

# Citizens for Easton



*Annual Newsletter - 2015*

## *South Park: The Big Picture*

From the air, or at least from Google Earth, South Park looks much as it has for a hundred years. Open fields are bounded to the east by forest, while the Mill River twists east, then north, then west – an irresolute path that indicates a flood plain where the only boundaries are man-made, South Park Avenue and Riverside Lane.

South Park is a natural oasis that has resisted the siren of development. There are reasons for this. Foremost, floodplains make notoriously poor areas to place houses, buildings, condominiums or parking lots. To build, rivers must be diverted and swamps drained. To build, the land – with the help of bulldozers – must discard the past, along with the elemental forces that made it uniquely what it is.

But there are other reasons why South Park remains. In 1972, Citizens for Easton was founded because residents concerned about a high-density development correctly envisioned these acres as the perfect place to draw the line – against thoughtless development, against an assault on our long-established zoning regulations, and especially against efforts by those seeking profit to the detriment of the town and the Mill River.

In 2008, with a vote of 1246 to 412, Easton residents voted in favor of acquiring the roughly 30 acres of land at 18-22 South Park Avenue “for preservation, conservation, and land use control purposes.” Out of concern for the Mill River and as a hedge against intensive development, Easton purchased the land.

Now, once again, South Park is endangered. Our town leaders are considering selling the property, to reverse what they deem a mistake – the purchase – and to recapture some tax dollars, however modest. While their primary concern is money, CFE sees the issues as far-reaching and complex: we are the current stewards of our town’s natural heritage with a responsibility to future generations.

Any move to sell the South Park property at this time is shortsighted. Beyond the natural impediments of the flood plain, what happens at South Park could happen anywhere else in town. What was true in 1972 is still true now: developers’ assurances are simply instruments of convenience – for them.

Those assurances can be re-ordered at the stroke of a pen, with the explanation that “circumstances have changed,” or “common-sense financial considerations must prevail,” or “market forces have dictated that we must reverse the position we originally agreed to.”

CFE’s urgent plea is: leave South Park alone. Do not cede our town’s character to those with no interest or stake in it. Do not sell this land. Only in ownership is there control, and the significance of this property warrants that control. Why?

- As a town, we have taken our role as stewards of the region’s watershed and public water supply seriously. Through the hearings for earlier development proposals, the town’s residents and commissions acquired an education on the unique characteristics of the Mill River as one of only nine pristine rivers in the state of Connecticut with a naturally occurring brook trout population. This ecosystem would be highly sensitive to the changes in light and temperature that might be caused by development. In part, it was concerns such as these that resulted in denials on earlier applications.
- Also during those hearings, both experts and residents raised health and safety concerns about the gas pipeline which runs through the property.
- As a gateway to Easton, this property represents the spirit and character of the town, its agricultural and natural heritage.
- What is permitted on the South Park property won’t necessarily stay on the South Park property. Precedence is a dangerous wedge that will be used to open the door to projects which do not comply with our zoning.

Given the significance of this property in its location and environmental value, CFE urges our town leaders to move forward with care and deliberation. There is no immediacy here. We Eastonites are fortunate to have the luxury of time precisely because we DO own this land. A bounty of documentation has been garnered through countless hours of public hearings, information that led to denials in each case. That says it all.

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## 7<sup>th</sup> Annual Easton Farm Tour on Saturday, August 22



Kathleen Magner

Citizens For Easton will sponsor a self-guided farm tour, which will be held this year on Saturday, August 22, from 10 a.m. to 3 p.m. This family-friendly event celebrates Easton's local farming community and showcases the many farming delights that the town has to offer. Participants will learn where their food comes from and why it is important to shop local and support small farms and businesses.

The tour starts at the Easton Firehouse Green at One Center Road where visitors check in and pick up a map of the current year's participating farms. The Farm Tour is a highlight of the summer and connects customers from Fairfield County and beyond with the Easton farmers who keep our agricultural heritage thriving. The tour includes tastings, educational events, pony rides, old-time fun and games, and live music. Watch for announcements for the time of this year's Farm Tour. You can also contact us by email at [farmtour@citizensforeaston.org](mailto:farmtour@citizensforeaston.org) or check our website at [www.citizensforeaston.org](http://www.citizensforeaston.org) for more information.

