing climate change mitigation benefits to our community and State.

The land supports birds, mammals, and pollinators



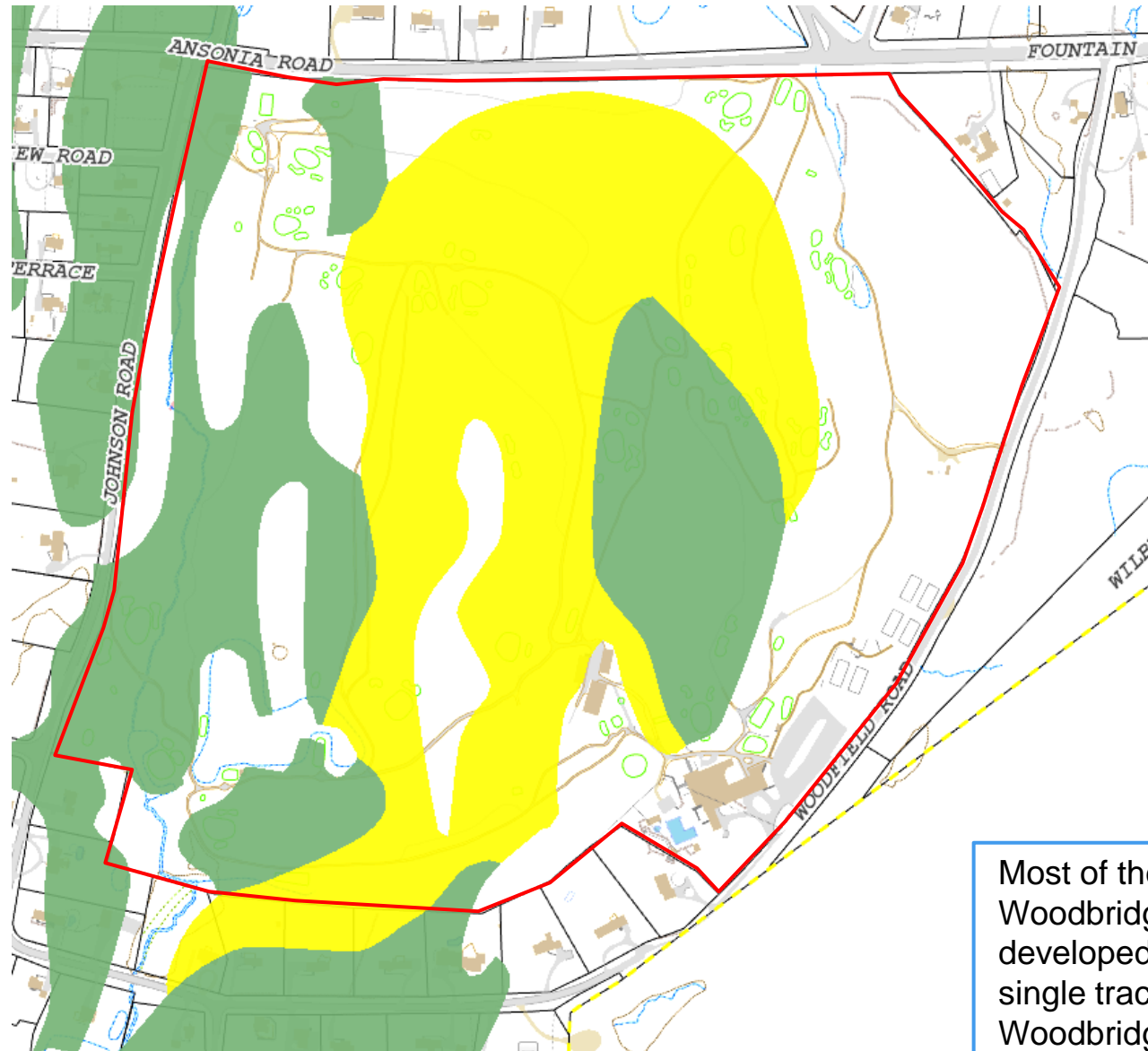
The stands of conifer⁽¹⁾ on the property provide important food and cover for birds and mammals.


Vegetation that may appear to be overgrown plays a critical role in supporting pollinators – bees, butterflies, and other insects.


