



TOWN OF EAST HAMPTON

159 Pantigo Road
East Hampton, New York 11937

KATHEE BURKE-GONZALEZ
Town Supervisor

Tel: (631) 324-4140
kburke-gonzalez@ehamptonny.gov

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

East Hampton Town to Consider Acquiring Iconic 66 Wainscott Main Street— Largest Community Preservation Fund Purchase in Town History

Would use Community Preservation Funds for the purpose of Open Space, Agricultural Lands, Historic Places and Property, and the Protection and Improvement of Water Quality

East Hampton, NY – September 27, 2024 – The Town of East Hampton intends to notice for public hearing on October 3rd at 6:00 PM the acquisition of the historic 66 Wainscott Main Street property using Community Preservation Funds (CPF) for \$56 million for the preservation of Open Space, Agricultural Lands, Historic Places and Property, and the Protection and Improvement of Water Quality. This remarkable 30-acre parcel has long been recognized as a key asset in preserving the community's character and natural beauty.

This property, featuring stunning views of Wainscott Pond, is included in the Town's Community Preservation Fund project plan and is situated within several protected districts, including the Agricultural Overlay District and the Harbor Protection Overlay District. The acquisition will help safeguard vital wetlands and maintain the area's ecological integrity.

“Acquiring 66 Wainscott Main Street is an essential step toward preserving one of our town's most iconic landscapes,” said Town Supervisor Kathee Burke-Gonzalez. “This property represents not just a view, but a commitment to maintain our community's sense of place. Mr. Lauder's vision and dedication to protecting our community's natural and historical heritage set a remarkable example for us all. We are grateful for his generosity and leadership in this vital effort.”

In 2021, Mr. Ronald Lauder purchased the property for \$66 million to prevent its development and has since worked diligently to maintain the meadow and enhance the viewshed. His willingness to consider selling the parcel to the Town for considerably below fair market value exemplifies a profound commitment to land preservation.

The Osborn family's connection to the land at 66 Wainscott Main Street dates back to the 17th century, when Thomas Osborn settled in East Hampton in 1648. His son, John Osborn, is credited as a founder of Wainscott, establishing a homestead in the area by 1668. Over the generations, the Osborns cultivated the land, contributing to the agricultural foundation of the community. The family's influence was marked by their establishment of several notable structures, including a Saltbox house built around 1675, which remained in their possession until the mid-20th century.

As the Osborn lineage continued, they adapted to changing economic landscapes while maintaining a strong connection to the land. In 1904, Louisa Edwards Osborn, widow of John Melvin Osborn, built the current family farmhouse to serve as a summer boarding house, reflecting the burgeoning real estate and tourism market of the time. However, in 1922, following the death of her son Thomas, Louisa sold much of the family farmland, retaining only a small plot. This marked a pivotal moment in the Osborn history, as the family faced the transformation of their agricultural heritage amid rising real estate speculation.

The land eventually changed hands with two families occupying and modifying the property. Notably, in 1927, Louisa's nephew, Raymond Osborn and Augusta Halsey purchased the farmhouse lot, and were later able to purchase the pond acreage back into the family, continuing the Osborn family farming legacy in Wainscott. The land they once cultivated transitioned to new ownership in the 21st century, highlighting the ongoing evolution of Wainscott.

The proposed acquisition of 66 Wainscott Main Street not only honors the historical significance of the Osborn family but also reclaims a vital part of East Hampton's agricultural past. By acquiring this land, the Town is ensuring that the story of the Osborns—a story of resilience, adaptation, and connection to the land—will continue to resonate in the community. This initiative also serves as a reminder of the importance of preserving not just the physical landscape, but the rich history that defines the character of Wainscott.

Hilary Osborn Malecki, a descendant of the Osborn family, stated, “The acquisition of 66 Wainscott Main Street is not only a pivotal moment for our community but also a heartfelt tribute to the legacy of my ancestors. This land has been a part of our family for generations, and its preservation honors the history and values that have shaped Wainscott. As we reflect on the sacrifices and contributions of those who came before us, it's inspiring to see the Town take this important step to protect our shared heritage. This property represents not just a scenic view, but the stories of hard work, resilience, and deep connection to the land that the Osborns embodied. I am truly grateful for the collaborative efforts of all involved in this initiative, ensuring that future generations can appreciate and learn from the rich history that has defined our community.”

