

# OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION



Reflections on the Value of Acquiring  
Property for Preservation Purposes

# What is open space and what does it do?

The Town Plan of Conservation and Development defines it as follows:

Land preserved or restricted for any of the following purposes:

- Maintain or enhance the conservation of natural, scenic, cultural and historic resources.
- Protects wetlands/watercourses and other bodies of water.
- Protects water supply sources.
- Promotes the conservation of soil and prime farmland.

# What is open space and what does it do?

- Enhances the public value of abutting or neighboring parks, forests, wildlife preserves, natural reservations and sanctuaries and/or other open space.
- Enhances public recreation opportunities.
- Preserves historic and/or culturally significant sites.
- Assist in the promotion of orderly growth and management.



# Types of Open Space

- Conservation or recreation easement with or without public access
- Fee simple ownership by the Town, State or other conservation entity (e.g. land trust)
- Purchase of development rights
- Agricultural use restriction
- Combination of above



# Methods to Acquire Open Space

- Subdivision approval process
- Donations, gifts, bequeaths, etc.
- Purchase
- Cooperative purchase – leveraging of funds with other entities
- Bonding
- Grant funding



# Guidance from 2010 Town Plan of Conservation and Development

Section 5 – Environment and Open Space offers the following statements, goals and recommendations:

- “Open Space acquisition is a key element in future planning.”(Page 5-4)
- “Formally protect a minimum of 20% of the town’s land as open space.”(Goal #2)
- “Protect and conserve prime farmland soils, productive woodlands soils and large unfragmented forest blocks, notable wildlife or plant life and fisheries habitat, streambelts composed of watercourses, inland wetlands and other associated riparian habitat components, and scenic views and vistas, through a range of preservation techniques, as identified in the Conservation Commission’s Open Space Plan.”(Recommendation #3)

# Guidance from 2010 Town Plan of Conservation and Development

- “Maintain and increase interconnected, linear open spaces, greenways, trails and wildlife corridors, and when appropriate, link other town, regional or state greenways.”(Recommendation #6)
- “Utilize the Open Space Plan to guide town land acquisition strategies and acquire more open space and coordinate the Plan with recreational needs as expressed in the Parks and Recreation Section.”(Recommendation #7)

# 2008 Coventry Citizen Survey Results

- **88%** of respondents rated open space (e.g. land purchases) as either essential or an important investment for the Town.
- **66%** of respondents supported the Town's purchase of open space, development rights or conservation easements, assuming that every \$1 million dollars borrowed would increase the taxes of the average household by \$15.00 per year.

# Guidance from 1997 Town Plan of Conservation and Development

- Chapter 2, Goals and Objectives – **Conservation and Open Space** - Goal – Provide adequate protection and preservation of the town’s natural resources while providing adequate open space opportunities for all town residents – Same objectives as 2010 Plan.
- Chapter 2, Goals and Objectives - **Recreation** – Objective – Continue the use of a revolving fund to acquire land for open space and/or recreational purposes, as it becomes available based upon a prioritized listing of preferred parcels identified by community plans.

# Guidance from 1997 Town Plan of Conservation and Development

- Chapter 11, Land Use Plan – **Preservation of Rural Character** – “The fundamental land use issue in Coventry is the preservation of the agricultural land and open space to maintain the Town’s rural atmosphere.”
- Chapter 11, **3 Tiers of Development, Preservation Areas** – “Town purchase of land – Theoretically the Town could purchase large amounts of land in the Preservation Area for park and open space use.”

# July 2014 – Final Report of the Coventry Open Space Working Group

- Members of the Town Council, Planning and Zoning Commission, Economic Development Commission, Conservation Commission, Ad-hoc Conservation Corps Committee, Inland Wetlands Agency, Parks and Recreation Commission, SOS Coventry and Planning and Zoning Staff formed a consortium based committee that worked for over two years to analyze the open space experience in the last 15 -20 years to provide an educational and advocacy tool for the community at large.

# July 2014 – Final Report of the Coventry Open Space Working Group

- The report provides a summary of Coventry's undeveloped land – open space; a series of findings, value statements, conclusions and recommendations, definitions of important terms and a resource 'toolbox'.



