

Citizens for Easton

While many surrounding towns in Fairfield County have lost their woodlands, open spaces, farms and antique homes to development, Easton has done an admirable job of preserving much of its open spaces, agriculture, and ancient stone walls as well as protecting the region's public drinking water supply.

This has taken much hard work and included the efforts of leaders, commissions, residents and local community organizations, like Citizens for Easton.

Citizens for Easton was founded in the early 1970s, and we celebrate the uniqueness of our town and its role as steward of the watershed with our mission of pursuing, supporting and encouraging efforts that preserve Easton's scenic, rural, agrarian and small town characteristics. In addition to those efforts, CFE has a broad range of past and present initiatives.

Citizens for Easton

- Partnered with the Coalition to Preserve Trout Brook Valley, the late Paul Newman and other entities to support the preservation of Trout Brook Valley, “the lungs of Fairfield County”
- Hosts Annual Meetings with speakers such as Dan Cruson, author and former Barlow teacher, on the history of local cemeteries. And "Meet Easton's Farmers"
- Supported the design of the new Samuel Staples School to echo our agricultural heritage & advocated for the land in front of the school to be farmed, providing educational enrichment to schoolchildren
- Funded the documentary “Keep on the Sunny Side”, a film promoting farming in Easton
- Raised money for the Easton Agricultural Land Preservation Fund

Citizens for Easton

- Supported the formation of the Easton Agricultural Commission
- Hosts a non-partisan Candidates Forum, a public informational event during local elections
- Hosted Newcomers Welcome reception for those new to town
- Initiated the Easton Photography Contest (now an Arts Council event) with winning photos on view at Town Hall
- Supported enacting the Scenic Road Ordinance
- Played an integral part in protecting the public drinking water supply by participating in legal proceedings preventing high density development on 124.7 acres in the Easton watershed
- Created and hosts the ever-popular, family-friendly Farm Tour, now in its 12th year, which supports and promotes our local agriculture and takes place the 2nd Saturday of every August

Citizens for Easton:

South Park Avenue Parcel Presentation



MILL RIVER PARK

...Forever Yours or Forever Gone



REFERENDUM –JUNE 17, 2008

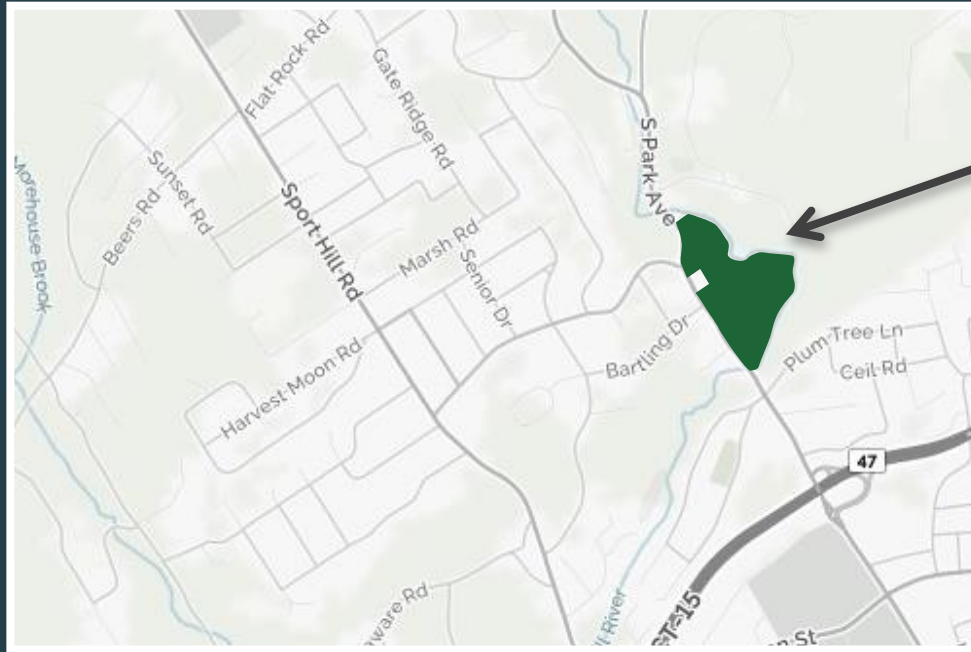
- 1. SHALL THE TOWN OF EASTON APPROPRIATE \$6,150,000 FOR THE ACQUISITION OF APPROXIMATELY 30 ACRES OF LAND LOCATED ON SOUTH PARK AVENUE FOR PRESERVATION, CONSERVATION AND LAND USE CONTROL PURPOSES AND AUTHORIZE THE ISSUANCE OF BONDS AND NOTES OF THE TOWN IN THE SAME AMOUNT, OR SO MUCH THEREOF AS MAY BE NECESSARY AFTER THE DEDUCTION OF GRANTS THEREFOR, TO FINANCE SUCH APPROPRIATION?
- This referendum passed by a wide margin— 1,249 votes in favor (75%) and 412 votes against (25%)