Wainscott Pond has been identified as an impaired water body under the New York State

Department of Environmental Conservation Priority Waterbodies List. The pond, which is owned by the East Hampton Town Trustees, has experienced frequent harmful algal blooms, posing serious threats to aquatic ecosystems and human health. A recent monitoring study conducted by the SUNY Stony Brook Goble Laboratory and funded by the Trustees, revealed that Wainscott Pond is the most consistently impacted water body in East Hampton, with every sample exceeding the bloom threshold. Alarmingly, the average concentration of blue-green algae reached levels that significantly surpassed the state's recreational safety limits, underscoring the urgent need for intervention to restore the pond's health.

Acquisition of the 66 Wainscott Main Street property, which encompasses roughly one-third of the pond's shoreline, would not only allow for public access but also enable further water quality monitoring through the Town's CPF Water Quality Improvement program. This initiative will facilitate comprehensive analysis to identify pollution sources, including stormwater runoff, agricultural activity, and outdated septic systems. By collaborating with the Town Trustees, the Town would look to implement remedial actions such as upgrading on-site sanitary systems to nitrogen-reducing technologies, enhancing stormwater management practices, and establishing buffer zones to minimize nutrient and contaminant inputs into the pond. These efforts are crucial for revitalizing Wainscott Pond and ensuring the long-term health of this vital natural resource.

Clerk of the East Hampton Town Trustees Francis Bock said, "We are thrilled to collaborate with the Town on improving the water quality in Wainscott Pond. This partnership will not only provide public access to this waterbody for the first time, but also allow us to increase the vital monitoring and implement necessary improvements. Our commitment to restoring the health of this impaired water body is unwavering, and we are eager to work together on initiatives that will combat harmful algal blooms and protect our community's valuable aquatic ecosystems for future generations."

In addition to its historical significance, the flora and fauna of 66 Wainscott Main Street underscore its ecological importance. The property primarily consists of meadowland, interspersed with patches of woodland along the western edge, and encompasses approximately 2.5 acres adjacent to Wainscott Pond, which is critical for both biodiversity and water quality.

The meadow is a vibrant habitat for a diverse range of plant species, including both native and non-native grasses, wildflowers, and shrubs. Notable flora includes the butterfly milkweed (*Asclepias tuberosa*), which supports pollinators, and blue flag iris (*Iris versicolor*), which thrives in the wetland areas. The landscape features a mix of over 70 species, providing critical habitat for various wildlife. However, the presence of invasive species, such as autumn olive (*Elaeagnus umbellata*) and silver grass (*Miscanthus sp.*), poses a threat to native biodiversity. These invasives can quickly dominate the landscape, shading out native plants and altering the habitat structure. Ongoing management practices, including regular mowing and targeted

removal of invasive species, will be essential to maintaining the health and diversity of this important ecosystem.

The property is also home to a rich array of wildlife. Species such as white-tailed deer and wild turkeys frequently traverse the meadow, while red fox dens have been observed in the area, highlighting the site's value as a habitat for larger mammals. The diverse bird population includes migratory and resident species alike, such as the great blue heron (*Ardea herodias*) and the eastern towhee (*Pipilo erythrophthalmus*), utilizing the meadow and wetland for breeding, feeding, and resting. The presence of species like the diamondback terrapin (*Malaclemys terrapin*) near the pond further emphasizes the ecological significance of the area.

Councilmember David Lys added, “This marks an important step toward preserving the natural beauty and historical integrity of East Hampton. Acquiring 66 Wainscott Main Street is a testament to our dedication to protecting our community’s treasures for generations to come.”

“Mr. Lauder’s dedication to protecting this land will leave a lasting legacy in our community,” stated Scott Wilson, Director of Land Acquisition & Management. “This acquisition aligns perfectly with our goals of conserving our significant natural resources.”

The proposed acquisition of 66 Wainscott Main Street marks a historic milestone as the largest Community Preservation Fund purchase in the Town of East Hampton’s history. This acquisition not only underscores the Town’s commitment to preserving open space but also sets a precedent for future conservation efforts. By investing in this significant parcel, we ensure that the community's character, natural beauty, and historical legacy are protected for generations to come.

The public is encouraged to attend the hearing slated for Thursday, October 17th at 6:00 PM to learn more about the proposed acquisition and to share their thoughts on this critical initiative.