

# Waltham Land

*Waltham Land Trust, Inc. is a non-profit corporation dedicated to preserving our community's natural resources for the future through education, open space acquisition and*



# QUARTERLY

SUMMER 2001

*Marc Rudnick*

## **Community Preservation Act to be on November Ballot**

On June 25 at 2:45 AM the Waltham City Council voted 8 to 5 to put the Community Preservation Act on the ballot for this November.

Waltham voters will be asked to vote to raise property taxes on all property by 3 percent, with an exemption for low income (and low/moderate senior) households. There is also an exemption for the first \$100,000 value of each property. There are no exemptions on commercial properties.

If successful, and if the expected state matching funds are granted, \$5 million dollars can be raised in the first year for Waltham's affordable housing, open space, and historic preservation projects. The city auditor testified that this formula would raise the average taxpayer's taxes by under \$35/year.

A concerted effort by housing, environmental and preservation activists will be needed for success in November. An all-out effort is getting underway, and your support is needed.

*Stephen Rourke*

## **President Bush Supports Waltham Land Preservation**

An unlikely headline? Maybe so, but it's true - because I'm planning to sign my federal tax rebate money over to the Waltham Land Trust's Land Preservation Fund. I see this as a triple win: First, I get to make a larger donation than I otherwise could have to a worthy cause; second, my donation is going to local land preservation, something my family and neighbors will directly benefit from; and third, my sudden "windfall" will become a charitable tax deduction on my next tax return. (I suppose there's a fourth win - it enables me to make the claim of presidential support in the headline above.)

While the Land Trust does not have the resources to purchase all the at-risk open space in Waltham in order to preserve it, we can play an important role in partnership with the City of Waltham, or with other groups seeking to protect open space by acquisition. Frequently, during a land purchase process, a landowner will want some financial commitment from the buyer in return for waiting while the buyer raises the money needed to complete the purchase. This option on the property is some portion, often 10%, of the agreed upon purchase price.

This is where our Land Preservation Fund comes in. When the city or some other entity is interested in acquiring open space property in order to preserve it, but is required to go

through a lengthy political and legal decision-making process in order to complete the purchase, the WLT could use the Land Preservation Fund to purchase an option on the property. Once our option is in place, the landowner has a financial incentive to wait while the purchasing party proceeds through its process, instead of selling to a private developer who may be able to generate capital quickly. Of course, it is incumbent on the Land Trust to enter such agreements carefully, to avoid the risk of losing option money, and to focus our resources on properties that best meet our preservation goals.

After examining various options and studying how other land trusts in New England have successfully conserved thousands of acres, the WLT Board of Directors determined that a revolving Land Preservation Fund is a common and highly effective conservation tool. I invite you to think about making a contribution to this fund, and especially to take advantage of the unique opportunity President Bush has afforded us this year. Any amount is welcome, but please consider donating some percentage of your tax rebate - 100%, 50%, 25%, or 10%. (And don't forget to take the charitable deduction on your 2001 tax return!)

Make your check payable to: Waltham Land Trust Inc. - Land Preservation Fund, and mail it to: Waltham Land Trust, P.O. Box 54 -1120, Waltham, MA 02454-1120 If you have any questions about the fund, or how it will be used, please call me at 781-899-1675.

## WLT Position regarding Development in Waltham

Waltham's open space is under siege. Wherever you look, new houses are being squeezed between existing homes. Office complex owners relentlessly attempt to expand their land use. Farms and commercial buildings are torn down and condominiums are built in their place.

The attack upon the few remaining parcels of significant size is of great concern to the Waltham Land Trust. We have identified the last 38 unprotected open space parcels over 5 acres in the entire city, and every one of them has attracted the interest of developers. Development activity is underway at the old Murphy Army Hospital grounds and the DeVincent Farm. The Archdiocese of Boston has made it clear that they intend to develop housing on 26 acres behind Our Lady Church on Trapelo Road unless the city buys them out. Developers are currently seeking permits to turn 21 acres of North Waltham woodlands into Indian Ridge, a 301-unit housing development. Rumors circulate endlessly about development at Olympus Hospital, the Stigmatine Espousal Center, and the Fernald School.

In addition to the threat from investors seeking to profit from housing development, some of these 38 parcels are also targeted for developments to satisfy the community's interest in expansion of schools, affordable housing, and athletic fields.

