

## WALTHAM



### Position Regarding Development in Waltham a white paper published in December, 2016

Fifteen years after Waltham Land Trust staked out a position to value Waltham's open space more highly than development, the city's open space is still under siege. Wherever you look, new houses are being squeezed between existing homes. Office complex owners relentlessly attempt to expand their land use. Our farms have been gobbled up as commerce, dormitories and condominiums replace them.

The attack upon the few remaining parcels of significant size is of great concern to the Waltham Land Trust. We have identified the last 64 unprotected open space parcels over 5 acres in the entire city, and every one of them has attracted the interest of developers. Since 2001, when we issued a white paper on this crisis, development has overtaken the old Murphy Army Hospital grounds and the DeVincent Farm. While the City acted to save 33 acres behind Our Lady Church on Trapelo Road, developers destroyed 21 acres of North Waltham woodlands to build the Indian Ridge housing development. The Olympus Hospital campus was also lost, and the Stigmatine Espousal Center and surrounding properties are development targets now. We anxiously await evolving plans for the Fernald campus, but are pleased that the majority of the land there will remain open space, possibly with preserved historic buildings reused.

In addition to the threat from investors seeking to profit from housing development, some of these parcels are also targeted for projects to satisfy the community's interest in expansion of schools, affordable housing and athletic fields. The position of the Waltham Land Trust regarding these circumstances 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 development on the City's large open space parcels--we already have enough developed parcels.*

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.

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

The Waltham Land Trust recommends 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. Where highly valuable open space like the Fernald and Stigmatine campuses are being considered for development, new construction should be limited to constrained building envelopes, with structured parking to minimize land use, and located in ways that maintain trail and wildlife corridors and the connections to contiguous parks and other open space. Waltham has a variety of opportunities available for adaptive re-use of already developed parcels. Waltham Land Trust applauds the reuse of the former police station for the Waltham Museum. Reuse of the Murphy Army Hospital grounds for soccer fields was another redevelopment plan that fit these goals -- the earlier proposals to destroy Waltham Woods or woodlands behind the High School for a hockey rink did not.

*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 Mayor and City Council's action to preserve several significant open space parcels in the past decade, but further action is required if we are to protect our open space.

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.

*[The Waltham Land Trust board of directors includes two City Councillors and one School Department employee. None of these three directors attended the discussions or votes on endorsing this policy or our development white paper.]*

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