

FAQs

Why do we need to save the Farm? Didn't the Town buy it in 2007? Yes, the Town did buy the 20-acre Farm for \$14 million in 2007. Subsequently, Town Meeting leased 7.6 acres containing the farmstead buildings and the arable land to the Wright-Locke Farm Conservancy, itself formed by vote of Town Meeting.

Since purchasing the land in 2007, the Town has twice tried to sell the acreage not leased to the Conservancy to pay down the debt. The first time the buyer defaulted; the second time all offers were rejected as too low. The Town is now trying a third time, in the hope that the Request for Proposals (RFP) allows enough development to bring in a substantial portion of the outstanding debt.

What is different this time? While the 12.5 acres up for sale have been sitting idle, the Conservancy has been busy returning the leased property to an active organic farm offering opportunities for us to connect with the land that sustains us. Among the many activities we plan to draw people to the farm are: spring, summer and fall programs introducing children to a farm experience, educational classes on food production and processing, free summer entertainment for one and all, and venues for organizations and individuals to sponsor outdoor events. As the farm activities have grown, it has become clear that the farm needs additional indoor space (to permit year-around activities), grazing land, and safe parking. (We currently park and let our sheep and chickens graze on Town-owned land with the Town's permission.)

The scale of development permitted by the RFP threatens the ability of the Conservancy to continue even the current education and agriculture programs. It will also destroy the viewsheds that are so valued by visitors to the Farm. People who have not been to the Farm may underestimate the value of an uninterrupted view, but to most of our visitors, the quiet of wooded hills, open fields, and ponds provide a peaceful refuge from the hustle of urban life.

What the heck is a viewshed?

A viewshed is an area of land, water, or other environmental element that is visible to the human eye from a fixed vantage point. The term is used widely in such areas as urban planning, archaeology, and military science.

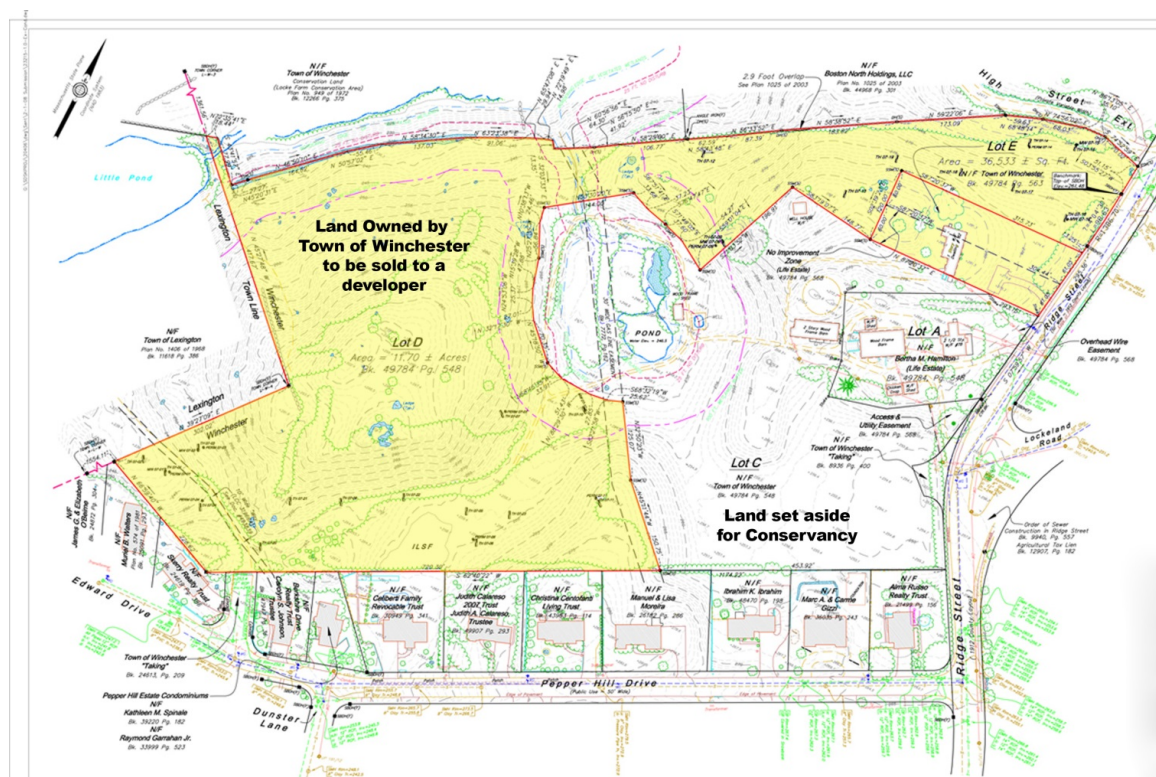
What can I do? You can make a donation to the Wright-Locke Land Trust or the Conservancy. We need to raise enough money to put in a serious proposal to purchase the 12.6 acres with little or no development. If the Conservancy does not win this proposal, the area around the farm will likely have some development on all sides, including on the current parking lot and the hill to the west of the farmstead. This is precious open space and once developed is gone forever. (See map.)

