

Bedford Farmers Club
Minutes of the Meeting of September 12, 2018
Westchester Land Trust
Sugar Hill Farm, 403 Harris Road
Bedford Hills, New York

<https://westchesterlandtrust.org/>

Club President Mary Farley called the meeting to order at approximately 3:15 pm. She introduced our four guest speakers of the afternoon:

- **Lori Ensinger**, WLT President
- **Kara Hartigan Whelan**, WLT Vice President
- **Brendan Murphy**, WLT Director of Stewardship
- **Ellen Best**, Bionutrient Food Association

Brendan Murphy spoke first about the Spotted Lanternfly, an invasive insect species that has now been found in Albany and Yates Counties in New York and throughout Pennsylvania. The Lanternfly negatively impacts peach trees, apple trees, grapes, and hardwood lumber species and will lay its eggs pretty much anywhere. During one stage of its life, the Lanternfly much prefers the Tree of Heaven (ailanthus). Eradication efforts are now focusing on control of this tree species.



Lori Ensinger spoke of the WLT (also covering Putnam County) as a conservation non-profit – one of 1200 land trusts nationwide. The WLT’s mission is focused in three arenas: land protection, land stewardship/restoration, & community.

A primary goal of the WLT is to preserve land in perpetuity. While the WLT has acquired 207 easements and outright ownership of over fifty land parcels, thereby protecting over 8,000 acres (with some of the donors being present at the present meeting), there are still thousands of acres to be preserved. Westchester is the most densely populated county in New York State outside of the City. The WLT is preserving land where the people are.

The benefits to land preservation include:

- Protection of drinking water and air quality --e.g., the reservoirs
- natural flood prevention

- recreation
- protection of scenic and historic views
- preservation of local farms and the “foodshed”

It is cheaper to preserve land in its natural state. The above benefits are provided free of charge. Open space provides more revenue and requires fewer tax dollars.

A conservation easement is a contract under which a landowner gives up certain delineated rights on one’s land in perpetuity. A qualified easement receives federal and NY state tax benefits. People are thereby incentivized to provide a benefit for the public good.

The conservation community is under attack by the IRS, which has viewed easements as a tax giveaway to the rich. However, donors are not getting something for free. They give away something of value – the right to develop and subdivide land. As a result, the value of the land declines. A tax deduction reflects this decline in value. The federal government now allows donors to carry their contributions forward fifteen years.

The WLT is now working with farms. The oldest working farm in Westchester County – Stuart’s Fruit Farm – is now protected. This is a 175-acre property that has been in the Stuart family as a working farm over seven generations, since 1828. The farm receives 25,000 visitors each year and is adjacent to the North County Trailway. The benefits are in the tourism realm as well as in the protection of farm soils and the farming industry. In 2016, WLT was awarded a highly competitive \$1.84 million dollar Hudson Valley Agricultural Enhancement Program (HVAEP) grant from New York State’s Department of Agriculture and Markets to facilitate the acquisition of the farm’s development rights. The purchase of the farm’s development rights (PDR) enabled Stuart’s to buy two new tractors and improve their productivity by 50%. New York State is more focused on the protection of large farms. The WLT wants to fill the void in terms of protecting smaller farms.

<https://westchesterlandtrust.org/new-york-state-treasure-protected-forever/>

Kara Hartigan Whelan next spoke of the WLT’s stewardship function – which differs between their easements and lands owned outright. Three staff members are involved with the stewardship program, including Brendan. Staffer Mary Walsh walks the different easement properties to see what the landowners are doing. As there are over 200 easements, she is quite busy. Some easements are open to the public, while others are not accessible and are more for wildlife protection.

The WLT is involved in a forest restoration project at the Otter Creek Preserve on Long Island Sound, utilizing volunteer help.

The WLT is building opportunities for people to get onto the land, so that they become more supportive of the WLT’s mission. The WLT newsletters describe a variety of programs open to the public – from yoga to hikes to lectures.

The WLT is involved in the Pollinator Pathways project, which aims to protect a corridor stretching from the Hudson to the Housatonic (H2H). Sixty organizations are involved in getting landowners excited about what is on their land and how they can help in providing corridors of connected public and private properties that provide native plant habitat and nutrition for pollinators. The H2H region includes portions of four counties, in Connecticut and New York. The most important lands have been identified and a pathway/corridor identified. The concept has been very successful

in terms of getting homeowners excited – e.g., in Ridgefield. Other pathways are being developed in Westchester County. For more information, see: www.pollinator-pathways.org and www.h2hrpc.org.

The WLT holds volunteer orientations in the spring. They require a lot of help – e.g., with editing and photography.

There will be a WLT fundraising event at Caramoor on December 13, 2018. Hillary Clinton and George Pataki will be honorees.

Ellen Best spoke next of the Bionutrient Food Association, an international nonprofit, the mission of which is to improve food quality. Food nutrient levels have gone down due to soil depletion. In many cases plants are being fed, but not the soil. Beauty in a plant does not necessarily reflect nutritional value.

