

McNally, Stephanie

From: Katherine Kosiba <kmk178@att.net>
Sent: Tuesday, July 27, 2021 4:01 PM
To: Planning and Zoning
Subject: Baron South property open space issue - Citizens Comments - Katherine M. Kosiba
Attachments: OPINION Westport Baron property open space - Colchester Cohen Woodlands.docx

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To Whom It May Concern,

I am a former Westport resident having grown up and attending the Westport School system (Staples 1972). With family still in Fairfield County I visit Westport periodically and sometimes read 06880. I read with interest the issue about the Baron's South Property where it is currently designated as open space, and there is a P&Z Subcommittee looking to change the zoning regulation to alter the use of the property.

I responded with comments of an open space property in Colchester CT, Ruby and Elizabeth Cohen Woodlands (approx.. 206 acres) that I have been involved in over the years enhancing the property for passive recreation as open space. The comments on the 06880 post is a listing of how the community has contributed to enhancing this open space park which may be of interest and help to the Town of Westport to engage interested community groups and volunteers to help bring the property back into shape and expand the awareness of the property as well as its usage as intended when purchased. The attachment also includes web links to additional information.

I plan to be on your Subcommittee's ZOOM meeting call on Wednesday, July 28, 2021 at noon, to listen to the discussion. If you have any questions for me, I'd be happy to contribute the discussion.

Thank you in advance for sharing this information with your committee members before the meeting.

Warm regards

Katherine M. Kosiba
178 Bull Hill Road, Colchester, CT
860-267-4471

Former address: 12 Juniper Road, Westport, CT 06880 (parents Edward A. and Mary P. Kosiba)

Memberships and affiliations:

Colchester Garden Club, President

Advanced Master Gardener

Community Wildlife Habitat of Colchester (Co chair) town certified through the National Wildlife Federation (2010- 1st community in CT/36th in U.S. and recertified each year since)

Norton Park Committee, member, Town of Colchester

Colchester StoryWalk Committee, member

Colchester Land Trust, member

Friends of Cragin Memorial Library, member, Colchester CT

Colchester Historical Society, member

Connecticut Master Gardener Association, member/former board member and officer

Connecticut Horticultural Society, member

Hardy Plant Society, member

[OPINION] Townwide Effort Needed At Baron's South

Posted on [July 26, 2021](#) | [18 Comments](#)

Longtime residents and Westport Preservation Alliance founders Morley Boyd, Wendy Crowther, Helen Garten and John F. Suggs are passionate about honoring and saving Westport's historic structures and open spaces. Over the years they've served on many town commissions and committees

Though Baron's South — the town-owned property between South Compo Road and Imperial Avenue, not far from the Post Road and downtown — has always been on their radar screen, they are now very worried about its future. They write:

What should we do with Baron's South?

This question has haunted the wooded, hilly, 22-acre parcel in the heart of town since we acquired it in 1999.

In 2016 it was zoned as passive open space. Shortly thereafter, an extensive tree removal project took place, and a landscape plan was commissioned but never finalized. Since then, the town has largely ignored the property.

As a result, Baron's South is rarely visited by the public. The weeds are taller than the deer, and the former pathways are disappearing behind encroaching overgrowth.



Vegetation surrounds a Baron's South pathway.

In fact, many Westporters don't even know where Baron's South is.