Pollinator numbers in the northeast have been dropping alarmingly and are critical for many plant species and agricultural crops to survive and propagate.

(1) Conifers on the property are important and under-represented and include eastern white pine, eastern hemlock, and eastern red cedar

Most of the land has important farmland soils



 Prime farmland soils
(Designated by the federal government of major importance in meeting the Nation's short- and long-range needs for food and fiber)

 Farmland soils of statewide importance
(Designated as important for food, feed, fiber, forage, and oilseed crops)

Most of the important farmland soils in Woodbridge have already been developed and lost. This is the largest single tract of land remaining in Woodbridge.

Town policy supports land preservation

The Woodbridge Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD), as approved by the Board of Selectmen, records the best thinking of Woodbridge regarding its future growth and to give direction to both public and private development and conservation efforts.⁽¹⁾

The POCD provides both a long-term vision for the community as well as a roadmap for short- and mid-term decision-making.

(1) State law requires the town to have a town plan of conservation and development and revise it every 10 years. The plan is done by the Town Plan and Zoning Commission, which they present to the Board of Selectmen. After a public hearing, the Board of Selectmen then votes to accept it.



Excerpts from the Woodbridge Plan of Conservation and Development

p. 73 "Woodbridge's natural resources include the quality of its air, the condition of its surface and groundwater supplies, the fertility and ecological functions of its soil, and its native plant and animal species. The character, sustainability, health, and **quality of life** of the Town will all be **enhanced by the continued protection and conservation of these resources.**"



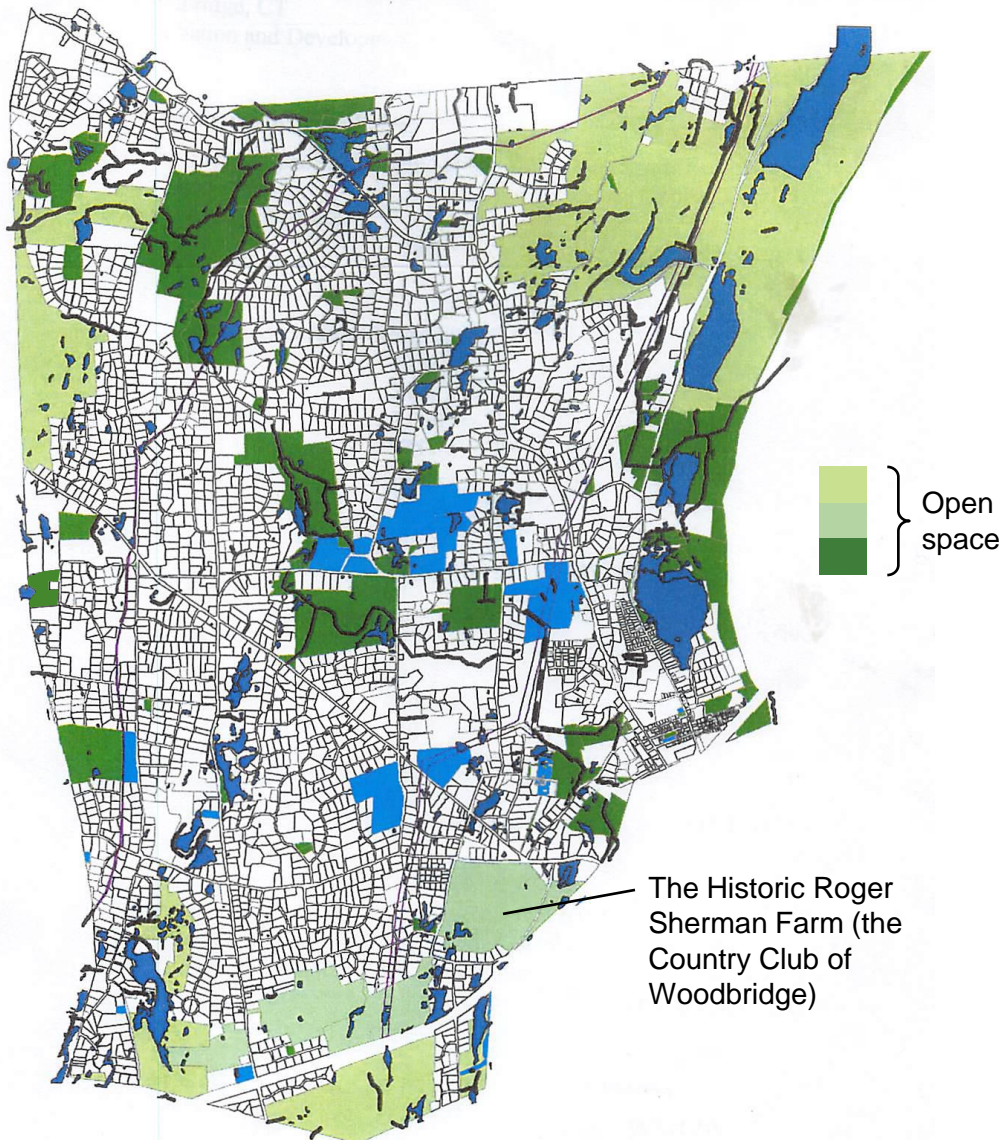
p. 75 "Woodbridge's 3,592 acres of **farmland soils** are an **irreplaceable** asset."

