

## MINUTES

### NATURE CENTER BUILDING COMMITTEE

April 26, 2011, 7:00 PM

Commission Room

A meeting of the Nature Center Building Committee was held on April 26, 2011 in the Library Community Room. Present were W. Glenn Major, Stephen Patton, Dennis Tracey, Nick Bell, John Zaro, Tom Failla and Gayle Weinstein.

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm. The following matters were discussed:

1. Mr. Tracey provided an update of the discussions between the Town and the Nature Conservancy to separate their ownership interests. The proposed agreement that will be proposed to the Board of Selectmen would (1) divide the parcel into two roughly equal parcels, with the Town receiving the parcel facing Godfrey Road including the existing buildings and the Conservancy receiving a parcel that is primarily wooded and contiguous to the Conservancy's property in Devil's Den; (2) the existing endowment for the maintenance and renovation of the property and buildings, currently amounting to approximately \$560,000 would be split evenly between the Town and the Nature Conservancy with each party agreeing to segregate the funds and to use them for maintenance and renovation of the portion of the Lachat property that each receives; and (3) all future uses of the property would be consistent with the intent of Mr. Lachat. There ensued a discussion of the proposed agreement. Mr. Tracey stated that any agreement between the Town and the Nature Conservancy would require approval of the Board of Selectmen, the Attorney General of the State of Connecticut and others, and that any agreement would be published to the community before it was executed.

2. The Committee then had a discussion on possible funding sources for the renovation of the Lachat Farmhouse. Carol Baldwin presented a number of ideas for funding. Ms. Weinstein stated that because of the very poor condition of the farmhouse and the lack of Town funds to renovate it, the Board of Selectmen had voted at the last meeting to disassemble the farmhouse, but that the Board of Selectmen would allow a period of time for third parties to come forward with funding for a renovation. Ms. Baldwin's presentation is attached hereto as Exhibit A and is made a part of the minutes. There ensued a discussion of the condition of the farmhouse and the how the farmhouse had deteriorated so badly. Ms. Weinstein stated that the intention was to convert the building into a Nature Center, and that the Town and Nature Conservancy had deferred renovation of the building pending a decision on whether and how the building would be used. Ms. Weinstein further stated that the funds were

placed in an endowment and, therefore, only 5% of the funds can be used in any one year because there is a need to retain the principal in order to have an ongoing source of funding. Mr. Patton stated that there was currently approximately \$560,000 in the endowment fund and that 5% of the principal may be withdrawn each year for renovation and maintenance of the property and buildings. Thus, in addition to the \$560,000 principal balance, there is an additional amount of \$73,000, which represents the current balance of 5% annual withdrawals that have not yet been used. A suggestion was made to take temporary measures to protect the farmhouse, including placing a tarp on the house and cutting down adjacent trees.

3. The next subject addressed by the Committee was the possible use of the Lachat property for a community farm. Amy Kalafa and Dan Levinson of the Green Village Initiative gave a presentation of ways in which the property could be used for organic farming, sustainable energy and educational purposes. The presentation is reflected in Exhibits B and C, which are made a part of the minutes. There ensued a discussion of the various ideas that were presented. It was agreed that there would be further discussion between members of the committee and the Green Village Initiative to develop a more specific proposal for the creation of a community farm on the Lachat property.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read "Dennis H. Tracey, III". The signature is stylized and somewhat cursive, with a large initial "D" and "T" visible.

Dennis H. Tracey, III  
Chair, Nature Center Building Committee

## **Exhibit A**

### **Presentation by Carol Baldwin**

#### **Lachat House Meeting**

Thanks for putting me on tonight's agenda. My name is Carol Baldwin and I have prepared a couple pages of notes I'd like to share with you. As background, I am a documentary television producer, and have lived in Weston for just under 20 years. I am a member of the Board of the Weston Historical Society and am also on the town's Historic District Commission. Obviously, I have an interest in historic preservation. I feel that our history links us with our past and offers us perspective on the future. Our town has seen much development since I moved here, and so the bits of history that are left and that harkens back to the town's past, are particularly precious. Once they are gone, the essence of our town – that which attracted me to the town when I chose to move here and raise my family in Weston and that gave the town's its uniquely charming appeal – That appeal will be gone for good. The town becomes closer to being just another bit of bland suburbia.

#### **What to do with Lachat**

I have attended town meetings and spoken out to town administrators about the fate of the Lachat property. I have been waiting to hear of a resolution between the town and the Nature Conservancy regarding the control of the property. I was told maybe a decision would be made in January of this year. I missed the last meeting and then learned that a decision had been made to demolish the Lachat farm house. I feel that many members of our town are unaware of this situation.

