

Unapproved
SPECIAL MEETING
MARCH 16, 2009

The Wethersfield Town Council held a special meeting on Monday, March 16, 2009 at 7:00 p.m. in the Silas Deane Middle School Auditorium, Silas Deane Highway, Wethersfield, CT.

Present from Council: Councilor Cascio, Console, Forrest, Hemmann, Kotkin (arrived 8:35 p.m.), Roberts, Walsh, Deputy Mayor Montinieri, and Chairperson Adil.

Also present: Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, and Amy Bello, Assistant Town Clerk

**PUBLIC HEARING ON THE PURCHASE OF WILKUS PROPERTY - \$3,500,000 –
PROPERTIES LOCATED ON THE EAST AND WEST SIDE OF WILLOW STREET
AND ON THE WEST SIDE OF THORNBUSH ROAD**

Chairperson Adil welcomed the public to the meeting.

Lisa Bassani of the Trust for Public Land, made a brief PowerPoint presentation. (*see attached*)

William Randazzo, 424 Old Reservoir Road, spoke in opposition to the purchase. He asked what fee the Trust for Public Land was receiving for brokering this deal.

Lisa Bassani of the Trust for Public Land, said that the Trust is a non-profit charitable organization that relies on donations. It is not receiving a fee from the Town.

William Randazzo said that \$3,500,000 is too much money for the land. If the Town doesn't purchase it, it will just sit there. The passive land that was donated by his family is only used by dogs and teens partying. He said that of the 81 acres, only 45 are buildable. No developer will want this land.

Joe Hickey, 28 Meadowview Drive, spoke in support of the land purchase. He said that historical Wethersfield was a farming community. Upland soil has been lost to development and this is one of the last large parcels of land in Town. This property could be used as a home base for farmers in the Meadows.

Dan Lagosh, 78 Windmill Hill, spoke in support of the land purchase. He said that he hopes this legacy will stay with the Town. He shared a story about Barney Wilkus.

John Miller, 45 Highland Street, spoke in opposition to the purchase. He said he raised the questions about the ownership of the Thornbush Road property. In 2006, the Town approved a bond giving the government the authority to purchase unknown land at an unknown cost. He said that \$3,500,000 for this property is outrageous. The Town is purchasing the property and the State has total control over the property. It is not a good situation. He said that this bond money has become a slush fund for Conservation Commission's wish list projects. He said that the Town doesn't need it, can't afford it, and the price isn't right. Much of this land is

undevelopable and the appraisal is too high. The Town is buying land for open space but is paying for prime development land. The Town should hold a referendum on this and let the voters decide.

Christopher Geiss, 245 Brimfield Road, Chairperson of the Conservation Commission, spoke in support of the land purchase. He said the commission is an advisory commission only and gives advice. This purchase was unanimously approved by the Commission. One of the priorities of the Town is open space.

Chairperson Adil asked that the Town Manager address the issue of price.

Bonnie Therrien, Town Manager, said that the Town hired more than one appraiser. The appraisers were told upfront about the use of the land. FEMA maps from the 1980's and 2008 maps were used. The Town looked at numbers to see what the cost to the Town would be if the land was developed. If 53 homes were built at a value of \$350,000 each (AM Farm Trust data from 2002) based on taxes and services, the net result would be a cost to the Town of about \$130,000 above the taxes generated.

Brenda LaBella, 34 Deer Ledge Lane, spoke in support of the land purchase. She said that the sunset on Thornbush Road is priceless. She said that this isn't New York City; everything doesn't have to be developed. She said that a small parcel on Hayes Road in Rocky Hill sold for \$600,000 and the developer is building homes in someone's backyard.

Michael Fallon and daughter Teaghan Fallon, 25 Swing Lane, spoke in support of the land purchase. He said that he has great respect for what the Town Council does. His daughter started a campaign, "Keep the Field in Wethersfield" to support keeping the farmland open space last year. She was concerned about the animals that inhabit that space. This farmland is an asset to the Town.

Joel Wagner, 203 Clearfield Road, spoke in support of the land purchase. He said that when he moved to Town, he started collecting tractors and loved visiting with the Wilkus brothers. He said that the property should be used for farmland.

George Ruhe, 956 Cloverdale Circle, spoke in support of the land purchase. He said that \$3,500,000 may seem like a lot of money, but when it is divided by the number of acres it is not so intimidating. He said that the 2006 referendum represented great wisdom. He recommends that the Town Council proceed with this purchase and rethink some of its other expenses.