p. 86 "It is hereby declared that it is **in the public interest** to encourage the **preservation of farmland, forest land, open space** and heritage land in order to maintain a readily available source of food products close to metropolitan areas of the state, to conserve the state's natural resources and to provide for the welfare and happiness of the inhabitants of the state."

P. 87 "**Preserve farmland, fertile soils, and local agribusiness** (As part of the Near-Term Action Agenda)

- Develop policies and incentives to encourage preservation of operating and **historic farms** and avoid further development on prime farmland soils."

The property is an important contribution to Woodbridge's evolving Greenway



The Conservation Commission of the Town of Woodbridge, along with other groups in Woodbridge, are working to create a Greenway around the periphery of Woodbridge.

The map on the left shows the current Greenway spaces, along with different land types, water bodies, and trails. Green shading of different colors indicates green spaces.

The Greenway would include passive recreation opportunities and a contiguous area to support the health of flora and fauna in the region.

Notably, many people have settled in Woodbridge for its rural character and open space, convenient to an urban area.

- This is, in large measure, one of the most important attractors of the town.

The State of Connecticut's Green Plan

The Connecticut Comprehensive Open Space Acquisition Strategy (Green Plan) guides the efforts by the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) and its land conservation partners to meet a goal of conserving 21% of Connecticut's land base as open space by year 2023, as set by section 23-8 of the general statutes.

However,

- Many towns in Connecticut do not have much, if any, available additional land to protect
- Towns like Woodbridge are thus obligated to protect as much land as possible for the benefit of the greater community—particularly for our neighbors in the city who have little or no access to open space within the city limits

In 2019, DEEP and its Partners together were 76% towards achieving the total statewide open space acquisition goal. To reach their goals, another 163,000 acres must be acquired.⁽¹⁾

Source: DEEP 2019 Annual Report (no updates since 2019 due to COVID-19)


Why is the Green Plan Important?

The Connecticut Comprehensive Open Space Acquisition Strategy (Green Plan) is a statewide planning document developed by DEEP in partnership with municipalities and numerous conservation organizations to guide land acquisitions towards achieving the state's open space goal.

Section 23-8 of the general statutes requires a goal of conserving 21% or 673,210 acres of Connecticut's land base as open space by year 2023:

- 10% (320,576 acres) is to be held by the State;
- 11% (352,634 acres) is to be held by municipalities, non-profit land conservation organizations, and water companies.

As of late 2015, DEEP and its Partners need to acquire an additional 62,960 acres and 108,920 acres as open space, respectively, to meet their targeted goals.



While progress has been made over the decades on preserving open space, lands of high conservation and recreation value continue to be lost to development, even with the current economic conditions.

The Green Plan is updated every five years. Help us improve your open space plan by viewing the plan and submitting your questions and comments via email to Jania.Sydorak@ct.gov

Key Implementation Partners

- The State Natural Heritage, Open Space and Land Acquisition Review Board
- Connecticut Land Conservation Council
- Council for Environmental Quality
- Other Conservation Partners: private landowners, municipalities, non-profit land trusts, utility companies, developers and land planners, and conservation-minded planning organizations and associations.

Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection
79 Elm Street
Hartford, CT 06106
Phone: (860) 424-3016


www.ct.gov/deep/openspace
www.ct.gov/deep/greenplan

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Connecticut's Comprehensive Open Space Acquisition Strategy

The Green Plan 2016-2020

Information Summary



The Preserve
Old Saybrook, Westford, Essex

Protecting Land Today Leaves a Legacy for Tomorrow

Purpose of and Need For Open Space

Connecticut's natural landscapes provide a seemingly endless list of ecosystem services to people, such as safe drinking water, carbon sequestration, flood control, outdoor recreation, sense of place and culture, and many more.

Fish & Wildlife Habitat:

Connecticut's marine, freshwater, and terrestrial habitats are home during all or parts of the year to a wide diversity of plants, animals, and insects.

Water Resources:

Clean water in our wetlands, streams, rivers, and waterbodies are essential to life and provide rich habitats.

Outdoor Recreation:

Residents enjoy nature and contribute to local economies through activities such as camping, fishing, and trail exploration.

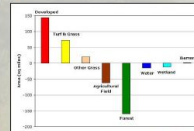
Urban Open Space:

Urban parks, trails, and community gardens increase the quality of life for residents in populated areas that tend to be farther from other existing open spaces.

Land for Open Space is Finite

Connecticut has witnessed a rapid growth in developed land compared to the rate of population growth over the last 40 years.

As a consequence, from 1985 to 2010, the state lost 115,200 acres of forested land and 39,680 acres of agricultural fields to development and related land covers like turf and grass. Developed land covers cannot not provide the same sustaining ecosystem services that natural lands do.



Statewide change in major land cover categories: 1985-2010.

A recovering economy could spark another burst in development. This places an urgency on all aspects of undeveloped land protection, from securing funding to negotiating transactions before desirable properties are converted to other uses.

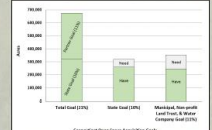
Key remaining lands and waters must be protected now if we wish to leave our future generations with the wildlife habitat, safe air and water, and outdoor recreational opportunities we benefit from today.

Connecticut's Open Space Goal

The state has a goal to protect 21%, or 673,210 acres, of Connecticut's land base as open space by year 2023, as required by section 23-8 of the general statutes.

As of late 2015, the State (DEEP) held about 257,616 acres, or 80%, of its statutory share for open space acquisitions. Most of these lands are associated with the State's system of public Parks, Forests, Wildlife Management Areas, and water access areas.

DEEP's Partners (municipalities, non-profit land conservation organizations, and water companies) held an estimated 243,714 acres, or 69%, of their statutory share for open space acquisitions.



DEEP and its Partners have met 74.5% of the total statewide goal. By working together, DEEP and its partners can achieve Connecticut's goal and ensure the protection of the most important lands for open space.

Connecticut Green Plan Priorities for Land Conservation

The 2016-2020 Green Plan contains an action strategy with acquisition priorities and targeted acreages to protect specific lands identified as capable of providing certain services, for example buffers to climate change, critical habitats, and recreational trails.

The plan recommends the acquisition of lands for environmental and public recreation conservation, centering around four major themes:

- Natural Waters and Drinking Water Resources
- Areas Significant to the Coast
- Natural Heritage Resources
- Natural Resource-based Outdoor Recreation

By targeting resources towards the highest-value conservation and recreation lands, the best remaining lands for open space can be preserved.

Learn more by viewing and downloading the Green Plan at: www.ct.gov/deep/greenplan

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Open space provides multiple benefits



Health

A study of 13 towns in New Haven County, rural to urban, showed that reduced prevalence of hypertension, heart disease, and diabetes attributable to access to open space translates to an annual avoided healthcare cost of \$37 million – a 40% reduction in healthcare expenses and economic losses.



Environmental quality

Fields and stands of trees provide:

- Mitigation of climate change
- Maintenance of clean air and clean water
- Wildlife habitats and biodiversity
- Carbon sequestered from of the atmosphere to combat global warming
- Flood control, by absorbing runoff



Tax revenues

Open space protection increases tax revenue (given that property values near open space increase)

- Studies have shown that properties near open space appreciated faster than those properties in the same towns not near open space.