I have thrust myself into this situation because I feel I cannot sit idly by and watch a piece of our town's history – as Mr. Shook detailed - be lost. Not only is the house historic – one of only 10 remaining homes in Weston dating from the 1700s - but the property is singular in our town- it remains the only intact farm left, and, with the other surrounding Godfrey houses and the toll house – altogether they make this area of our town worthy of being designated an “Historic District”.

#### **Funding**

Estimates have been made as to the costs to stabilize the house. And more funds would be needed to make the space workable. I feel that the exterior should be restored to appear as it did when Leon lived there – and NOT back to its original 18th century appearance- the changes over the years are part of its charm. I feel that the interior should be gutted and made into a space that can serve the community.

I understand the town may only have \$65,000 left to put towards a renovation. I would like to pursue finding additional NON-TOWN funds to renovate the house. [STATE:] I would like to pursue 2 options available for STATE grant money: one from the State's Commission on Culture and Tourism as offered by its “History and Museum's Division”. They provide grants up to \$200,000 via their Historic Preservation Fund. I will also pursue a State STEAP grant that could match

privately donated funds – STEAP grants offer economic opportunities to our state by providing jobs initiated by money granted for projects such as this.

[FARM:] As a farm, there is funding available to save the last real farm in our town via 3 different State and National Funds, set up to retain just these sorts of properties: the Connecticut Farmland Trust, the Trust for Public Land, and The American Farmland Trust. A farm HOUSE is integral to a property that is being saved as farmland.

[PRIVATE:] I will also approach 3 different private historic preservation funds: the first being The Connecticut Trust for Historic Preservation. The CT Trust offers grants for feasibility studies, and planning studies. In addition to the Connecticut Trust, the National Trust for Historic Preservation also offers funds for restoration projects just like this. And, the “1772 Foundation” is a privately funded organization based in Putnam, CT that offers grants for the restoration of historic properties.

I will also approach family foundations, some of which are overseen by Weston residents. And I will ask private individuals to consider helping fund the restoration. I would also like to possibly create a fundraising event (To this end...I would love to enlist the help of a famous musician who lives just through the woods of the Lachat Property!)

In just the last 48 hours, I have already secured preliminary commitments for \$50,000 of private funds for the restoration of the house. A challenge for matching funds could be established.

[OTHER:] I have also sent photos and a description of the Lachat home to the television program, “This Old House” – whose offices are located in NYC – in the hopes that they might pick up the project.

And I have spoken with local architects who have expressed interest in helping restore the house pro bono.

[DEMOLITION:] A cost that should be noted is that of its demolition. It’s not as simple as just tearing the house down: there are demolition costs, disposal costs, and site work necessary after its removal that involves re-grading the gaping hole and landscaping the former site. The cost to destroy the house may very well match the costs to stabilize the house. Just THIS morning in New Canaan, the town decided NOT to demolish an 800 square foot building because of the costs: One estimate was for \$135,000 and the other, from Stamford Wrecking, was for \$426,000!

[MORE TIME:] So all this being said – I would like to ask the Committee to allow me, working with a task force of concerned citizens, to try to raise the funds necessary. But I need some time to be able to pursue these options. Throughout the state, the Delay of Demolition period is typically 90 to 180 days. In Westport, for example, it is 180 days. I would like to ask the Committee to offer me at least this amount of time to seek non-town funds and report back to the Committee.

### **Future use**

One issue that has been brought up in previous meetings is: “What to do with the house once it has been restored?” --especially since the town already has an empty restored antique home – the Morehouse property. I would suggest a model such as

is SO successful in Westport at the old Wakeman Farm – a teacher from the high school and his young family live there in exchange for helping with the town farm. The gutted interior could be outfitted with a small apartment, a classroom space, as well as public bathrooms. The Lachat Farm could become a piece of living history – allowing for school visits, summer day camp programs for children, and gardening classes -- a space that enables our town to become more of a community. It could ALSO serve as the gateway into the Devil's Den hiking trails. Turning the Lachat Farm into a Town Farm is a wonderful innovative use of the house and property that not only preserves Leon's intent when he offered his farm to the town but also preserves our town's early history in a way that will captivate and educate our town's young and old for the NEXT 300 years!

Thank you for your time.

## WHY WOULD A TOWN FARM BE GOOD FOR WESTON?



- Community Supported Agriculture: A town farm can be run as a CSA project. Interested citizens can join and participate by buying shares in the harvest and/or working some hours on the farm. Many CSA's donate their surplus to a town food bank, providing the needy with fresh produce instead of canned. There is a network of town farms in Connecticut, the Community Farm Coalition. There's a town Farm in Wilton (Ambler Farm), a town farm in Westport (Wakeman Farm), a town farm in Norwalk (Fodor Farm) and a town farm in Redding (New Pond Farm).

