

## East Hampton to buy historic Osborn estate for \$56 million



Hilary Osborn Malecki at the historic Osborn house that her family had owned for generations. The Osborn family settled in the area in the 17th century; the property is now owned by Ronald Lauder, the heir to the Estée Lauder cosmetics company. Credit: Tom Lambui

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The nasal honk of geese flying overhead became a welcome symphony to Hilary Osborn Malecki each time she visited the Wainscott land her ancestors settled in the 17th century.

“For literally 350 years we’ve all heard the same sounds,” she said of walking the land where generations of her family farmed.

The 30-acre property that abuts ocean beach in East Hampton Town — with its picturesque views, array of wildlife and historical significance — will soon be preserved as part of a landmark town purchase.

East Hampton recently approved spending \$56 million in community preservation funds — property transfer tax revenue the town uses for land acquisitions — to buy the property from billionaire Ronald Lauder, the heir to the Estée Lauder cosmetics company. Lauder purchased

the property for \$66 million in 2021 from the Osborn family to "prevent its development," according to town officials.

## WHAT NEWSDAY FOUND

- **East Hampton Town** plans to spend \$56 million to acquire the Osborn estate, a 30-acre parcel in Wainscott.
- **The purchase will be** the largest ever in the history of the Community Preservation Fund.
- **The Osborn family** that first settled Wainscott had owned the property for generations until recently.

The purchase represents the highest sum for a single acquisition since the CPF program launched across all five East End towns in 1999. It eclipses East Hampton's previous highest sale by \$27 million, according to Scott Wilson, the town's director of land acquisition and management. There is about \$40 million left in the fund, which has generated its highest totals from 2020-2023 at an average of \$51 million per year.

Officials justified the sum by saying the price is "considerably below fair market value." The preservation protects the bucolic area against future development and will foster water quality improvement initiatives at Wainscott Pond, which is frequently susceptible to harmful algae blooms.

The town's acquisition ensures public access to the area for the first time, which could include a new walking trail, officials said.

## Historic sale

The property, known as 66 Wainscott Main Street, "represents not just a view, but a commitment to maintain our community's sense of place," Supervisor Kathee Burke-Gonzalez said in a statement.

The town's previous highest sale was for \$29 million to preserve 32 acres of farmland in Amagansett known as the former Bistran property, Wilson said. Last December, Southampton Town approved spending \$30 million to preserve about 27 acres in Bridgehampton in a partnership with the Peconic Land Trust.

The supervisor said the town may close on the sale by mid-December. "No other property we have considered for acquisition has such a litany of purposes — all of them uniquely important to Wainscott and the broader community," Wilson said during a public hearing in October.

Malecki has become the family's unofficial historian over the past 40 years — a task her grandfather managed decades earlier. She pored through family diaries her father had given her around 1980 and transcribed the fading ink to preserve the difficult-to-read script text.

"I started just researching and then I basically built the whole family tree as a database," she said.

## **Wainscott's founding**

Thomas Osborn first settled in East Hampton in 1648 and historians credit John Osborn as Wainscott's founder, according to town officials. Malecki said some current members of the family still live in Wainscott.

The current property is mostly vacant land and features a farmhouse built in 1904 and a two-story barn built in 1915.

Malecki said during her lifetime the barn has stored farm tractors on the first floor while farmworkers and family members lived on the second floor. In the late 1930s into the 1940s the family exclusively farmed potatoes, a tradition that continued through the 1980s, she said.

The purchase received broad support from a dozen residents at the public hearing.

Carolyn Logan Gluck, who chairs a citizens advisory committee in Wainscott, said despite the enormous price tag, the "benefit to the Town of East Hampton is beyond measure." She said the committee "wholeheartedly" endorses the acquisition.

The Wainscott Heritage Project, a group formed in 2021 to preserve the hamlet's history and cultural character, also supported the purchase, said Susan Macy, a member of the group's board of directors.

Amagansett resident Richard Whalen called it a "vital purchase" while highlighting some of the property's history at the recent public hearing.

"There's probably no single parcel in Wainscott to which the hamlet owes its historic and rural character as much as this particular property," he said.

The site's preservation is a "fresh dream come true," said Jaine Mehring of Amagansett. She described a "nagging sense of dread" as she pondered the property's future. She said she feared what the property could become at the hands of a developer and the image of tall hedges shielding the watershed view from the public.

"No matter how iconic the view, the reality has been, as long as it stayed in private control, the risk of development and degradation grew," she said.

That risk, she said, is "finally extinguished."



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