# Summary of Coventry's Undeveloped Land

## PERMANENTLY PROTECTED

Conservation Easement – 399 acres

Fee Simple – 1,930 acres

Subtotal – **2,329** acres

**(9.5% of total town area)**

Coventry Lake and Rivers: **460** acres

Eagleville Lake: **25** acres

Upper Bolton Pond: **22** acres

**TOTAL PROTECTED- 2,849 ACRES**

**(11.6% of 24,505 acres- total town area)**

# Summary of Coventry's Undeveloped Land (cont'd)

## UNPROTECTED:

**3,768 acres (15.4%)**

Golf courses - 220 acres

Sportsman's organizations - 490 acres

Almada Lodge (Channel 3 Kids Camp) - 140 acres

Farms - 1,600 acres arable, 1,200 acres wooded

Museums - 31 acres

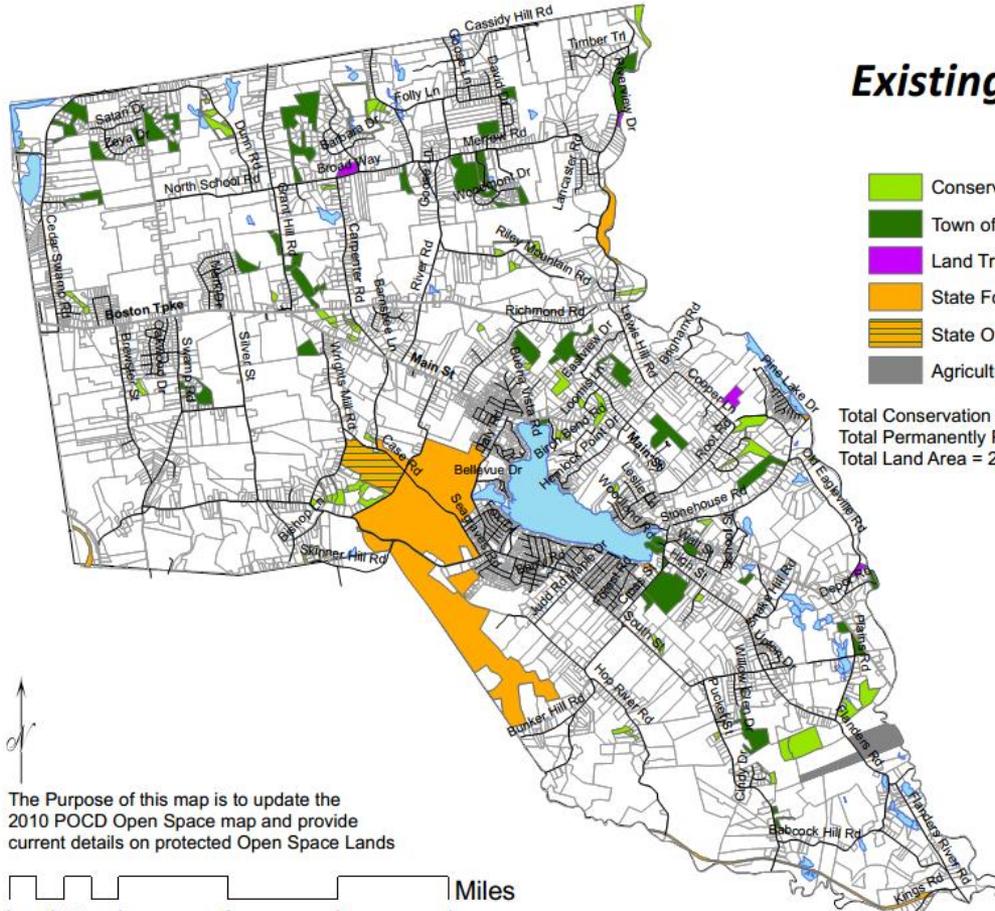
Connecticut Light & Power/Nu Star- 87 acres

CT Water Company – 13 acres

**Excludes:** residential parcels, State owned parcels from the old Route 6 Expressway acquisition, church owned land.

# Coventry Open Space Map 2013

## Town of Coventry, CT Existing Protected Open Space

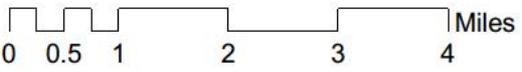


- Conservation Easement
- Town of Coventry (Fee Simple)
- Land Trust
- State Forest/Property
- State Owned/Town Park
- Agricultural Conservation