“The Community Food Projects (CFP) Competitive Grants Program provides the major funding source for community-based food and agriculture projects nationwide. Approximately \$4.6 million in funds were granted in 2006.

<http://www.nal.usda.gov/afsic/csa/>

<http://attra.ncat.org/attra-pub/csa.html>

<http://www.localharvest.org/csa/>



- Farm to School: Our kids need a connection to the land and must learn where their food comes from to ensure a sustainable future. A town farm could supply fresh fruits, vegetables and even eggs to the school system, and our students could come to the farm to learn and participate in planting and harvesting. Farm to school programs exist across the country: The Yale University Sustainability Project here in Connecticut and the ConVal School District in Peterborough, New Hampshire are two model programs that are leading the way.

<http://www.farmtoschool.org/resources.htm>

<http://www.ecoliteracy.org/>



- **Get Healthy:** Our nation's kids, and yes, even Weston's kids are suffering a nutritional crisis. Beyond epidemic obesity and diabetes, we have epidemic increases in the incidence of asthma, allergies, autism, ADHD, depression and behavioral disorders among our kids. We have great facilities for physical fitness in our community, but no program for families to discover for themselves the way fresh, local, ecologically raised foods can impact their overall health and wellness. Edible schoolyards and town farms are springing up here in Weston and in neighboring Wilton, Westport, Fairfield and Ridgefield.

<http://www.integrativenutrition.com/>



- Traditional Farming Preserves and Conserves Land: Small farms are necessarily diverse and regenerative. The Lachat property was deeded to the town in trust for conservation purposes. Sustainable farming practices prevent soil erosion, increase soil fertility, sequester carbon and preserve the natural biodiversity of the environment.

<http://www.ctnofa.org/index.htm>



- Diversity of Seed Stock: Our agriculture system has caused a 95% decrease in the diversity of seed stock over the past 100 years. This means that the genetic material for our food is so uniform that a blight like the potato blight in Ireland could easily wipe out the majority of one of our major crops like corn, soy, or wheat. Organic farmers can use non-commercial varieties of seeds because they don't need to raise tomatoes that are firm enough to be shipped 3000 miles or potatoes that are exactly the size required by MacDonal'd's for their fries. Genetically modified crops (illegal in Europe and elsewhere) are now the bulk of America's agribusiness, currently don't require labeling, and are proprietary products. Small, local farms are integral to preserving a diversity of seeds for the future.

<http://thefutureoffood.com/>



- Food Security: Fairfield County was once a farming community. If we were to have a regional disaster with our food supply cut off from major delivery routes to the west, we would have few resources for regenerating our own food. According to published reports, Connecticut has only a four-day emergency food supply to feed its population. It is imperative for residents of the northeast to develop a modicum of self-reliance for food security.

<http://foodsecurity.org>



• Food Miles: The average meal travels 1500 miles from farm to fork. With peak oil in our near future, it is simply not sustainable to transport all of our food across the country. Small, local farms add to the local economy, use fewer or no pesticides and herbicides than a giant commercial single-crop operation, and don't waste energy or contribute to air pollution.

[http://www.sustainweb.org/chain\\_fm\\_index.asp](http://www.sustainweb.org/chain_fm_index.asp)

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# Green Village Initiative Weston Town Farm Proposal

**To:** The Town of Weston - Gayle Weinstein First Selectman ()

**From:** Westport Green Village Initiative

**Date:** April 1, 2011

**Subject:** Weston Town Farm

*"With access to a farm, many are dazzled by the bounty and wonders of nature.  
I love to see grown people awed by the delicate beauty of a carrot seedling."  
Robyn Van En, founder of Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) in United States*

**Overview:** This proposal, submitted by Green Village Initiative ("GVI") to the Town of Weston, sets forth GVI's desire to preserve Lachat Farm as a town farm for the entire community – addressing the major issues of our time – food, energy, community, sustainability...

The Weston Town Farm ("The Farm") will celebrate Weston's agricultural and independent New Englander roots and its future as a leader in sustainable/environmental and community practice. GVI's goal is to establish a model town facility that will educate the community and inspire others with local healthy food production, responsible land stewardship, sustainable practices, community/service orientation – and the highest of ethical and giving/thoughtful practices. Activities will include growing fruits/vegetables, raising chickens, possibly sheep and other diverse farm animals, best food generation and preservation practices, permaculture/sustainable practices, farmstand/CSA (community supported agriculture), and related educational and culinary activities. The Farm will be run as a community non-profit open to the public with emphasis on inviting the participation of our schools and neighbors.