## Saddle Ridge Update

On August 20, 2008, Saddle Ridge Developers, LLC applied for a 21-lot subdivision on the parcel of land located on the northwest corner of Route 136 and Sport Hill Road. The application, which complied with Easton's three-acre zoning and proposed to build 21 ten-bedroom homes, was approved. Subsequent to this approval, on July 15, 2010, Saddle Ridge submitted an application to construct 110 two-bedroom townhouses on the same property under the auspices of the affordable housing statute 8-30g. As this was completely contrary to our zoning, CFE strongly objected to the proposal on the grounds of the threat to public health and safety, and through the Coalition to Save Easton (CSE), became a legal intervenor in the process. The property lies on the watershed and feeds the Aspetuck and Hemlock reservoirs, which provide public drinking water for over 600,000 Fairfield County residents. The application was denied.

On March 4, 2011, Saddle Ridge filed for a 99-unit development on the same property. CSE again became a legal intervenor, and this application, too, was denied. Saddle Ridge and the property owner, Silver Sport Associates Limited Partnership, filed lawsuits against both denials.

On August 8, 2014, Saddle Ridge applied for a 48-parcel subdivision on the same property, breaking zoning under the guise of qualifying under the affordable housing statute 8-30g. This scheme proposed 600 sq. ft. affordable rental apartments on the second or basement floors of 3,000 sq. ft. homes. The affordable housing statute clearly states that affordable units must be comparable to the market rate homes. CSE became a legal intervenor in the process, and again, the application was denied.

Saddle Ridge Developers LLC, owned by Bucky Stone and Robert Carlson, and the property owner, Silver Sport Associates Limited Partnership, are currently pursuing the lawsuit for the 99-unit application. The trial is scheduled to start on September 8, 2015 and The Coalition to Save Easton is, once again, a legal intervenor in the process. Legal intervention is very costly, so please send a donation, payable to CSE, to: Coalition to Save Easton, PO Box 151, Easton, CT 06612.



Jeff Yates



Contributed

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Finally, we leave you with this: go to that Google Earth view on your computer screen, then pull back. Look at the rest of Easton. Look at the sensible development that is the result of seventy years of zoning regulations that are wise, fair, and suited to this town so rich in natural beauty and resources. Look at the reservoirs, the upland forests, and the remnant farms that still so strongly define our heritage and character. Look at the streams and rivers that characterize our town, our home.

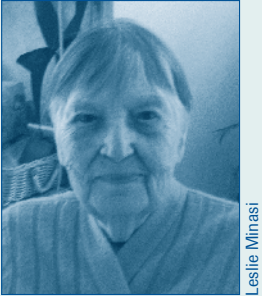
As you look, remember this: Easton plays a unique role in Fairfield County, as steward of a water supply that serves the entire region. This is a border-to border obligation – this stewardship – and it doesn't stop at South Park. For now, it is our responsibility, and the legacy we create is what future generations will inherit. Leave South Park alone. Forever ours, or forever lost, along with so much else we treasure here.

## Your Neighbors: Much to Treasure in Easton

**Luella Ostrofsky:** Luella, originally from Maine, came to Stratford during WWII to build the Corsair airplane. Before returning to Maine, she met her husband-to-be, Milton, and they moved to Fairfield. In 1952 they saw a piece of land for sale in Easton, came up into the woods to check it out, and fell in love with the rural atmosphere. Luella and Milton cleared their three-acre plot by themselves. A local excavator dug the cellar, and Milton built the rest of their home himself. It took him from Labor Day until June 20th of 1953, when Luella, Milton, and their two boys moved in.

Then, as now, Luella loves the quiet and open spaces of Easton. Their family grew to three boys, who benefited from the excellent Easton/Redding educational system. The two older boys went to Joel Barlow Junior High and High School, and by the time Jeffrey came along, Helen Keller Middle School had come into existence. Back in the day, Mamma Slady used to pack the bushels with apples and peaches, Snow's delivered the milk, Dugan's Bakery delivered fresh baked goods, and Benny Silverman supplied Samuel Staples School with fresh produce.

Luella remains active at Jesse Lee Church, and still treasures Easton for its tranquility, good neighbors, wildlife, and rural atmosphere. She says the only way she will be leaving Easton is feet first!