For Current and Future Generations



Citizens for Easton advocates retaining town ownership of this valuable natural asset and preserving it in perpetuity as passive open space for current and future generations.

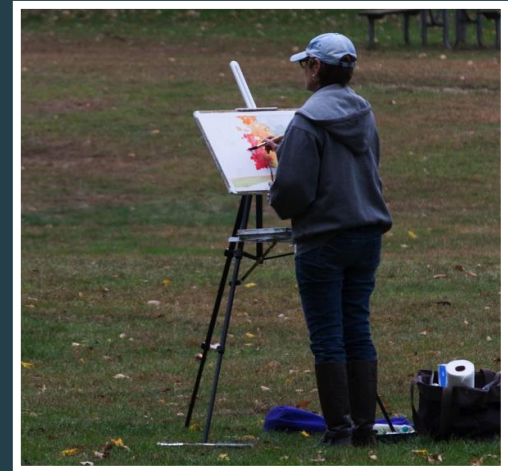
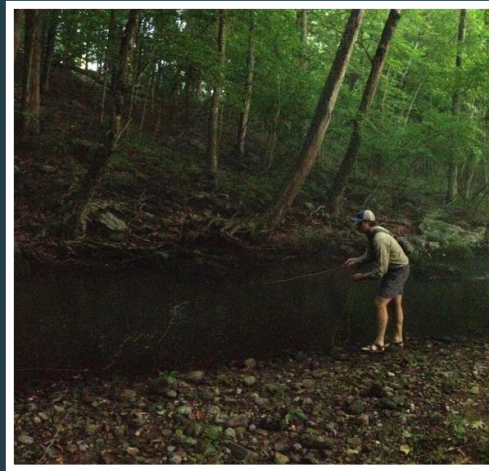
A Neighborhood Park for Lower Easton



Mill River
Park

Mill River Park would be an ideal neighborhood park for southern Easton, since it is much more accessible than the open space in the northern part of town.

Passive Enjoyment Appealing to All



- Family-friendly
- Catch and release fishing
- En plein air painting
- Picnicking
- Walks
- Photography
- School study groups
- Bird watching

Mill River Park

Makes Sense for Financial Reasons

Economic Benefits of Open Space

Too many community leaders feel they must choose between economic growth and open space protection. But no such choice is necessary. Open space protection is good for a community's health, stability, beauty, and quality of life. It is also good for the bottom line.*

**Trust for Public Land
"The Economic Benefits of Parks and Open Space"*

Economic Benefits of Open Space

- Homeowners receive more services than their taxes support.
- Cost to leave the property natural is minimal.
- In some instances, a community's bond rating may actually rise after it has shown it can control growth by purchasing open space.*

**Thomas, "The Economic Benefits of Land Conservation"*

Mill River Park: Makes Good \$ense

- Currently* it costs the Town of Easton less than 1% of an approximate \$44 million dollar annual budget to keep the property.
- After December 15, 2029, it will cost us virtually nothing except minimal upkeep.

If the property were to be developed in the future, it would most likely cost the town more in

- annual tax dollars than retaining the property as preserved open space.

If the property is sold, there is no guarantee of a positive cash flow.