T. William Knapp, 171 Collier Road, spoke in support of the land purchase. He said that Cromwell is forming a committee for open space and Newington and Rocky Hill already have one. He said that the Town found money to purchase Wintergreen Woods, Mill Woods and the 1860 Reservoir. The 2006 bond shows that open space acquisition is a priority for the Town. He

said that he hopes the regulation prohibiting machinery on the property does not include farm equipment.

Lisa Bassani said that the regulations allow for active farming and use of all of the equipment that goes along with it.

Aurelio Interlandi, 249 Willow Street, spoke in support of the land purchase. He said that he lives next to the farmland. He said that back when Mr. Gold was Mayor, the Town spent \$2,000,000 on drainage on Willow Street. He said that Wethersfield is dead now. Pretty soon there won't be any people in Town anymore. The Town has spent millions of dollars on schools. He said that this farmland is one of the glories of the Town. The Council should buy the farm.

Vincent Vitaliano, 138 Thornbush Road, spoke in support of the land purchase. He said that the scenery of the farmland is beautiful. He asked the farmer once why he didn't sell the farmland and the Mr. Wilkus said that he had an offer of \$7,000,000 in the 1980's but turned down the offer. He hopes the Town will buy this property.

Nicholas Davis, 38 Wedgewood Drive, spoke in opposition to the purchase. He said that he was at the meeting because he had to attend a Town Council meeting for a class. He said that by purchasing the property, the taxes will go up and the Town doesn't have the money right now. The Town should take care of the roads instead.

John O'Leary, 27 Coleman Road, spoke in opposition to the purchase. He thanked the Town Council for their service to the Town. He said that this project should go to referendum so that the voters could decide its fate. He said that he is in favor of open space, but Wethersfield is land poor and there is very little land left to develop. The Town missed opportunities for development in the past: the 291 corridor and the industrial zone on the corner of Maple Street and Elm Street. He said the Town should do the democratic thing and put this to a vote by the people.

Eileen Candels, 106 Windmill Hill, spoke in support of the land purchase. She said that there are intangible things that make the Town the place that so many residents want to live in. She said that she enjoyed the freedom to roam through farmland as a child and wants her children to be able to experience that same feeling. She said that she hopes the Town Council will act on the 2006 referendum that the Townspeople approved.

Scot Anderson, 78 Baneberry Lane, spoke in support of the land purchase. He said that he grew up in New Britain and realized all of the distinctions between New Britain and Wethersfield. He was attracted to his home on Baneberry Lane because of its closeness to the open farmland. He supports this acquisition.

Bill Smyers, 76 Ox Yoke Drive, spoke in opposition to the purchase. He said that this purchase seems like an express train. The Town should leave the land alone stating that no developer will ever buy it for \$3,500,000. The land can stay open and not cost the Town anything.

Kris Tracy, 241 Broad Street, spoke in support of the land purchase. He said that he has lived in Wethersfield his entire life and has seen so much development. He thanked the Town Council for seeing the importance of preserving this land.

Ralph Moyer, 9 Grandview Terrace, spoke in support of the land purchase. He said that he is a member of the Conservation Commission. He said that the Town is asymmetrical. There is open space in the meadows but not much elsewhere in Town. He said that the Commission's job is to inventory the upland open space in Town, not the meadows. In the last 10 years, each year, the inventory gets smaller. He urged the Town Council to vote in favor of this purchase.

Jim Woodworth, 5 River Road, spoke in support of the land purchase. He said that Mr. Miller and Mr. Randazzo don't know the value of upland farming. This upland farm has real value and the Town needs to preserve it.

Judy Parker, 366 Pine Lane, spoke in support of the land purchase. She said Carpe Diem -the Town needs to seize the day. Wethersfield's history is farming and maritime. She hopes that the Town Council will take advantage of this opportunity and use the land for farming.

Robert Young, 20 Coppermill Road, spoke in opposition to the purchase. He said that he voted no in 2006 when the Town held the referendum and does not support this now either. The Town should not own properties. It didn't even take care of the Moeller Home. The Town is a poor steward for its properties. He said that it is not the time to take out more debt. The government is out of control with its spending.

Jeff Michelson, 70 Baneberry Lane, spoke in support of the land purchase. He said that some people may say that this is not the best deal but he disagrees. He said that some of the land is wetlands but much of it is developable and will create more homes and more expenses for the Town. Paying for the property is reasonable cost avoidance. He said that the price of the purchase is fair to the Wilkus family. It would be a great travesty if the Town did not purchase this land.

ADJOURNMENT

Chairperson Adil moved into the Regular Meeting.