Leslie Minasi



Contributed

**Vivian Hardison:** As an Assistant District Governor of Rotary International District 7255, Vivian Hardison's business card says "Light Up Your Community," and she has done just that in Easton. CFE is proud and pleased to welcome her to our board. Viv moved here in August 2014 with her husband, Richard Lechtenberg, a neurologist, because they were looking to retire to "a place of serenity and reflection." The couple loves Easton's natural beauty and energy. Viv's lost no time in embracing the values all of us at CFE cherish. Both Viv and her husband are particularly concerned about recent development initiatives and have been outspoken about protecting our vulnerable lands and watershed.

At the April 20 forum featuring three of five proposals for South Park, Viv was an articulate proponent of keeping the property available to present and future Eastonites, including one in particular, her 4-year-old grandson, Daniel. His life changed completely when he came here from an urban setting. "The Easton way of life provides safety and endless opportunities for him to explore the wonders of nature," she says. "The ducks in the pond, the birds, the ladybugs – all make growing up fun for him...South Park's fields and streams will give Daniel and many children like him a spiritual oneness with nature. And one day, Daniel will be able to take his children to a magical place from his childhood. Won't that be a beautiful thing?" Since moving to Easton, Viv's creative life has flourished as well. "My life journey to a peaceful coexistence with nature has helped my writing. Things flow more easily here." Her book, *The Courage to Walk Away*, advises readers to let go of negative things. "If you give out good things, they'll come back to you." CFE and the town of Easton are and will continue to be beneficiaries of Viv's spirit and enthusiasm.



Contributed

## Citizens for Easton 2015 Membership

Please join now or renew your tax-deductible membership for the coming year, receive our newsletter and other communications, and participate in meetings and activities. The modest family membership fee helps cover the cost of our communications, speaker fees and awards. Your further support as a patron or sponsor helps us to do even more towards the preservation of Easton's appeal.

Family Membership . . . . . \$20.00 Name \_\_\_\_\_

Sponsor . . . . . \$30.00 Address \_\_\_\_\_

Patron . . . . . \$40.00 Phone \_\_\_\_\_ Email \_\_\_\_\_

Please make checks payable to: Citizens for Easton. Include employer's matching gift form if applicable. Membership amount enclosed \$ \_\_\_\_\_. Contributions to Easton's Agricultural Land Preservation Fund are needed to preserve Easton's farms and farmland for the future. As CFE oversees this fund, you may contribute at this time. Tax-deductible contribution to the Agricultural Land Preservation Fund enclosed: \$ \_\_\_\_\_. Your gift is tax deductible to the extent allowed by law.

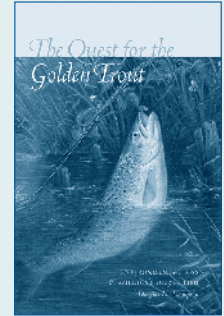
Detach and return this membership form to: Citizens for Easton, P.O. Box 151, Easton, Connecticut 06612 AN2015

## ***The Quest for the Golden Trout: Author Douglas Thompson to Speak*** **CFE Annual Meeting, Monday, June 22 at 7 p.m. at the Easton Library**

Join us on a fishing expedition into the waterways with *The Quest for the Golden Trout*, a compelling new book by Douglas Thompson, author, department chair, and professor of geology at Connecticut College. Thompson writes that the angler's dream of fishing pristine waters for sleek, healthy trout has become a manufactured experience – to the detriment of our rivers and streams. Millions of dollars are invested in river restoration projects and fish-stocking programs which are based on faulty logic. As a result, these programs risk destroying the very species they are designed to protect.

When river ecosystems are modified with engineered structures to improve fishing, native species that compete with trout are eradicated. Non-native invasive game fish are indiscriminately introduced, genetically modified, and selectively bred to produce the contrived "golden trout." As Thompson noted in his op-ed in *The New York Times* last month, "...it is more important than ever to protect wild populations of native fish with catch-and-release practices." Since Easton's Mill River is one of only nine Class A wild trout streams in Connecticut, Thompson's work is especially timely.

CFE is pleased to welcome Mr. Thompson as our featured speaker at our 2015 Annual Meeting, which will be held in tandem with Easton Public Library. Copies of *The Quest for the Golden Trout* will be available and refreshments will be served.



*Citizens for Easton vigorously pursues, supports, and encourages efforts that preserve Easton's scenic, rural, agrarian, and small town characteristics.*

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