

# New Canaan Conservation Commission Newsletter



## Welcome to Our Third Issue

Thank you for “clicking” on our Fall 2010 newsletter, our first ever available exclusively on line. Our goal is to make us all more aware of the world in which we live and to live a more environmentally friendly lifestyle. In this edition, you will find an article from Laszlo Papp, Chairman of the Planning & Zoning Commission on the need for a Conservation Commission. Please feel free to email us at [conservation.commission@ci.new-canaan.ct.us](mailto:conservation.commission@ci.new-canaan.ct.us) with any suggestions you have for future articles.

### The Need for a Conservation Commission

*by Laszlo Papp, Chairman of P&Z*

Conservation of natural resources in New Canaan is important in terms of preserving environmental functions, protecting community character and enhancing the quality of life for residents. “Environmentally sound planning helps find an appropriate balance between conservation and development” –so states the Plan of Conservation & Development, adopted by the town in 2003. The State of Connecticut also recognized the same needs and goals when in addition to the Inland Wetland and Planning and Zoning Commissions it authorized towns to establish a Conservation Commission as well.

In 2001 New Canaan elected to combine the Inland Wetland & Watercourses Commission, the Flood & Erosion Control Board the Conservation Commission into a single entity – The Environmental Commission. It became very obvious that a single community board cannot effectively oversee all the issues presented to the combined commission. While Inland Wetland and Flood & Erosion have regulatory power, the Conservation Commission has only an advisory function. No wonder that conservation issues were always shortchanged. John Black Lee, an architect and senior member of the Environmental Commission expressed frustration about the lack of attention given to the conservation issues, and as a protest, resigned. His action called attention to conservation planning issues. On behalf of P&Z, I appealed to the Board of Selectman for the establishment of an independent Conservation Commission. This was accomplished two years ago.

As the Plan of Conservation & Development states, the function of the Conservation Commission should be: coordinating conservation activities; preparing an inventory of natural resources; conducting research into land utilization and making recommendations (to P&Z and others) on the development and use of different areas; preparing and distributing books, maps, charts, plans and pamphlets; acquiring and managing land and easements, and/or receiving and administering gifts for conservation purposes.

In order to promote this goal it may establish an open space fund, pursue grants, encourage philanthropy (tax credit) donations. It can also promote the longstanding goal: to establish “Green Links.” This grew from the simple idea that walking is the best way to explore and enjoy New Canaan’s rich natural beauty, wildlife, history and architecture.

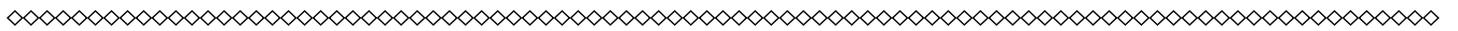
As we can see, the Conservation Commission has a lot on its plate. We are fortunate that with the leadership of its five members the Commission it is up and running. The P&Z has assigned one its members, Eileen Boyd, to act as a liaison. We shall work closely together for the common goal: the conservation of our natural resources. For its part P&Z recognized the importance of open space and conservation. In the Subdivision Regulations we can require that each new subdivision shall provide at least 10% open space or pay a fee-in-lieu for open space. The prime aim of this regulation is to establish parks, playgrounds or greenbelts – local trails. This is where we may need to work

with the Conservation Commission, because we often encounter opposition from property owners who do not want other people to walk behind their properties.

Those who point to the ‘openness’ in the 2 and 4 acre zones have a point. Since the building coverage is restricted to no more than 5%, of the residential site and even adding non-building coverage, i.e. driveways, pools, play areas, the large lot zones have more than 90% in ‘open condition.’ Indeed, if you fly over New Canaan all you see is trees.

The Zoning Regulations allow (by Special Permit) a portion of a residential lot to be dedicated for permanent preservation of open space and for this purpose some of the zoning requirements may be reduced. Here, again, advice from the Conservation Commission may be helpful in connection with an application where such a dedication may be appropriate.

Management of already dedicated open spaces presents a challenge. A question to consider is who should take charge of the open space management though out the town?