** As of 4/1/2020*

Long Term Financial Benefits

- In the long term, open space is less costly to the town because it requires less services than development.
- Median cost of services in Connecticut for municipalities: \$1.11 of every dollar collected goes to provide services for residences, whereas only 31¢ of every dollar collected provides services for open space/forest/farmland.*
- Studies have shown homes near open space increase their fair market value.

**Connecticut Farm Bureau Association*

Controlling Property Saves Money

- Before being acquired by the town of Easton, the South Park Avenue property was the object of contentious development proposals over the years, including assisted living and other high density uses.
- Consequently, the Town incurred legal costs for defense. Now that the property is town owned, it would be unwise to lose control of it again to another developer.
- If property is sold, no matter what current proposal is on the table, purchaser would be free to sell to whomever they wish, resulting in unknown consequences.

Mill River Park

Makes Sense for
Planning and Zoning Reasons

Plan of Conservation & Development

“...The 2005 Plan cited a location in southern Easton, off the public supply watershed, for possible evaluation as a potential site for more intensive housing. Thorough engineering studies over the past two years have demonstrated conclusively that intensive housing development at this location would adversely affect the water quality of the adjacent Mill River. Consequently, the 2006 Plan recommends single family residential use here at no greater density than for the other non-watershed land in the South Park Avenue neighborhood”

*– Easton Town Plan of Conservation & Development
Executive Summary, Revised April 2007*

Rather than building residential, single family housing that would create more of a tax burden, Mill River Park would avoid those expenses and protect the water quality of the river.

Easton Town Plan of Conservation & Development:

Executive Summary, Revised April 2007

The summary included twelve major policy recommendations with excerpts below:

Town's Role in the Region

- Easton's role within the densely developed region of southwestern Connecticut should be primarily that of providing pure water, clean air and permanent green space to support a livable environment for the half million people of the area.

Open Space

- Conserve Easton's extensive watershed lands, wilderness areas, existing public open space preserves and other open lands as permanently dedicated open space.

Additional Benefits to Lower Easton



- Stability
- Resolution
- Quality of life
- Harmony with area
- Open space access
- Property values

In addition to Citizens for Easton,
listen to what others are saying:

Easton Residents

“Wouldn’t it be great to maintain the lower Park Avenue area as open space so that there is a convenient open space location for most of our residents to enjoy? Imagine how nice it would be for our younger residents to be able to come home from school, jump on their bikes and ride over to an open space area near their homes on South Park Avenue to enjoy the streams, hike the trails and observe nature.”

*–Letter to Easton Courier
June 4, 2015*

Easton Residents

“Easton’s open spaces, along with our farms, are touted as the town’s defining feature. It has been a combination of serendipity, vigilance, hard work, and perseverance that have kept those water bodies secure and the forests intact. There is no question that posterity will struggle with the repercussions of this generation’s undervaluation of the importance of Earth’s natural systems, but over four decades, Easton’s citizens have done their part to protect those systems. I hope our leaders recognize their responsibility in continuing in that vein.”

*– Letter to Easton Courier
July 23, 2015*

Easton Residents

“We have an opportunity and a responsibility to protect this extremely fragile ecosystem for future generations. It is important that the legacy we leave to our children is one that says we choose to protect the environment. We must retain town ownership and not let our treasured landscape be ruined by development.”

*– Letter to Easton Courier
June 18, 2015*

Easton Residents

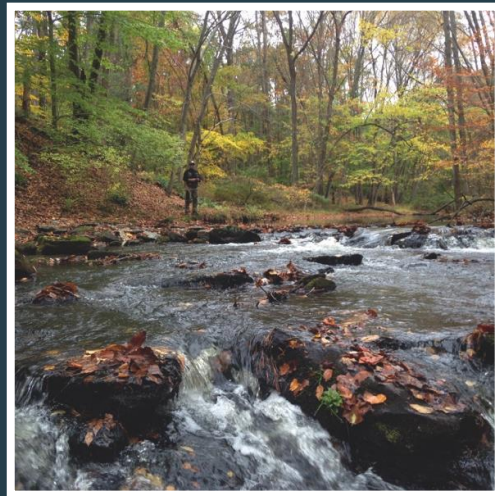
“I am so grateful for our regulations and those who have worked with such dedication to develop and uphold them. But we have seen, again and again, that regulations can only do so much to preserve and protect the South Park Avenue property and that stretch of the Mill River. The town must retain ownership.”