Ninety-five percent of people given carrot pieces from 3 sample containers will prefer the sweetest. Sweetness is a reflection of nutrition, which is a function of soil microbes and minerals. We should prefer “composting in place” – i.e., leaving roots in the soil to break down. We should not think of weeds as bad, because their roots are providing goodies to the soil. This is a change in mindset!

The BFA encourages any and all to become involved. The local chapter holds potluck meetings every month. All are welcome. Please sign up for their newsletters.

<http://bionutrient.org/site/chapters/US/westchester-new-york-city-ny>

Ellen also spoke of a prototype Bionutrient Meter that she has been helping to test. It is a handheld device that uses flashes of light to discern the nutrient density of food. It also can be used to test soil quality.

Club members were invited to visit the Sugar Hill Farm gardens with Ellen at the conclusion of the business meeting. The Farm’s half-acre property is one of the Feeding Westchester’s Food Growing Program sites.

Following the presentations, the business meeting continued. **Mary Farley** noted that Treasurer Roger Vincent was unable to attend. Once again, please pay your \$10 annual dues, if you have not done so already.

While there were no guests in attendance, Mark Levesque was voted in as a member, as this was his second meeting, thus making him eligible for membership.

Club Secretary **Elin Peterson** summarized the minutes of the June 2018 Club meeting. The possibility of attaching Club meeting minutes to Club e-mails was discussed.

Club Historian **John Stockbridge** offered a look back at the Club minutes of a century ago. Interestingly, the speaker of the Club meeting of August 28, 1918, was William Sanders, manager of Bedford’s Beaver Ridge Farm. Beaver Ridge Farm is now known as Sugar Hill Farm, headquarters of

the Westchester Land Trust and site of today's meeting. Sanders spoke on the topic "*The Importance of the Dairy Cow and Its Products.*" According to Sanders, the dairy cow is the most important animal to mankind. On Beaver Ridge Farm, they had a 4 ½-year old Guernsey cow that averaged 1600 pounds of milk per month, equaling the food value of nine steers. AND in realizing this food value they were not "killing the goose that laid the golden egg." Sanders further noted that the milk is the only substance whose sole natural purpose is to serve as food, and it is the only complete food, containing all the needed nutrients. It has been universally used as human food since the dawn of history. He further noted that the dairy farms supplying New York City with milk have moved further and further north and west from the City, due to the building of the railroads and as farmers nearer to the City have found it more and more difficult to realize a profit.

Later in this same meeting, Mr. Curtis spoke of how New York people will pay any price for a product that appeals to them. He then noted that New Yorkers will pay far more for pure white eggs, believing them to be fresher. Bostonians, on the other hand, prefer darker eggs.

Pam Sorkin next offered the meeting's *Timely Tips*.

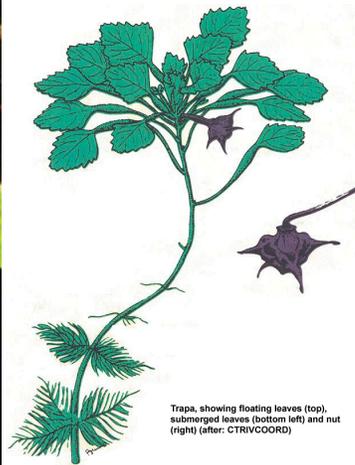
Pam first spoke of the American Sycamore, which at this time of year throws off "pieces of itself" – i.e., its bark. Pam showed all assembled a sample from her own lawn. If you are interested in this tree for your property, be aware, because it can create quite a mess on your lawn. What happens is that, as the tree's inner cambium grows, it pushes off the outer layers of bark.



Sycamore Trunk with Shedding Bark

Pam's next topic was the water chestnut. She recently found a seed pod in or next to her pond and discovered that it was a water chestnut (*trapa natans*), an invasive annual species. If you find these, do not chop them up, as the seeds inside the pods/fruit can survive for up to fifteen years. PRISM (Program for Regional Invasive Species Management), a program administrated through the New York State Department of Conservation, sent four college graduates to Pam's property on a Sunday to hand pick and remove them.

Also, if interested in volunteering with PRISM, they will be having a clean-up day in Mianus Gorge on September 29th.



Water Chestnut

Pam next mentioned that we are getting close to the time to begin planting spring flower bulbs. A variety she recommends is the Rignveld's Early Sensation, a hybrid daffodil that blooms early – at least two weeks earlier than other varieties.

Pam recommended that Club members visit Innisfree Garden (www.innisfreegarden.org) in Millbrook, New York, a relatively short drive up the Taconic Parkway. Created by landscape architect Lester Collins over a fifty-year period, Innisfree has been recognized as one of the world's top gardens.

According to the Garden's website:

"Innisfree is about the individual's experience in nature. Inviting exploration and even contemplation, Collins' sweeping landscape merges the essence of Modernist and Romantic ideas with traditional Chinese and Japanese garden design principles in a form that evolved through subtle handling of the site and slow manipulation of its ecology. The result is a distinctly American stroll garden — a sublime composition of rock, water, wood, and sky achieved with remarkable economy and grace."

Mary then closed the meeting by noting that the Club's next meeting will be held on October 10, 2018, at Bedford's Coker Farm, where the topic will be the Farm's new composting program.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Elin Peterson.