Beauty

The natural beauty of open land and viewscapes are, for many people, a way to calm the soul, find inspiration, and bring perspective to life.

Many recent studies show that time in nature reduces stress and raises self esteem.

The land is a place for neighbors to connect



The land provides important recreational benefits



This is the only town land that provides these wintertime recreational opportunities

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Open space preservation is economically beneficial

A 20-page study by the Office of the State Comptroller of New York on the Economic Benefits of Open Space Preservation says:

- “Naturally functioning ecosystems provide services that economists and planners identify as ecosystem services. Ecosystem services are often overlooked in town planning ... leading to land use decisions that do not accurately weigh costs and benefits.”
- “In many instances it is less expensive for a community to maintain open space that naturally maintains water quality, reduces runoff, or controls flooding.”
- “A common misperception is that open space protection translates into a loss of revenues for municipalities. While replacement of farming or forestry land with residential, commercial or industrial uses can produce an increase of gross revenues, that increase can be more than offset by an increase in the demand for services.”



“Studies have shown that open space demands fewer municipal services than lands in other use. Consequently, open space tends to generate greater municipal tax revenue than the value of services required by these lands. In comparison, lands in residential use typically consume services of greater value than the property tax revenues generated by these lands.”



OFFICE OF THE STATE COMPTROLLER
Thomas P. DiNapoli, State Comptroller

Economic Benefits of Open Space Preservation

March 2010

One tenet of the “smart growth” movement is that communities should strive to preserve open space, farmland, natural beauty and critical environmental areas.¹ Conflicts often occur between open space preservation and other goals. In fiscally challenging times, it is particularly important to understand and consider fully the economic benefits of open space.

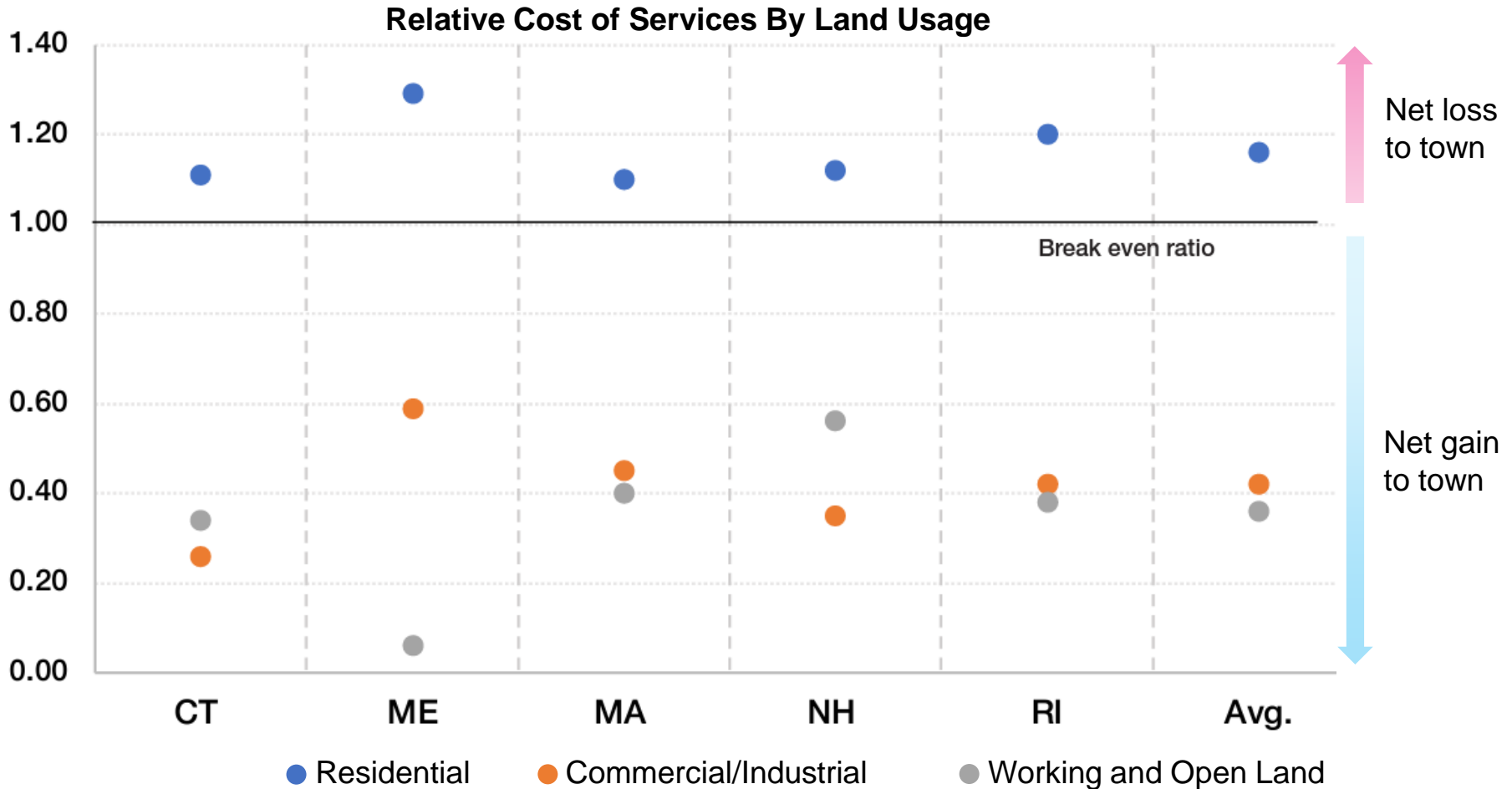
While the environmental and recreational benefits of open space preservation are readily apparent, the many economic benefits are often less evident. For example, benefits provided by open space, such as water preservation and storm water control, are often significant. In many instances it is less expensive for a community to maintain open space that naturally maintains water quality, reduces runoff, or controls flooding than to use tax dollars for costly engineered infrastructure projects such as water filtration plants and storm sewers. When these benefits, also known as ecosystem services, are overlooked, open space protection may be considered an expense rather than an investment that can mitigate property tax increases, leading to land use decisions that do not accurately weigh costs and benefits.