*– Letter to Easton Courier
June 18, 2015*

Greater Bridgeport Regional Council



Open meadows



Sparkling Streams



Stone walls and winding roads

“Although Easton now lies on the fringe of an increasingly urban and suburban area of Fairfield County, it remains distinctively different from its neighbors. Here there still exist extensive forests, open meadows, sparkling streams and lakes, country homes and stone-wall-bordered winding roads and lanes.”

– Greater Bridgeport Region Council

Connecticut Metropolitan Council of Governments

State entities also recognizes the role that Easton plays in the region. The creation of Mill River Park as passive open space fits perfectly with Easton's identity.

“Easton, with the lowest population density in the region, is a town with much of its New England character intact due to a combination of family owned farms — over 70% of the region's agricultural land is here — and the town's location in a watershed area.”

– Connecticut Metropolitan Council of Governments

Iconic Gateway to Easton

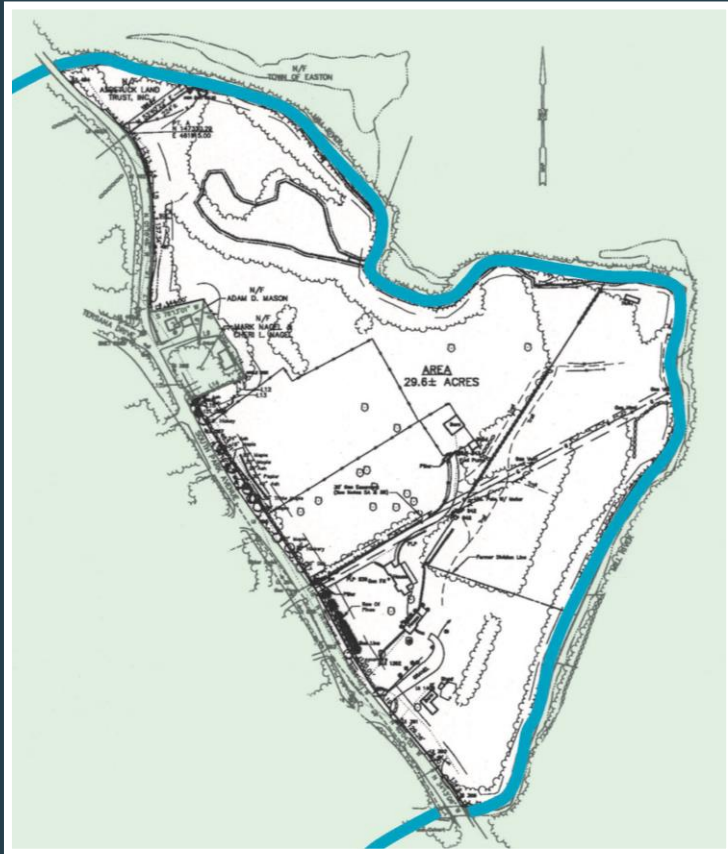


The property creates a scenic gateway to Easton from the south, just past the “Easton Town Line” sign. A pastoral landscape and prime example of Easton’s heritage.