## **The Open Space Map is adopted, now what?**

*By Steve Kleppin*

The compilation and mapping of open spaces is one of the few mandates that the Conversation Commission is required to undertake. At its April 15th meeting the Conservation Commission formally adopted the Draft Open Space Map as the official mapping of open space in New Canaan. The adopted map can be viewed by just clicking on “open space map” on our website One of the other mandates is to conduct research into the utilization of land within the Town of New Canaan. In addition, the Town Code and State Statutes indicate that the Commission may propose greenways for inclusion within the Plan of Conservation and Development.

Since the map is now adopted, some logical next steps in utilizing this map are: 1) Looking for opportunities to add to the town’s existing open space; 2) Assessing New Canaan’s existing open space areas (especially in context of previous open space reports); and 3) Determining the feasibility of establishing greenways.

Adding to the town’s inventory of open space will be a challenging undertaking for several reasons: 1) the high cost of land acquisition in New Canaan; 2) the relatively low availability of vacant land, particularly large, undeveloped parcels; and 3) the fiscal constraints facing the Town of New Canaan as well as the State of Connecticut. However, these limiting factors should not deter attempts to target properties should the opportunity arise. While acquiring one of these properties might be difficult, all due diligence should be undertaken to see if there is a willing seller and perhaps a conservation buyer who can take advantage of the potential tax savings of purchasing and easing the property. A more affordable and appropriate strategy might be to target parcels that are adjacent to existing town parks, or other preserved lands. While some of these parcels may be small, less than 5 acres, if they are accumulated and connected to existing preserved lands you can significantly increase the size of the parkland and/or contiguous open space as well as provide greater protection for the future.

Regarding management of New Canaan’s existing open space, success in the future will require ever more proactive management of this vital resource in an increasingly coordinated fashion to ensure we take the most appropriate actions to provide for its protection and efficient use. This is particularly true for New Canaan’s parks which represent approximately 500 acres or nearly 40% of our open space.

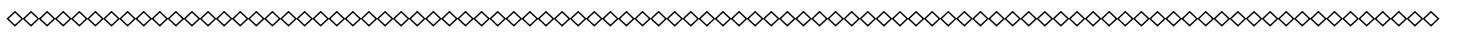
Much progress has been made managing our open space over the past several years with the implementation of many of the recommendations in the 2004 Open Space Committee Report and the 2006 State of the Parks Report. Recent examples include the reconditioning of the walking trails at Waveny Park and the sidewalks on South Avenue, construction of the walking paths and ball fields at Irwin Park and renovation of the pocket park at Mill Pond. While working with the Commission on this issue, we believe one very important next step will be to prepare an up-to-date and comprehensive master plan for Waveny Park, similar to what is being considered for Irwin, to ensure we carefully plan for the future of the town’s “crown jewel”.

Another, promising outcome is the potential for an approximate 6-mile greenway spanning a good portion of the Stamford/New Canaan border. A draft of the greenway map can be viewed at [http://www.newcanaan.info/filestorage/9488/9220/785/7539/2010-0212\\_OS\\_New\\_Canaan-reduced.pdf](http://www.newcanaan.info/filestorage/9488/9220/785/7539/2010-0212_OS_New_Canaan-reduced.pdf)  
<http://www.newcanaan.info/content/9488/9220/785/7539/default.aspx>

The hardest part in any land preservation effort is obviously acquiring vacant land. In this instance, for the most part, the majority of the requisite properties are already preserved in some fashion or are owned by the Aquarion Water

Company. There are many obstacles to overcome prior to the establishment of any trails. First and foremost is gaining access to the Aquarion properties. The town has begun a discussion with Aquarion and were hopeful we can persuade them to allow access. There are other logistical concerns in terms of connecting several New Canaan Land Trust parcels off Davenport Road to parcels in Stamford as well as potential water crossings. While these obstacles will not be easy to overcome, the addition of a 6-mile long trail would be an asset which many of our surrounding towns would be envious of. This trail could serve as a great day-long excursion for families looking to spend time together as well as commune in a pristine, untouched environment.

In summary, the Commission will continue to examine and interpret the data derived from the map and work with other town bodies to look for opportunities to add to the town's open space and to develop plans that ensure we carefully manage and care for this precious resource.



**New Canaan's Preservation Alliance Inc.**

*by Mimi Findlay*

The mission of the New Canaan Preservation Alliance Inc. (NCPA) is to establish as a community priority the conservation of the town's character-defining historic architectural and natural environments.