What is the time line for soliciting proposals and selecting a winner: The RFP went out October 28. Proposals are due on January 6, 2015. The Board of

Selectmen will recommend one of the proposals to Town Meeting, either at a special meeting in March or the regular spring meeting in early May.

Who makes the final decision? The 192 elected Town Meeting members have the final say. Since this question involves the sale of land, approval of any proposal requires a 2/3 majority. If the recommended proposal includes overly dense development or fails to make adequate provision for the needs of the Conservancy, we hope Town Meeting will reject the Selectmen's recommendation in favor of one from the Land Trust offering less or no development.

I'm not a Town Meeting member, so what can I do? Each of the eight precincts in Winchester has 24 Town Meeting representatives. You can find their names at <http://www.winchester.us/DocumentCenter/Home/View/546> or by calling the Town Clerk's office. If you are sympathetic to the Conservancy's desire to limit development, please let your representatives know. Also, there are also some vacancies that will be filled by appointment by the precinct's other representatives. You can volunteer to fill one of those vacancies by contacting one of your representatives.



Will they build houses on the raspberry patch? No, the raspberry patch is currently protected by the 30-year lease to the Wright-Locke Farm Conservancy. It is within the 7.6 acres leased by the WLFC. It is the woodlands and hills surrounding the flat land that are currently at risk.

Why doesn't the town have a referendum on whether or not to sell it? They already did. In March of 2007 there was a Debt Exclusion Override on the town ballot. The electorate voted in favor of increasing their real estate taxes by up to \$14 million in order to purchase the farm. This override passed by a 75% margin.

What's the big deal if a few homes are built in back of the working farmland?

Wright-Locke Farm is already a very small farm. If the development intrudes on all sides (as is currently the case on the southern side) it will look like a backyard, not the unique historic farm that it is. Also, we would like to expand our crops and re-invigorate the apple orchards that are in the 12.6 acres up for development. Currently the town allows us to park cars and graze our animals in the 12.6 acres we do not rent. A large development could take that land, which would be devastating to the farm's operations and fiscal sustainability.

Will the homes be for over 55-year-olds? Possibly. That will depend on which proposal wins the RFP. Under the current overlay zoning, if a building has more than 4 units, it must be for the 55 and older set. Consequently, denser developments will tend to be age-restricted because there is not enough buildable land to accommodate many single-family houses.

If homes are built, will my taxes go up or down? What happened to your taxes depends on how much the winning bidder pays for the land. Some of the debt has already been paid, leaving \$12 million. Should the Town not sell the land, the debt would be \$12 million as shown in the box below and the average homeowner would owe \$124 /year for 20 years (depending on how the Town decides to bond the debt.). If the Town recoups \$9 million, thereby leaving \$3 million to be financed, the average homeowner would owe \$31/year.

TAXPAYER IMPACT - This table shows the tax impact for Winchester's average single-family house valued at \$770,455.

If Debt Is	Then Tax Is
\$12 Million	\$124/yr.
\$ 9 Million	\$ 93/yr.
\$ 6 Million	\$ 62/yr.
\$ 3 Million	\$ 31/yr.

Source: Town of Winchester

Will we need to build more schools, etc.? We will not know this answer until

Town Meeting chooses a proposal. Before the Selectmen decide on which proposal to back, they will ask the Finance Committee to write a report on the impact of each development on the Town's infrastructure (schools, police, fire, water and sewer, etc.). While these numbers will be an estimate, they will point towards the real impact. However, what is never covered in these studies is the secondary movement. In developments such as the Ledges and the Pansy Patch, many of the new owners are older Winchester residents who have sold their large homes and downsized after their children have grown up. Though these people bring no new children into the new development, their old larger homes are immediately bought by young families which adds new students to our wonderful schools. So there is an impact.

We have the Middlesex Fells for nature-lovers, why do we want more of the same? The Middlesex Fells is a treasure that Winchester residents use and enjoy. Wright-Locke Farm is a community treasure of a different sort. The Fells is a mecca for passive recreation. At the farm, residents can have community-building and educational experiences as well. They can interact with each other and with the farm via public events, volunteering in the fields, and attending our Farm Education programs.