Mill River Park

Makes Sense for the
Protection of Natural Resources

Endangered Species



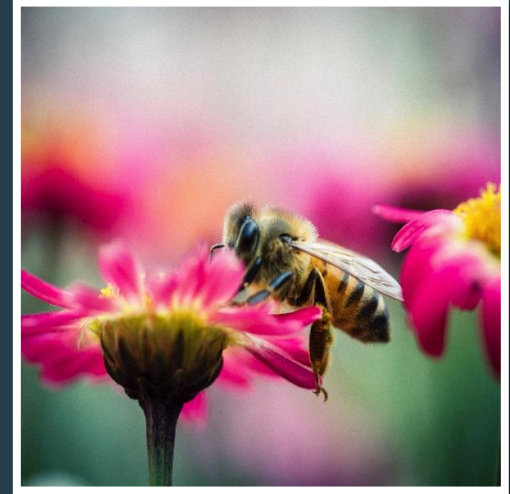
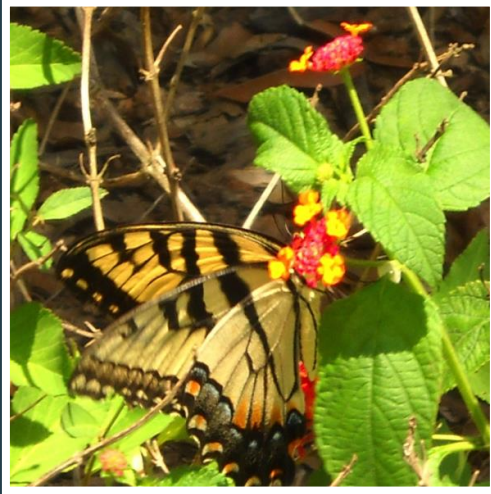
Designating it as protected open space with a conservation plan in place would ensure the preservation of the Mill River, which encircles much of the property. Out of over 300 streams in Connecticut, the Mill River is one of only nine Class A Wild Trout Streams left in the state. The river is unique because it is pure and cold enough to sustain wild trout, which are sensitive to any changes.

DEEP Wildlife Conservation Plan

- Wild brook and wild brown trout are listed in the “Most Important” category of fish designated as Greatest Conservation Need in the August 2015 draft of the Connecticut DEEP 2015 Wildlife Action Plan.
- Cold water streams and associated riparian zones are noted as “Select Habitats” at risk.

The creation of Mill River Park would preserve a unique, natural area and protect species that are considered threatened, endangered, or of special concern.

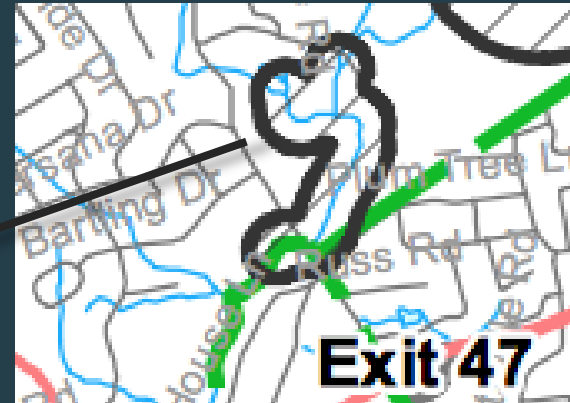
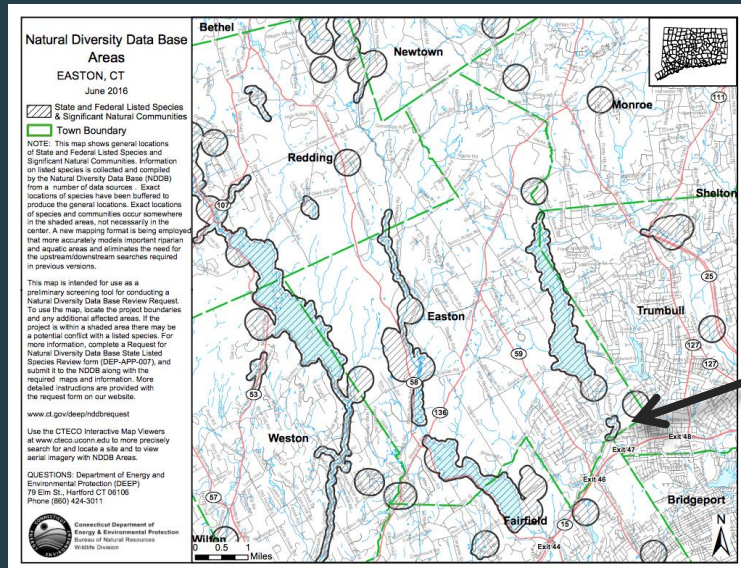
Web of Life



“Some insects on the river have the same requirements as the brook trout. And those insects feed frogs, salamanders, turtles and more... Altering one part shifts everything.”