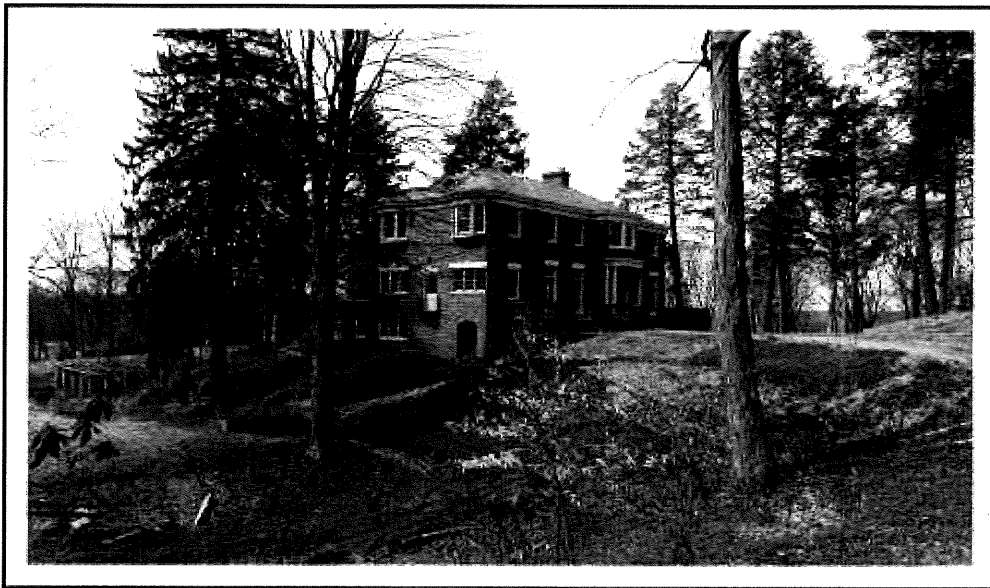
Now the Planning & Zoning Commission is considering rezoning swaths of the property for active, organized recreation. This could mean bocce courts, swimming pools, even new buildings.

These are worthy ventures. But aren't there already plenty of places in Westport to get active? And wasn't the goal of the "open space" designation to permanently preserve and conserve this unique,

centrally located piece of green infrastructure so that all Westporters could enjoy its quiet and natural beauty?

There's no doubt that Baron's South needs an infusion of energy. But why isn't harnessing passive energy the goal?

Let's form a town and citizen-driven cooperative to direct resources and passive energy toward the restoration and conservation of this incredibly special property. With the guidance of local environmental organizations like Earthplace, Wakeman Town Farm and Sustainable Westport, let's engage children, parents and grandparents to work side by side to gradually remove debris and invasive plants, install beneficial native plants and trees, create pollinator meadows, improve the park's many entrances, and build pervious paths to lead us to its interior rooms.



Golden Shadows, the home of former property owner Baron Walter Langer von Langendorff. Along the way, we and our kids can learn to notice and appreciate the park's wildlife and beneficial insects, rather than fear them. We can learn the value of native plantings, water conservation, biodiversity, and sustainability. We can come to understand the negative impacts of monocultures, climate change, pesticides and herbicides.

Passive open space requires active management and attention. Re-committing ourselves to this goal is the change that is needed.

As anyone who has ever done yardwork or gardening knows, the work can be as physically challenging as any ball game and as meditative as yoga. Bring your energy, your calm, your curiosity, your children and your save-the-planet sensibilities to bear on this great park.

Let's save Baron's South for a better good — the good that comes from quiet places, thoughtful passive-use planning, hard work, and the wisdom of Mother Nature.

The next meeting of the Zoning Regulation Revision Subcommittee takes place via Zoom at noon tomorrow (Tuesday, July 27). The public can participate. To get the Zoom link, call 203-341-1076 or email mperillie@westportct.gov.

(Want to learn more about Baron's South? [Click here](#) for stories from the "06880" archives.)



Wildlife amid the growth at Baron's South. (Photos/Wendy Crowther)

REPLY: by Katherine M. Kosiba July 26, 2021

As a former resident of Westport, now living in Colchester CT, we have a 206 acre open space park (3 parcels acquired over several years), Ruby and Elizabeth Cohen Woodlands that is well used as open space/passive recreation with community involvement. The park is within a CT DEEP Officially Designated Connecticut Greenway.

Over the years,

- Boy Scout Eagle projects have created three short hiking trails for individuals and families. One of the Scouts created a park map. .
- A town employee designed a wooden gazebo with another employee building it.
- Boy Scout troops have built picnic tables that are placed in the shade near one of two ponds on the property.
- In 2010, Colchester became the first town in Connecticut to become a certified Community Wildlife Habitat (CWH) through the National Wildlife Federation (NWF) . Our CWH large sign commemorating this community action, with an informational kiosk on the back, is at the park's parking lot Cohen Woodlands is one of the individual certified Wildlife Habitat properties with the NWF.
- As an Advanced Master Garden project, I redeveloped an abandoned butterfly pollinator garden in 2014 with assistance and now ongoing maintenance by member volunteers of the Colchester Garden Garden Club and UConn Master Gardeners/interns in need of community service for their certification.
- In 2017, the Cragin Memorial Library and several non profit organizations in town joined together to create a temporary StoryWalk trail; then offering the project of building permanent StoryWalk stations as an Eagle Scout project that was completed in Nov. 2019 and is a popular activity for families with young children.