The position of the Waltham Land Trust is guided by our primary goal: to acquire, preserve, or restore land in a way that balances conservation and access, maximizes the natural value of the land, reduces habitat fragmentation, and permanently protects and conserves Waltham's natural resources.

***The Waltham Land Trust is opposed to new housing and commercial development on the 38 large open space parcels. We already have enough developed parcels.***

The recent build-out analysis presented by the Metropolitan Area Planning Council indicates that building under current zoning on all the remaining un-built space in Waltham would add just 1,000 new homes to the city, increasing the housing stock by only 5%. Commercial development is reaching a similar saturation point. Developing the remaining open space would lead inevitably to more traffic congestion, lower air quality, lower property values, and loss of wildlife habitat and recreational opportunities.

***We urge the city to promote redevelopment instead of sacrificing our remaining open space.***

The Waltham Land Trust prefers that new development to address the city's infrastructure needs or to increase affordable housing stock be sited on parcels that have already been developed and can be re-used. Activity must be limited on undeveloped parcels, especially places that are highly valuable

as open space, such as parcels that are contiguous with existing parks, or other undeveloped open space.

Waltham has a variety of opportunities available for adaptive re-use of already developed parcels. The former police station is under review as a site for the Waltham Museum. The abandoned armory downtown is being considered for affordable housing, and the Waltham Land Trust applauds these initiatives. Reuse of the Murphy Army Hospital grounds for soccer fields is an improvement over proposals to destroy Waltham Woods or woodlands behind the High School for a hockey rink. Future development of the Fernald School might combine affordable housing, recreation and open space preservation.

WATCH Community Development Corporation, Waltham's affordable housing organization, recently won a design competition showing how a downtown business parking lot could be re-used to provide parking, affordable housing and a park. It is no small irony that this site was once a south-side park, until the city sold it (in the 1960s) to a local business to provide parking for their workers.

***We request that the city consider adopting a new development policy that would make open space preservation the highest and best use of our undeveloped land.*** If development must proceed on open space parcels, it should be permitted only after alternatives for re-use have been proven unfeasible and a comparable parcel of open space of the same size is protected in perpetuity. These developments should be limited in size, concentrated in area, built with the best environmental practices available and strategically located to maximize preservation of the site's natural resources.

***The Waltham Land Trust believes that action to preserve open space needs to be immediate and long lasting.*** We urge owners of our remaining open space to meet with the Waltham Land Trust to learn about mutually beneficial preservation strategies and techniques available to landowners before committing to a major land transaction. We applaud the City Council's recent preservation proposal for four properties on our "38 most endangered" list and the Mayor's quick response to begin protecting these parcels, but further action is required if we are to protect our open space.

***The Waltham Land Trust recommends that any proposals for development of open space be deferred until a city master plan is created that articulates long-range needs, goals, guidelines, and policies for such development.*** We urge that the process for creating such a master plan be thorough, deliberative, inclusive, and public. It is time to plan for the future of Waltham so that public appreciation of natural resources will grow, native habitat will be preserved and restored, environmental quality of life improved, pollution reduced, biodiversity increased and a legacy of conservation perpetuated in our city.

### Newsletter Distribution

Copies of the Waltham Land Trust Quarterly are available at **City Hall** and the **Waltham Public Library**. We are grateful to **THE CHATEAU** and the **First Parish Church** for allowing distribution of the WLT Quarterly and would like to know of other locations willing to be included in the future.

## WLT Endorses Community Preservation Act

The Waltham Land Trust enthusiastically endorses the Community Preservation Act (CPA) and urges voters to approve it when it appears on the ballot this November. This initiative calls for a small annual contribution from property owners to create a fund for open space, affordable housing and historic preservation. While taxing the average Waltham homeowner less than \$35 a year, the Act will generate millions of dollars annually for these purposes from both the tax levy, as well as from a pool of matching state funds to be shared among the cities and towns that pass their ballot issue.

Here is a rare opportunity for voters to pay taxes that they know will go only to fund priority concerns of the community and increase the quality of life in Waltham. The CPA, if passed, will quickly become one of the largest funding sources for purchasing land or interests in land to preserve natural resources, maintain scenic views, create greenbelts and build trail systems. At the same time, the CPA will create sorely needed affordable housing and fund the preservation of our local heritage. Please join us in supporting the passage of the Community Preservation Act in Waltham.