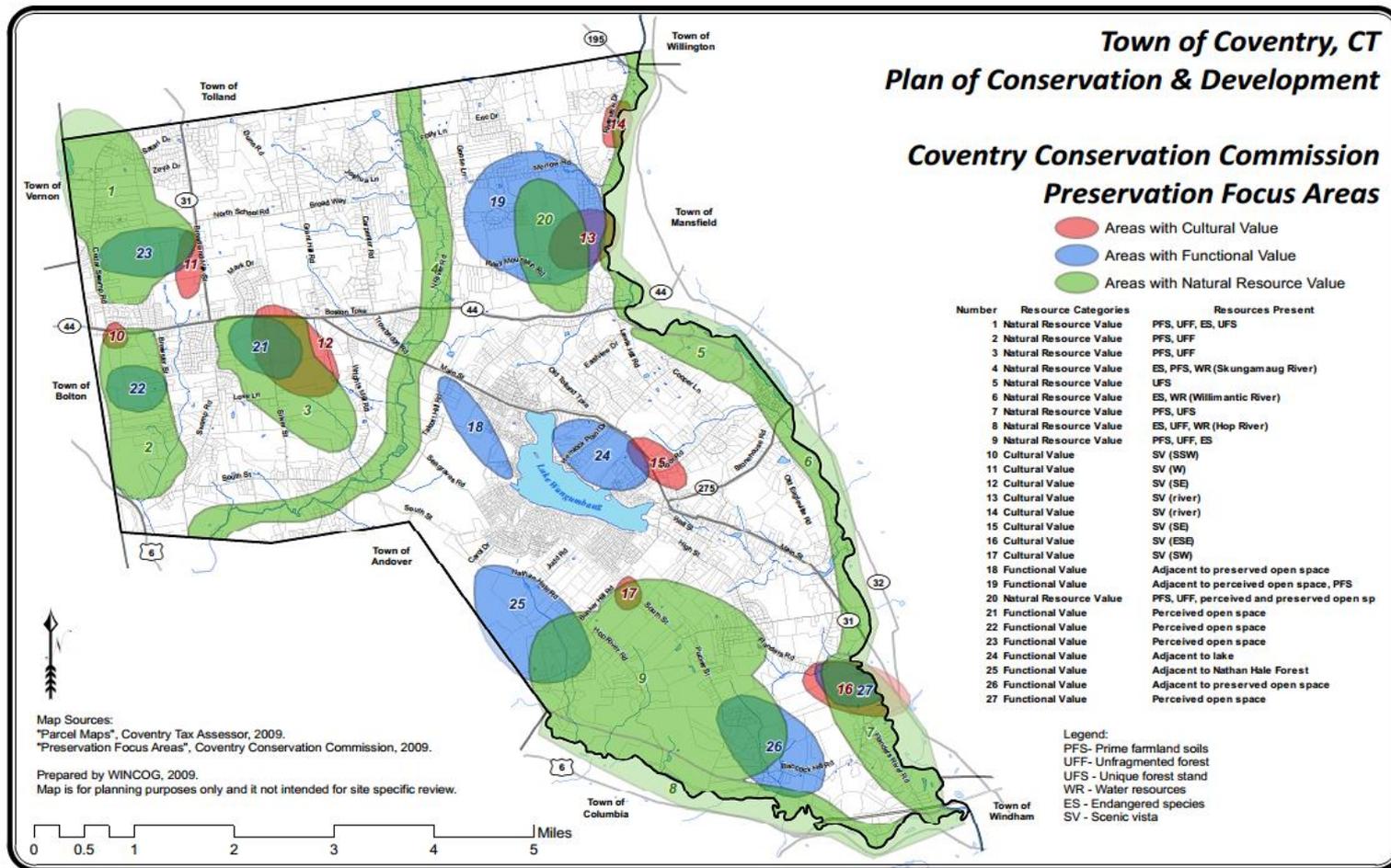
Total Conservation Easement = 324 acres  
 Total Permanently Protected (fee) = 1672 acres  
 Total Land Area = 24,090 acres

Name	Type	Acres
Apollo Gardens	Town of Coventry	18
Boat Launch	State	2
Brigham Tavern Road	State	20
Brookway	Town of Coventry	9
Couch Property	Land Trust	32
Couch Property	Town of Coventry	7
Coventry Mills	Town of Coventry	23
Creaser Park	State/Town	99
Deer Road	Town of Coventry	5
Fair Subdivision	Town of Coventry	4
Former Estates	Town of Coventry	28
Grammar School Open Sp.	Town of Coventry	12
Grant Hill Estates	Town of Coventry	19
High Meadow Farms	Town of Coventry	12
Millside Woods	Town of Coventry	25
Hop River Trail	State	36
Keriton Falls	Town of Coventry	4
Ladies Park	Town of Coventry	38
Liberty Croft Estates	Town of Coventry	27
Lillian Woods	Town of Coventry	29
Lisickie Beach	Town of Coventry	3
Malton	Town of Coventry	2
Marens Road Park	Land Trust	2
Middle School Open Space	Town of Coventry	31
Miller Richardson Park	Town of Coventry	13
Mountain Estates	Town of Coventry	25
Nathan Hill State Forest	State	742
North Coventry Farms	Land Trust	36
Old Eagleville park	State	1
Old Eagleville	Land Trust	4
Patriot's Park	Town of Coventry	13
Patriot's Park Forest	Town of Coventry	56
Reynolds Estate	Town of Coventry	31
Riverview Trail and Park	Town of Coventry	28
Robertson School Open Sp	Town of Coventry	6
Rolling Woods	Town of Coventry	32
Seminis Estate	Town of Coventry	38
The Ledges	Town of Coventry	28
Thornton Meado	Town of Coventry	27
Town Green	Town of Coventry	2
Williams Subdivision	Town of Coventry	21
Willow Glen	Town of Coventry	3
Windswept Farms	Town of Coventry	23

