



Newsletter of the Westford Land Preservation Foundation, Inc.

Fall 2005

East Boston Camps ~ 286 Acres Forever Wild

Just one year ago, in October 2004, the board of selectmen announced that Westford had the opportunity to purchase East Boston Camps, the 286 acre property along Stony Brook which the Town and conservation groups had long hoped to acquire when the Hyams Foundation chose to sell it.

The role that the Westford Land Preservation Foundation played in making this happen was huge, and the board of directors couldn't be prouder.

It began in December of 2003 when we introduced the town manager to the staff from the Trust for Public Lands in Boston, the non-profit organization with years of experience helping groups preserve open space. From the beginning, Nancy Rosinski of our board was in on the negotiations between the town, the Trust and the Hyams Foundation, owners of the East Boston Camps property since the 1920s.

The Westford Land Preservation Foundation also led the campaign to raise private funds in order to reduce the amount town meeting would be asked to spend. In just three months, almost \$455,000 was donated, including grants from the Harpley Foundation and Fields Pond Foundation, and raffle income for a week in a French village, thanks to Tom & Janice Henderson.

Nancy Rosinski chaired the fundraising committee, whose members included Angela Harkness, Mariclare O'Neal, Lynn Cohen, Diane Holmes and Ellen Harde.

At an historic and emotion-filled special town meeting on February 7th, town meeting voted unanimously to buy the East Boston Camps property.

Foundation Undertakes Its First Limited Development

There are several parcels of land in Westford that remain agricultural, and whose owners pay lower property taxes through a State program titled Chapter 61 which encourages keeping land open.

When an owner of Chapter 61 land decides to take the land out of the program, the town has the right of first refusal to purchase the property. The selectmen can either exercise the right or can transfer it to a conservation organization.

This spring, an 18 acre parcel abutting Stony Brook was offered to the town under the Chapter 61 program. After much discussion, the selectmen determined that the town was not able to afford the \$1.2 million dollar price tag.

In an unprecedented move in Westford's history, the board of selectmen then voted to transfer their right of first refusal on the parcel to the Westford Land Preservation Foundation.

We had presented the selectmen with a plan whereby the Foundation would partner with a local builder to pay the landowner the \$1.2 million, but build only 6 homes and leave 12 of the 18 acres as open space. The landowner had a potential buyer whose initial plan was to construct up to 10 houses.

Abutters on Barn Lane and Stony Brook Road supported our plan, and in September the Planning Board and Conservation Commission gave their approvals.

(see related article on page 4)

Preserving land in its natural state for the enjoyment of present and future generations

Board of Directors Christie Williams, President ~ Doug Deschenes, Clerk
 Nancy Rosinski, Treasurer ~ Ellen Harde ~ Diane Holmes

Changes to our Board

A member of the board of directors since we the Foundation was created in 1991, Ron Johnson stepped down as of our annual meeting this spring.

We are delighted that Ron has agreed to stay involved in our work, specifically overseeing the baseline study of East Boston Camps. Ron will work with the town's Conservation Coordinator Bill Turner and with the East Boston Camps land stewards to document every facet of what the Camps property looks like as of fall 2005. This will provide a benchmark when any future requests are made for maintenance work on the property to assure that the conditions of the conservation restriction are strictly adhered to.

Life-long Westford resident Diane Holmes has joined the board, and brings a wealth of knowledge about land and land use in her home town. As a member of the board of Assessors, a real estate appraiser by profession and having served on numerous town land use committees, Diane is a fountain of knowledge about the lands in Westford.

Diane offered to contact several Westford families she has known for many years who own parcels of land and might benefit from the Foundation's expertise. Eminently qualified to talk with landowners who are confronted with making a decision about selling their land, Diane can outline how they can receive the same amount of money working with our Foundation as they would receive from a for-profit developer, yet leave large portions of their land preserved forever.

We are lucky to have both Diane and Ron working with us.

Over the Year ~ Landowners We Have Advised

The word is spreading that if you own open land and have a question about how to keep it open, the Westford Land Preservation Foundation is a good source.

Here are some of the ways we have responded to Westford landowners who have contacted us:

Copies of *Land Conservation Options: A Guide for Massachusetts Landowners* have been given to several Westford property owners. This 38 page booklet was published on behalf of The Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition and provides an excellent review for conservation planning options. Should you be interested in obtaining a free copy from us, please contact Nancy Rosinski at anr@toast.net or 692-6202.

A family selling their home along Stony Brook called us about their options for keeping a separate 8 acre parcel as open space. Ron Johnson and Christie Williams from our board met with them. When it was found the parcel abutted land under the care and custody of the town's Conservation Commission, the Commission was contacted and they were delighted to be able to buy the parcel and expand the Green Beltway are creating along the brook.

A landowner on Hildreth Street wanted to find out if he could make one of his lots into a woodlot which would never be built upon to save on property tax. A member of our board met with the Assessors, found the needed information and presented it to the landowner in a comprehensive two page report.

Why We Need Your Financial Support

Our accomplishments in 2005 are many. But they meant spending money.

We have huge ambitions, but we are still a young organization with less than \$4,000 in assets.

The Trust for Public Lands paid for most of the expense of The Campaign to Save East Boston Camps, but we had out-of-pocket expenses too.

Having raised \$455,000 for East Boston Camps, we had to have a full audit, at a cost of close of \$2000.

Please help us replenish our coffers so we are ready for the next campaign.