Here are the basic facts about Waltham's ballot issue:

- If the CPA is passed, commercial property owners will pay a 3% surcharge on their property taxes.
- Low income property owners, whose household income is below 80% of Boston area median, are exempt, as are low and moderate income senior citizens (whose income is below the Boston area median.)
- Residential property owners who know their property's assessed value can calculate their annual tax surcharge. Subtract a \$100,000 CPA exemption from the total real estate value and subtract another \$55,100 if the property already earns the residential exemption (for owner-occupied properties). Multiply the remainder by the current tax rate (1.11% this year) and multiply the result by 3%. (e.g., for a \$250,000 owner occupied home:  $\$250,000 - 155,100 = 94,900 \times 1.11\% = 1053.39 \times 3\% = \$31.60$  per year.)
- The funds generated, and the state's matching funds will be put into an account overseen and disbursed by a locally appointed committee. A maximum of 5% of the funds can be used for the CPA committee's administrative costs.
- The committee will also determine the allocation of funds among the three mandated uses (open space, affordable housing, historic preservation). This allocation can be changed from year to year, but at least 10% of the funds must go to fund projects in each of the three areas.
- The CPA is a permanent commitment, but after five years, the city council or by petition, the voters can put the measure back on the ballot for re-approval or rejection.

### Waltham Land Trust Annual Meeting

**Wednesday, October 17th,  
2001 7:00 pm**  
Waltham Public Library.

Second annual meeting of the  
Waltham Land Trust.

- Reports on all WLT accomplishments and initiatives to date.
- Plans for future activities.
- Nomination of new board members.
- All members encouraged to attend, public is welcome.
- Refreshments will be served.

Check the events listing on our  
web site:  
[www.walthamlandtrust.org](http://www.walthamlandtrust.org)



*A view of the grounds of the Paine Estate, owned by the city of Waltham.*  
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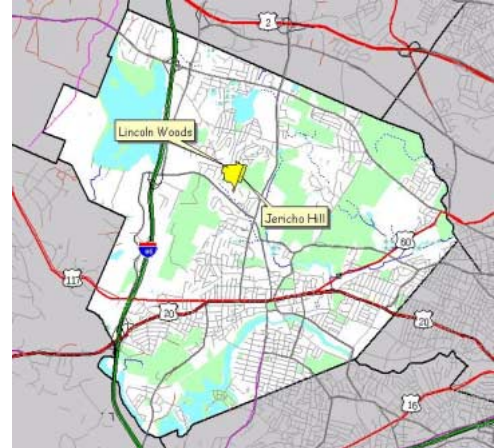
## CAMPAIGN TO SAVE JERICHO HILL

To help preserve Jericho Hill, one of the last great open spaces in Waltham, the Waltham Land Trust is launching a campaign to support of the City's efforts to purchase the land and assist other land conservation initiatives in Waltham. The undeveloped property that runs along the crest of Jericho Hill is one of the highest points in Waltham. The wooded hills are crossed with informal walking trails that wind through stands of oak, cedar and white pine. The hill features several granite outcroppings that offer striking views of Prospect Hill, downtown Waltham, Boston and beyond.

The six-acre hillcrest, if combined with other abutting undeveloped parcels like Lincoln Woods, would create a 72-acre park encompassing the steep southern flank of Jericho Hill. South of Lake Street and the Maravista neighborhood, west of Lexington Street and east of Lincoln Street, the area remained farmland as houses and commercial buildings began to fill the Waltham countryside. Combined as one protected open space, this would be the city's fourth largest park, after Prospect Hill Park, the Storer Conservation Land, and the Beaver Brook Reservation.

The City of Waltham, spurred on by the hard work of the Committee to Study Land Acquisition for the Preservation of Open Space, has included the six-acre crest as a top priority for protection. The Waltham Land Trust identified this parcel as a critically important open space in 1999, and is prepared to help the City protect Jericho Hill and its abutting parcels, if and when needed.

If you are interested in joining our effort to preserve Jericho Hill, please call Eileen Zubrowski (617-924-2033) or Chris Rodstrom (781-894-2320) to find out more about upcoming events and volunteer opportunities.



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**Newsletter Editor:** Bonnie Regelman

*An electronic version of this newsletter is available on our website.*

*If you would prefer us not to mail you the paper version, please let us know.*

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