The Purpose of this map is to update the 2010 POCD Open Space map and provide current details on protected Open Space Lands



# Coventry Preservation Focus Area Map from 2010 Plan of Conservation and Development



# Open Space Working Group Report – Findings Examples

The Working Group reflected on their collective experience serving their respective Boards and Commissions, communications with Town Staff and the development community, reviewed pertinent studies, regulations and other resource documents to render findings, some of which are summarized here:

- Open space, in different forms, creates quality of life for the community.
- Large undeveloped parcels, identified as ‘Functional Open Space’, such as sportsman’s clubs, currently have no permanent open space protection and are at risk for sale to developers.

# Open Space Working Group Report – Findings Examples

- Attention has been paid to contiguous parcel acquisition or easements for wildlife corridors and trail systems. It is important to maintain this approach in order to expand the stock of the connective open space properties and protection of valuable natural resources.
- The Town should pursue more dedicated open space parcels in order to meet the POCD recommendation that a minimum of 20% of the Town's land area be permanently protected – consider more private land stewardship as appropriate.

# Open Space Working Group Report – Value Statements Examples

## **OPEN SPACE:**

- Contributes to better air and water quality, ground water supply and flood management.
- Protects the natural and built environment for a variety of purposes, including historical, cultural and archaeological.
- Conserves critical forest and farmland soils and provides opportunity for local food, fiber and wood production.
- Provides recreational and health benefit opportunities for residents of all ages.
- Provides tourism and economic development opportunities.
- Contributes significantly to the character and charm of Coventry.

# Open Space Working Group Report – Value Statements – Fiscal Issues

## **OPEN SPACE:**

- Increases the property values for sites in proximity to the undeveloped land - a 2010 study in southeastern Pennsylvania indicates this value to be between **5%** and **8%** for such properties (Source – “The Economic Value of Protected Open Space in Southeastern Pennsylvania, November, 2010).
- Minimizes municipal revenues needed for fire, police, roads, schools and other services – Undeveloped land costs **\$0.25** in municipal services provided for every **\$1.00** in tax revenue it brings in. (Source – Green Valley Institute study for Coventry POCD – 2009).
- Provides tourism and economic development opportunities – a 2012 Tourism Impact Study of The Last Green Valley found that 1.8 million visitors came to the region and impacted the local economy by \$262 million. Visitors made 5.7 trips per year to the region, a \$1,957 economic value for each visiting party to the region.

# Open Space Working Group Report – Conclusions and Recommendations Examples

- **Open space creates value for the community** – acquire more open space parcels in addition to those acquired through the subdivision and donation process; balancing the value to the community, size of the site, its future use and maintenance costs – develop more links between open spaces and greenways.
- **Large undeveloped parcels remain at risk for development** – strengthen the open space education materials and outreach efforts throughout all facets of our community - agree on methods to engage property owners and discuss cooperative efforts to pursue the purchase of open space or the development rights.

# Open Space Working Group Report – Conclusions and Recommendations Examples (Cont'd)

- **Partnerships with related stakeholders are essential in accomplishing open space goals** – establish and maintain partnerships with such entities as Joshua's Trust, CT Farmland Trust, State of CT, CL&P, abutting towns, property owners, developers, nature groups, recreational entities, etc.
- **The public's opinion and understanding of the value of open space is important** – provide forums to engage the community at large and all stakeholders and reflect on the outcome and adapt recommendations as necessary.



# Open Space Working Group Report – Conclusions and Recommendations Examples (Cont'd)

- **Continuing open space education is critical to public understanding and support** – evaluate and agree upon viable educational methods and materials that include reasons to support the preservation of open space - host educational hikes, walks and forums on open space properties.
- **The Town and community need to be better stewards of open space** - open space parcels need to have a use and management plan created for the purpose of describing the value of the property, public use intentions, planned management activities, their costs and a historical summary of acquisition - consider new and expanded volunteer roles of the Conservation Corps and other related entities (Boy Scouts, Girl Scouts, 4H) to strengthen stewardship activities - partner and cooperate with the Town Department of Public Works and Parks and Recreation Department to execute management efforts – gain experience from CT Forest and Park Association, Joshua’s Trust and Bolton Land Trust on monitoring activities – promote a discussion on a funding mechanism to facilitate maintenance and stewardship efforts.