Amy Bello
Assistant Town Clerk

THE TRUST *for* PUBLIC LAND
CONSERVING LAND FOR PEOPLE

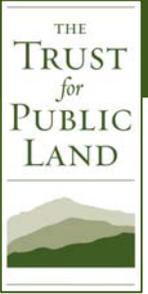


Wilkus Farm Acquisition, Wethersfield

Lisa Bassani, Field Representative

Wilkus Farm





Land for People:

The Trust for Public Land conserves land for people to enjoy as parks, gardens, and other natural places, ensuring livable communities for generations to come.

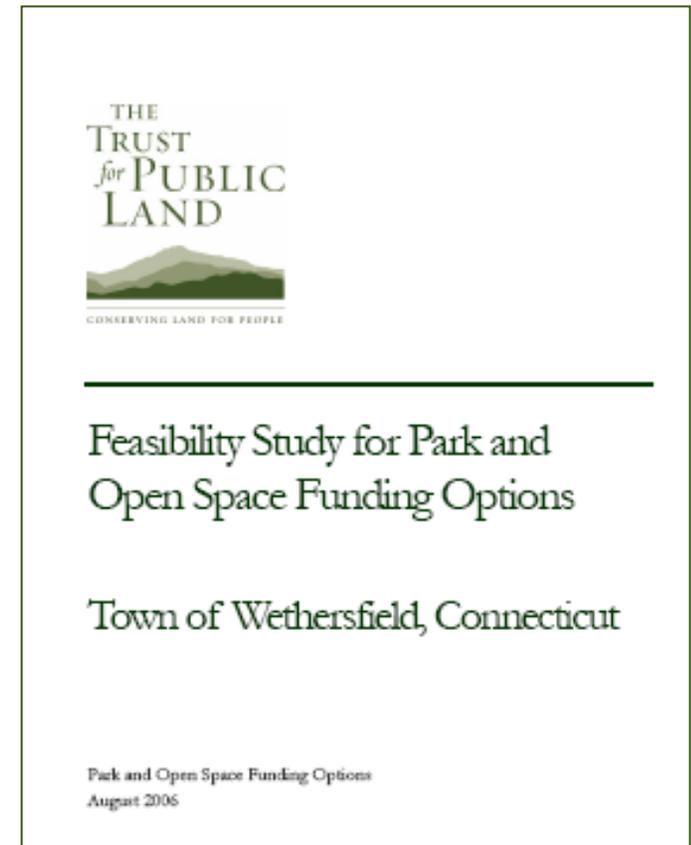
The Trust for Public Land Mission Statement

TPL – who we are and what we do

- National nonprofit land conservation organization
 - Office in CT since 1995
- Assists communities with immediate and long term conservation priorities
- Offers expertise in complex land conservation transactions

TPL's Work in Wethersfield

- Began in 2006 with Feasibility Study
- \$4 million Open Space Bond in November 2006
 - Approved by voters
- Wilkus Farm the priority for acquisition based on Conservation Comm ranking



Our role here

- Negotiate terms of Agreement
- Entered into contract with Wilkus Family – contingent on coming to agreement with Town for purchase
- Help assemble funds
 - State Grant
 - Town approval process
- Due Diligence
 - Appraisal
 - Title
 - Phase I Environmental Assessment
- Project Management and Legal Support