GVI stands ready to accept the responsibility of this undertaking and has funding and leadership in place to carry it forward effectively and responsibly. By bringing strong leadership/funding, farming expertise, deep Westport/Weston community roots and experienced advisors – GVI hopes to "over-deliver" on the program described herein. Please see [gogvi.org](http://gogvi.org) for background on GVI, its resources/members, philosophy and programs.

**Proposed Lease Terms:** GVI proposes to lease The Farm with a total of at least 20 acres from the Town of Weston for seven years starting as soon as possible. GVI will commit to renovate the buildings, maintain the property and actively pursue the program described herein in exchange for waiver of rent obligations. The lease will include a requirement for GVI to maintain proper insurance, and take proper safety measures and other items in keeping with Town practice.

**Consistent with Town Precedent, Town Plan and Town Economic Priorities:**

- GVI does not hold itself out as expert on Weston town operations, but The Farm is consistent with current and past Town practice of public/private partnership to provide community services. Examples include the Farmers Market and athletic programs.
- The Farm is consistent with findings/recommendations of the 2010 town plan. Specifically, The Farm will preserve critical environmental areas, preserve open space, natural beauty and natural resources, and, as specified in the plan, preserve Weston's rural character. Also as specified in the plan, the Farm will be a facility that will benefit all Weston residents. And, the Farm will promote and model sustainable practices in our food system, energy consumption and reuse and recycling of resources.
- The Farm will provide affordable housing to a local farmer and his or her family and it will be an economic development center for local food production and local artisans and provide employment and internships for Weston youth.

**Farm Program:** GVI will return the site to a working farm that will plant/raise, grow, distribute, and promote community involvement in local/healthy food production, sustainability and independence – all while inspiring people, supporting them and having fun! Renovations will include updating the existing house and /or apartment to house a farmer, outfitting the garage for farmstand/CSA and farm operations, the barn for hay, animals and a working / teaching kitchen, preparing garden/farm areas, expanding parking as needed, etc. All operations will be staffed as needed with paid professionals on site supported by volunteers and heavy involvement from Weston Middle and High School students (Environmental club, animal rights club) and other Weston organizations such as the Historical Society, the Kiwanis, etc.

**Property Improvements:** Property improvements will be funded by GVI and supervised by local builders / architects / farmer as follows:

- Updated living quarters for on-site farmer.
- Barn farmstand/CSA.
- Farm office and food prep space in barn or garage.
- Farm equipment/supply space in barn.
- Deer fencing, other fencing
- Field preparation and planting, greenhouse, chicken coop and the like, and general farming activities/installations.
- Ample parking.

**Code of Conduct:** GVI will use best efforts to ensure that all activities on and related to The Farm are legal, safe, constructive, mindful/thoughtful, reflecting well on the town, of the absolute highest ethical standards - and a credit to all involved.

**Farm Team and Advisors:** GVI is comprised of dozens of talented local citizens with deep experience in the areas of environmental programming, farming/gardening, CSA operations, education, and the like – including leaders of local organizations, Weston’s educational community and long-standing active citizens. This breadth and local depth gives GVI the ability to complete the program described herein. In addition, GVI brings strong relationships/support from successful area and national related farm/homesteading/environmental nonprofits, including:

- The Manhattan Country School Farm in the Catskills (a leading model farm/homestead for decades)
- The E. F. Schumacher Society in the Berkshires (which started the first CSA in the country)
- Gilberties – a leader in local organic farming/retailing/greenhousing (in Westport and Easton)
- Earthplace – Westport’s most successful environmental educational resource.
- The Hickories in Ridgefield (the area’s most dynamic farm)
- Millstone Farm in Wilton (owned by Jesse and Betsy Fink)
- Stone Gardens (currently serving 100+ family CSA in town)
- New Pond Farm (Redding's Town Farm)
- Ambler Farm (Wilton's Town Farm)
- Sport Hill Farm in Easton

**Approval Process:** The Weston Town approval process, as we understand it, is as follows:

- GVI submits proposal to Selectman’s Office.
- Gayle Weinstein reviews proposal with Lachat Committees.
- The Nature Conservancy's attorney reviews the proposal and all parties negotiate an amicable division of the property (proposed wooded lots for Nature Conservancy, fields and buildings for Town Farm)
  - Town Attorney, draws up lease.
  - Town Attorney and / or Health District to recommend any “due diligence” items (such as testing soil and septic).
  - First Selectman requests approval of the lease from P&Z and Board of Finance.

GVI stands ready to execute the necessary legal agreements to pursue this program as quickly as possible.

Thank you for your consideration.