A review of studies of the costs and benefits of open space protection conducted by the Office of the State Comptroller finds that:

- Open space supports industries that generate billions of dollars in economic activity annually;
- Open space protection can be financially beneficial to local governments by reducing costs for public infrastructure and programs, lessening the need for property tax increases;
- Open space preservation can support regional economic growth; and
- Well-planned open space protection measures need not conflict with meeting other vital needs, such as economic development, municipal fiscal health and affordable housing.

Residential land developments cost towns more than the revenues they provide

Data from
39 towns in five New England
states



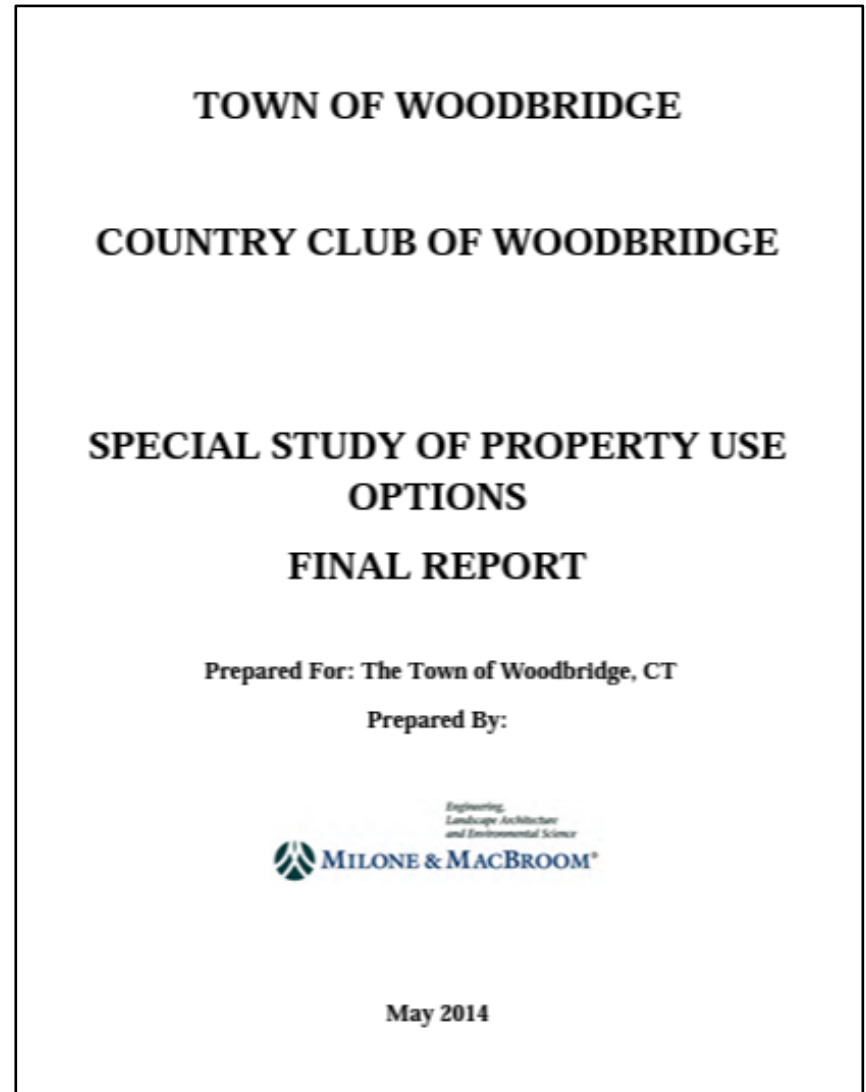
Source: American Farmland Trust, Cost of Community Service Studies, 2010; CT (avg. 11 of towns), ME (1 town), MA (avg. of 13 towns), NH (avg. of 11 towns), RI (avg. of 3 towns)

Milone & MacBroom study

In May 2014, the Town of Woodbridge commissioned a study by Milone & MacBroom⁽¹⁾ of property use options for the Country Club of Woodbridge.

The study found that for a “standard single family detached residential subdivision” the total growth-related **municipal costs**, which would include increased costs of municipal services and schools, would be **58% higher** annually **than the tax revenues**, thus making the option an ongoing financial loss to the town.

There are benefits to contracting for an unbiased independent assessment of costs and revenues to the Town



(1) Milone & MacBroom, a regional consulting and engineering firm. See <https://www.miloneandmacbroom.com/>

Debt service on the property will be paid off in 10 years