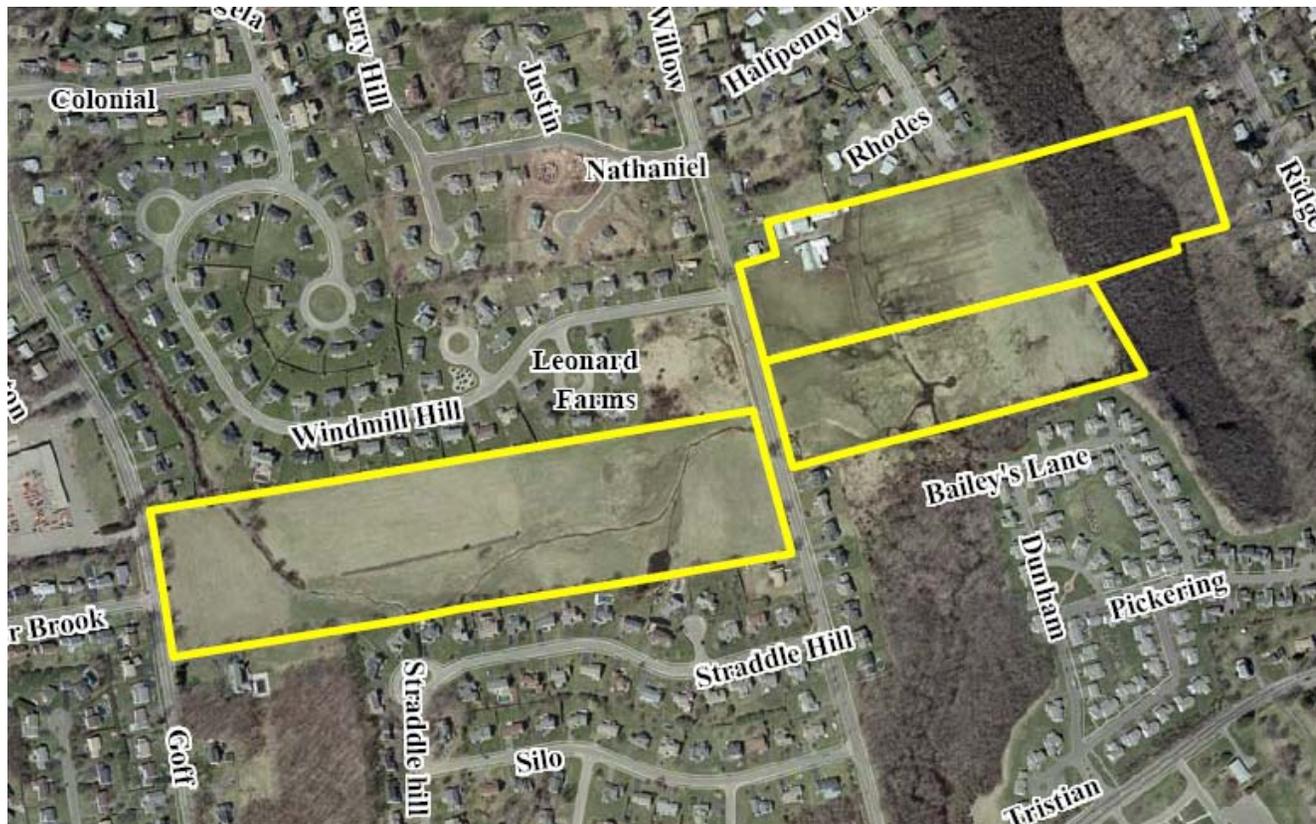
Property Description

- Deal includes approximately 81 acres
 - 34.5 acre parcel on Thornbush Rd
 - 22.5 acre parcel on Willow Street
 - 24 acre parcel on Willow Street
 - .33 acre parcel with house lot at 138 Willow Street
- Property in active hayfields

Map of Property: Thornbush Parcel



Map of Properties: Willow Street



Plan of Conservation and Development

- Acquisition is consistent with the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development
 - “Identify, preserve, and protect the Town's natural resources...”
 - “Encourage the preservation of the 1860 Reservoir and surrounding open space in its natural state and maintain for passive recreational use.”
 - Wethersfield Plan of Conservation and Development, p. 44
- Planning and Zoning Commission issued a positive referral under Sec 8 –24 of the CGS (March 3, 2009)

Conservation Value of Wilkus Land

- Last significant open space parcels in Town
- Contains prime farmland soils
- Symbol of Town's agricultural history
- Active hayfields provide important wildlife habitat – (habitat in decline across CT)
- Conservation Commission – high ranking

Terms of Agreement

- Purchase Price of \$3.5 million
- Due diligence satisfied on or before June 3, 2009 (Title search, Phase I EA)
- Closing on or before June 15, 2009

Project Finances

- Total cost \$3.5 Million
- State of CT Open Space Grant (DEP)
 - Town of Wethersfield awarded \$490,000
- Town has approximately \$3.7 million remaining from open space bond authorized in 2006
- Town has approximately \$306,000 in Land Acquisition Fund

Basic Terms of State grant

- Conservation Easement conveyed to State of Connecticut
 - Legally binding agreement filed on land records
 - Prohibits residential or commercial development, construction of temporary or permanent structures, or any uses inconsistent with preservation of natural resources on the property
 - Allows access for passive recreational activities
 - Property remains in natural scenic condition

Conservation Easement – Uses of Land

Prohibited:

- Buildings or structures
- Paved parking or roads
- Active recreational fields
- Commercial or industrial activities
- Motorized vehicles

Permitted:

- Passive recreational activities, including hiking, birdwatching, cross-country skiing, wildlife viewing, picnicking
- Active agriculture

Title Issue Addressed

- Issue raised whether the Town owned 4 acres of the Thornbush parcel
 - Town Clerk and TPL's title company investigated issue
 - In 1965, Town placed a Lis Pendens on "Parcels 1, 2, and 3, in and around the 1860 Reservoir (Parcel 2 owned by Nellie Wilkus
 - In 1968, Parcel 3 deeded to the Town and in 1969, judgment issued giving Parcel 1 to the Town for \$60,200
 - Following judgment, 2 quit claim deeds between Barney and Edward Wilkus to clarify property boundaries for the parcels – parcel 2 never transferred to the Town

Wilkus Farm