In 2007, as a flurry of tear-downs removed many of New Canaan's 18th, 19th and early 20th century houses, and barns, along with their historic thrown stone walls, a group of long time residents gathered to respond to the vanishing character of the town we loved and valued for its collection of heritage resources, to create a new organization, the New Canaan Preservation Alliance, Inc.

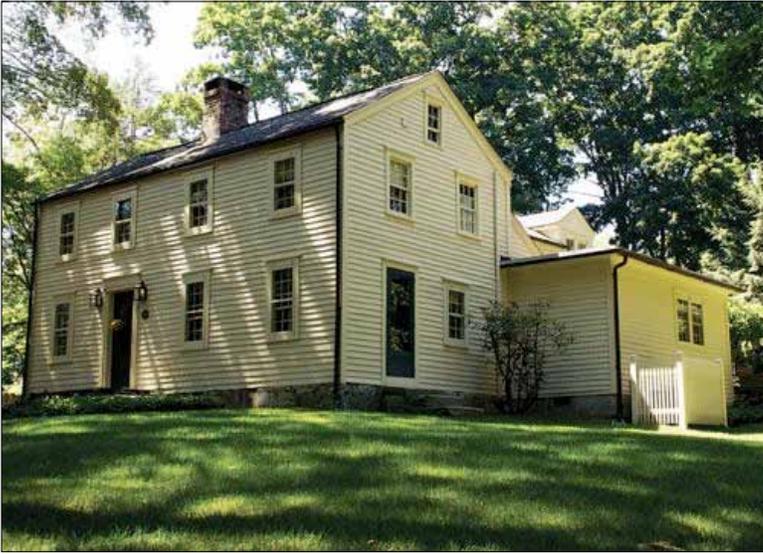
A board of directors was formed to include residing New Canaan architects, historic home owners, museum curators, educators, financial planner, a retired contractor and a web master. An Advisory Board of experts in the preservation field from all over the state has also been established.

Lacking the feasibility of expanding New Canaan's local Historic District at that time, - an historic district has statutory controls over alterations, demolitions and new construction, as in the 1100 properties in Wethersfield CT and the entire island of Nantucket MA - it was quickly determined that the goal would be an educational one: to foster a local culture that understood, appreciated and wanted to protect the character-defining elements of our town.

Over the past two and one half years, partnering with the CT Trust for Historic Preservation, the National Trust, Historic New England, the New Canaan Historical Society, the Glass House, and the Silvermine Guild, NCPA has held workshops on various conservation planning topics, facilitated the National Register nomination of the Moderns, provided guides for a modern architecture and sculpture tour, hosted book-signings and presented noted architects and preservation planners from all over the eastern seaboard for its members and interested citizens. A workshop was held last May, National Preservation Month, conducted by David Taylor, our survey consultant, "What you do with What You've Got" in which he raved about the architecture of downtown New Canaan but warned of the rapid disappearance of significant architectural elements such as original windows, pediments, colum otherwise, art deco parapets, original brick surfaces, etc. from many of these historic buildings.



At the first Awards ceremony in 2008, the Alliance gave an award to Jacqueline and the late Bruce Capra for their outstanding rehabilitation of this Edward Durell Stone landmark on Oenoke Ridge.



For three years NCPA has held a public annual birthday party and presented Awards to owners of historic properties that they had preserved, rehabilitated or restored, also recognizing their architects and contractors with noteworthy preservation practices.

The c1832 home of the Silvermine artist, Hamilton Hamilton, this house received an Award for outstanding preservation and rehabilitation from the Alliance in 2009.

In 2009, a consultant was hired to revise, re-photograph and expand the 1987 Historic and Architectural Resources Survey of New Canaan's downtown eastern half, funded with a grant from the Museum and Historic Preservation Division of the CT Commission of Culture and Tourism. The second phase, to begin shortly, will complete and expand downtown's western half. This database DVD will be used by the Town's Planning and Zoning Department, the Historic Review Committee, and by the New Canaan Historical Society, and any interested citizen in the town Library.