Given the property was purchased in 2009, the Woodbridge taxpayers have **already paid for more than half** of the debt service for the property.

The remaining payments are **\$45 per capita** per year for the next ten years⁽¹⁾ and **less than 1 percent** of the town budget⁽²⁾

Once the property is **paid off**, it would be almost **no cost** to the town with the added multiple benefits associated with being a beautiful, open space.

<u>Fiscal year</u>	<u>Principal</u>	<u>Interest</u>	<u>Fiscal total</u>
2022-23	\$325,000	\$123,425	\$448,425
2023-24	\$325,000	\$108,375	\$433,375
2024-25	\$325,000	\$93,325	\$418,325
2025-26	\$325,000	\$78,275	\$403,275
2026-27	\$325,000	\$63,375	\$388,375
2027-28	\$320,000	\$49,800	\$369,800
2028-29	\$320,000	\$37,400	\$357,400
2029-30	\$320,000	\$26,000	\$346,000
2030-31	\$320,000	\$15,600	\$335,600
2031-32	\$320,000	\$5,200	\$325,200
Totals	\$3,225,000	\$600,775	\$3,825,775

(1) Tony Genovese, Administrative Officer / Director of Finance at a town information session, September 2021

(2) With the Woodbridge adopted budget total of \$51,566,481 for Fiscal Year 2021-2022, the annual payments represent less than 1 percent of the town budget.

Source: Town of Woodbridge Finance Department

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The proposal to the town -----	would still allow the town to gain revenue
A rich history -----	could be highlighted and valued
The wonder of the land -----	supports the environment and its ecology, and aligns with town and state goals
Benefits provided -----	include health, community building, and inspiration
Financial impact -----	suggests a residential development would be a net loss over time



In sum

A place worth protecting