– Easton Courier, July 9, 2015

State Natural Diversity Database



Mill River and adjoining land

This map shows general locations of State and Federal Listed Species and Significant Natural Communities. Information on listed species is collected and compiled by the Natural Diversity Data Base (NDDB) from a number of data sources. Exact locations of species have been buffered to produce the general locations. Exact locations of species and communities occur somewhere in the shaded areas, not necessarily in the center.

Hear what State and other noted
organizations have to say:

Archeological Significance



“The majority of the parcel is on level to very gently sloping terrain comprised of well-drained soils within a bend of the Mill River. This type of environmental setting frequently is associated with Native American settlement. Based on the known archeological resources in the vicinity, it is the opinion of this office that the property has the potential to contain significant archeological resources.”

*– Catherine Labadia, Deputy State Historic Preservation Officer
Staff Archeologist, State of Connecticut Historic Preservation Office*

Aspetuck Land Trust



“...the Mill River, which in its upper section is a pristine tail water fishery that flows from the bottom of the Easton Reservoir and ultimately makes its way to Long Island Sound through Southport Harbor in Fairfield, CT.

The upper section of the Mill River, which is the portion of the river adjacent to the preserve, is designated by the state as a Class 1 Wild Trout Management Area (WTMA) that by definition means it hosts an abundant population of wild trout and is never stocked.”

– Aspetuck Land Trust website

The Connecticut Audubon Society, *Executive Director*

“The Connecticut Audubon Society joins with Citizens for Easton in its concern about the future of 29.6 acres on South Park Avenue adjacent to the Mill River. Development of this town-owned land will compromise a small but beautiful wildlife habitat that plays an important watershed protection role for the river, and is a much-used and enjoyed passive outdoor recreational area for birdwatchers, anglers, artists and school groups.

The Connecticut Audubon Society is the state’s original, independent Audubon. We and our many members in Easton look forward to your leadership as exemplary stewards of the environment by supporting the preservation the 29.6 acres on South Park Avenue as open space in perpetuity for current and future generations.”

*– Nelson North, Executive Director
Connecticut Audubon Society*

The Connecticut Audubon Society, *Vice President, National Audubon*

“Audubon Connecticut, the state office of the National Audubon Society, supports the Citizens for Easton in their efforts to prevent the proposed development of approximately 30 acres of town-owned land on South Park Avenue in Easton, adjacent to the Mill River.

The Mill River is a critical aquatic resource, providing habitat for wild native brook trout and brown trout; and it has been the subject of intense conservation focus in recent years. The South Park property serves as a natural buffer to protect water quality for the river. Keeping the land as open space, as advocated by the Citizens for Easton, for passive recreation would protect the watershed, local wildlife, and preserve an area that is valued by anglers, birdwatchers, and many others who appreciate it's natural beauty.”

*– Stewart J. Hudson
Executive Director Audubon Connecticut
Vice President, National Audubon Society*

Potatuck Club, Newtown, CT

December 2, 2015

Connecticut Department of Energy & Environmental Protection
Office of the Commissioner
Office of Planning & Program Development
Land Acquisition & Management

Re: 22 South Park Avenue Property, Easton, CT

Greetings:

My name is Wayne Michalka and I am a board member of the Potatuck Club, Inc., a Connecticut non-stock corporation located at 100 Mile Hill Road in Newtown, CT 06470.

Our club is a fish and game club that has been in operation since 1888. As a member of this club, I am familiar with the relatively long section of the Mill River that forms a border of the above-mentioned South Park Avenue property (see attached map).

This stretch of river is well-known as a superb class A river, home to native brown trout. Preventing development on this land will ensure the continued vitality of the Mill River.

Our organization therefore strongly endorses the preservation of this land.