In 2010 our unique elementary school program was launched with a pilot developed by board members Arianne Faber Kolb and Laura G. Einstein. The program includes a power point presentation on New Canaan's landmarks to fourth graders, with an activity workbook including architectural vocabulary and spelling, history of architectural styles, exercises on reading floor plans and recognizing the specific New Canaan buildings depicted in the WPA canvas murals in Town Hall by Walter Bradnee Kirby.

In partnership with landscape historian/designer, Jessica Matteson, of James Doyle Design Associates, NCPA is sponsoring a research project on the evolution of the historic landscape of Waveny Park, beginning with the "Original Conditions Plan" of the working farm of Thomas Hall (1895-1904), through the nearly 300 various Lapham period designs prepared by the Frederick Law Olmsted firm (1905-1967) to the "Period of Completion Plan c1916" and the "Merritt Parkway Addition Plan c1935" and concluding with today's "Existing Conditions Plan 2010".

The most consistent feature of the New Canaan landscape is its "tossed" or "thrown" stone walls bordering its roads. Not cut to fit, not glued together with concrete or iced on the top with mortar, these remarkable features really define out town, the epicenter of the Connecticut stone wall phenomenon.



For further information or questions, please call  
Mimi Findlay, President, 203-966-4617  
or write to: NCPA, PO Box 924, New Canaan, CT 06840



contractor who is certified in herbicide applications. If you cut it or dig it do not compost it, bag it and take it to the dump to be incinerated.



Close up of leaves -April



Route 123 near Country Club



In flower along River St. Sept 10, 2010



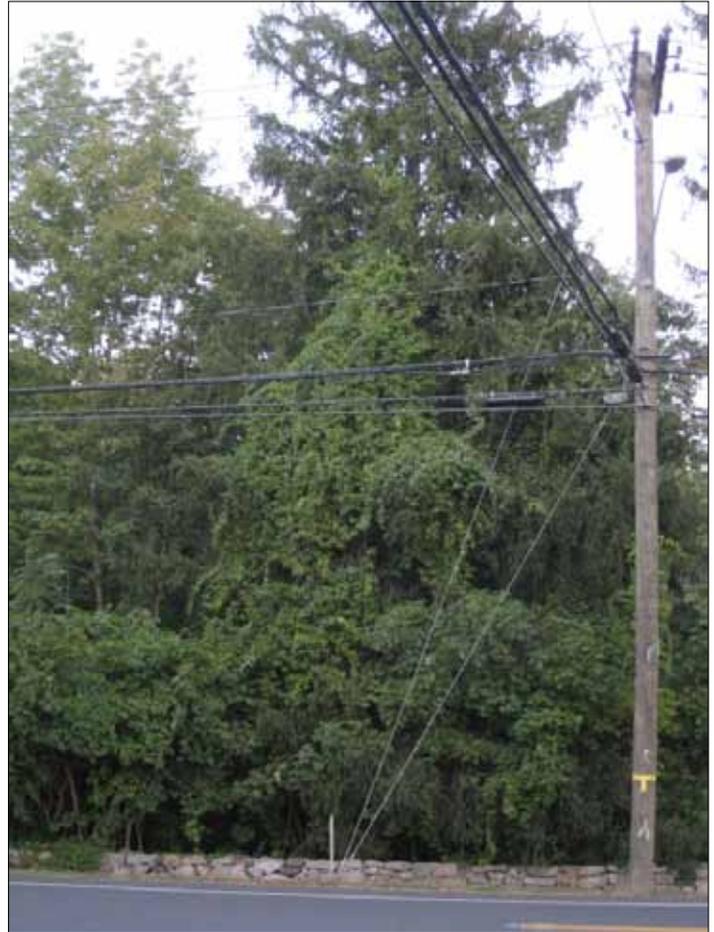
December 2009 Smith Ridge at North Wilton Road

For more information : <http://www.invasive.org/eastern/biocontrol/12Knotweed.html>

### **Oriental Bittersweet:**

Bittersweet vine can smother and kill shrubs and trees. Do not let it begin to grow up in trees. If it is already established cut the stems and try to pull it up by the root. It is often impossible to get larger stems out of trees.





These beautiful spruces are being irreparably harmed.

For a full list of plants considered invasive in Connecticut go to:  
[www.hort.uconn.edu/cipwg](http://www.hort.uconn.edu/cipwg)