- Soon after our Colchester Garden Club created a children's garden at the start of the StoryWalk which has now grown in size with paver paths added (Sept 2020) to the large circle garden so children may get closer to the plants and visiting insects, with new plantings continuing to be added this summer and fall.
- One of the local Boy Scout troops is undertaking this year the trail maintenance of two of the trails including repainting the fading blazes and adding more on one of the newer trails for better viewing by hikers.
- A recent Eagle Scout project just completed renovation of the wooden gazebo and informational kiosk reroofing, places rotted benches, floor and other supports, and painting.
- Another Eagle Scout project this summer is building cement/wood slat benches for four areas of the park that need seating as a respite for visitors.
- The Public Works Dept mows grassy areas and paths through the fields for visitors to walk more easily, and weed whack the garden edges and around the StoryWalk stations. They also take care of any tree maintenance.
- The Colchester Garden Club, in partnership with the Public Works Dept., has undertaken a multi-year conservation project to cut two large stands of Invasive Japanese Knotweed working to weaken/eliminate it in this Greenway area.
- The most recent development in regard to this open space park is that a Wildlife Management Plan/recommendations was prepared and delivered to the Town of Colchester by students of Dr. Ortega's Wildlife Management Course (NRE 3335) from the University of Connecticut. Many of the recommendations are in process or in the planning phase with local community groups, and others under consideration by the town.

This Park is very popular with residents, with more visitors discovering this gem of an open space park all the time. It's a park for all seasons - hiking, visiting the butterfly pollinator garden, parents fishing with children at the ponds, families visiting the StoryWalk, older residents bringing their chairs to enjoy nature in the shade, picnicking, photography, community groups holding events/activities in the open mowed field areas, Scout troops having outings/activities, school groups coming on educational field trips, cross country skiing, snowshoeing and more.

To become more familiar with this park, go to: <https://www.colchesterct.gov/parks-facilities/pages/ruby-and-elizabeth-cohen-woodlands>

- For Cohen Woodlands Park brochure and map:
https://www.colchesterct.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf4286/f/uploads/cohen_woodlands_park_and_trail_map_brochure_2021.pdf
The original map was created by a Boy Scout after building the trails, with the park enhancements, I asked the Boy Scout and his father for an update which they provided and I created the brochure with the input and approval of Colchester Parks and Recreation Dept and Colchester Public Works Dept. I personally print/restock the brochures for visitors in waterproof boxes at the park purchased by our Colchester Garden Club
- For Colchester Garden Club Cohen Woodlands Butterfly Pollinator Garden Brochure
https://www.colchesterct.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf4286/f/uploads/brochure_cohen_garden_ltr_size.pdf
- For Colchester StoryWalk Brochure:
https://www.colchesterct.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlf4286/f/uploads/colchesterstorywalkbrochure_2019.pdf

- UConn students Wildlife Management Plan/Recommendations for Ruby and Elizabeth Cohen Woodlands, April 2021
https://www.colchesterct.gov/sites/g/files/vyhlif4286/f/uploads/final_ruby_cohen_wildlife_management_plan_april_202.pdf

I would be happy to meet with Westport Preservation Alliance founders Morley Boyd, Wendy Crowther, Helen Garten and John F. Suggs OR members of Westport Planning and Zoning commission or other interested individuals/groups to provide a guided tour of Colchester's Ruby and Elizabeth Cohen Woodlands to share what has developed over time for our residents and visitors, and maybe inspire some of the same for the Baron's property. All the best. Katherine M. Kosiba,

Colchester Garden Club - President

Advanced Master Gardener

Community Wildlife Habitat of Colchester (Co-chair)

Colchester StoryWalk Committee (member)

Staples HS Class of 1972.