Sincerely,

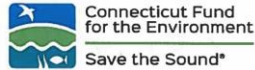
Wayne Michalka DDS



“I am familiar with the relatively long section of the Mill River that forms a border of the above-mentioned South Park Avenue property. This stretch of river is well-known as a superb Class A river, home to native brown trout. Preventing development on this land will ensure the continued vitality of the Mill River. Our organization therefore strongly endorses the preservation of this land.”

– Wayne Michalka
Potatuck Club, Inc. Newtown, Connecticut
A letter to CT DEEP, December 2015

Connecticut Fund for the Environment and Save the Sound



August 11, 2016

Honorable Adam Dunsby, First Selectman
Honorable Robert Lessler, Selectman
Honorable Carolyn Colangelo, Selectman
Town Hall
225 Center Road
Easton, CT 06621

Dear Selectmen,

The Connecticut Fund for the Environment, Inc. (CFE) and its bi-state program Save the Sound, on behalf of its approximately 7,000 members in Connecticut and New York, join with Citizens for Easton in its concern about the future of 29.6 acres of town owned land at 22 South Park Avenue adjacent to the Mill River and in its effort to preserve this land from development.

CFE was founded in 1978 to protect and improve the land, air, and water of Connecticut using advocacy and scientific expertise to achieve results that benefit our environment for current and future generations. CFE has represented the interests of its membership in legal proceedings before trial and appellate courts and federal and state administrative agencies in various proceedings in which CFE sought to protect the environment and natural resources for its members and the citizens of Connecticut. Save the Sound was founded in 1972 as the Long Island Sound Taskforce to preserve and protect the Sound. In 2004, the two organizations merged. As a program within CFE, Save the Sound seeks to protect, conserve and protect the environmental health and natural resources of the Long Island Sound. Together, CFE/ Save the Sound, among other things, advocate for wise policies that protect and preserve critical wildlife habitat and valuable open space and to protect the water quality of our rivers and Long Island Sound. The Mill River is a critical wildlife habitat in need of such protection.

As you may know, the Mill River is unique in that its waters are pristine and cold enough to sustain wild trout; in fact it is one of only nine Class A Wild Trout Streams remaining in Connecticut. Additionally, the 2015 Connecticut Wildlife Action Plan lists wild brook and brown trout among 17 fish species in the "most important fish category". Because of the limited number of cold water streams in Connecticut, the Mill River is a rare and fragile resource and any activity that could jeopardize this resource must be prohibited.

Development of this 29.6 acre property would eliminate a unique natural habitat and replace it with impervious surfaces which, in turn, cause runoff and damage to the water quality of the river. Connecticut Fund for the Environment/Save the Sound support the effort of the Citizens for Easton to preserve the 29.6 acres on South Park Avenue adjacent to the Mill River as open space in perpetuity for the use and enjoyment of current and future generations.

Very truly yours,


John M. Looney
Staff Attorney

“Development of this 29.6 acre property would eliminate a unique habitat and replace it with impervious surfaces which, in turn, cause runoff and damage to the water quality of the river. Connecticut Fund for the Environment/Save the Sound support the effort of Citizens for Easton to preserve the 29.6 acres on South Park Avenue adjacent to the Mill River as open space in perpetuity for the use and enjoyment of current and future generations.”

– John M. Looney, Staff Attorney
Connecticut Fund for the Environment
Save the Sound

Educating the Next Generation



Mill River Park would serve an ideal environmental field study area for school groups and educational professionals. Easton schools could model a program similar to Fairfield's award-winning River-Lab program, which meets state standards for science education.

Kids Can “Unplug” and Make Memories



Studies show that children who explore the outdoors are happier, more alert and curious. Kids who are out chasing butterflies and making mud pies even have more complex brain structures than those who spend hours in front of a computer screen, since experiencing new smells, sounds, sights, textures and terrains actually promotes brain development.

– *PBS Parents*
Expert Q&A, Diane MacEachern

Summary

It All Adds Up:

- + Financial
 - + Planning & Zoning
 - + Protection of Natural Resources
 - + More!
-

= Mill River Park

Open Space Preserved in Perpetuity for All

Support preservation in perpetuity...

MILL RIVER PARK

...Forever Ours

