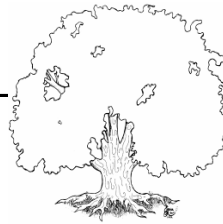


# THE FRIENDS OF WORCESTER

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www.friendsofworcester.org  
email: info@friendsofworcester.org

Fall/Winter 2023



## Worcester Township Acquires New Open Space in 2023

In 2021, the Worcester Township Board of Supervisors (BOS) established a dedicated open space fund that will match voluntary resident donations dollar for dollar. Subsequently, the BOS set a goal of preserving 300 additional acres of township land and structures by 2033—the 300th anniversary of our township’s founding.

Then, in 2022, the BOS took the first step towards fulfillment of that goal by purchasing a gently rolling, picturesque 40-acre farm on Fisher Rd. The vision for the future use of that land remains in the planning stage.

As a next step, in September 2023, the BOS completed the purchase of the historical Dutchie Church and its adjoining cemetery from the Worcester Historical Society. The 1-acre property is located along Valley Forge Rd. (not far from Heebner Park), and the church is believed to have been a stop on the Underground Railroad in the pre-Civil War era. Plans for township use of this historic site are believed to be in the very early formative stage.

Most recently, at the October 2023 BOS monthly meeting the supervisors unanimously authorized execution of an agreement of sale for the township purchase of the 9.6-acre Griffith property for \$595,000. The property is located at the intersection of Valley Forge Rd. and Griffith Rd., in Fairview Village. This property lies directly across Griffith Rd. from township-owned Heyser Field (where the Farmers’ Union Annual Horse Show is held). Currently open land with no structures, this property was part of the lands of David Rittenhouse when Worcester became a township in 1733. More recently, the Griffith family has been an active steward of this land for over 80 years.



The newest addition to Worcester’s Open Space is the Griffith property located at Griffith and Valley Forge Roads.

*(continued on page 5)*

## Who Are The Worcester Advocates?

Many people have asked us: “What is the difference between Worcester Advocates and Friends of Worcester?” We would like to clarify the similarities and distinctions between each group.

For over 25 years, the Friends of Worcester (FOW) has made it our mission to educate township residents about topics of public interest, while focusing on the preservation of farmland, open space, historic sites and structures, as well as reasoned, thoughtful development. Thoughtful development recognizes that while growth and transformation are inevitable, well-considered planning can ensure a blend of scenic green spaces and compatible structures, with the intent to retain the overall rural character of our township.

Over the last several years, the Worcester Advocates (WA) was formed by a group of like-minded neighbors who strongly support the idea of thoughtful development. The group is committed to ensuring that Worcester’s future development aligns with its current aesthetic.

WA’s initial focus has been on helping to support the neighbors’ legal defense against the validity challenge to Worcester’s zoning ordinances presented by the attorneys representing the owners of the 55-acre ‘Palmer Property’ at the intersection of Skippack Pike and Valley Forge Road. The Palmer family is seeking to rezone their entire 55 acres to commercial from its current zoning of 48 acres residential and 7 acres commercial.

WA and FOW share a common objective — retaining open space through the thoughtful development of our township’s natural resources. They differ in what they do to attain that objective.

FOW works to educate residents about open space preservation and thoughtful development — teaching about creative development techniques, communicating issues, sending newsletters, maintaining an informational website, and promoting community engagement.

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## The Legacy of Subracyol Farm on Fisher Road

“I want to leave a legacy in perpetuity to Worcester residents of a beautiful farm as they drive down Fisher Road,” said our father Oliver Smith when he chose to preserve the land by selling the property’s development rights. The farm was permanently preserved through the Montgomery County Farmland Preservation Program in 2007.



Oliver and Rosalie Smith at their preserved Subracyol Farm.

The vision Oliver had for the farm began in 1957, when he and his wife Rosalie moved to Worcester to follow his dream of becoming a full-time dairy farmer. There were less than five trees on the property then but Oliver and Rosalie had a vision for a beautiful farm. Every Christmas, the trees our family decorated for the holidays were planted around the farm. For decades, Oliver continued to invest in a wide variety of trees for the farm.

His desire to raise dairy cattle shifted when he realized it might be hard to send his five kids to college on a dairy farmer’s income. So, he got a job with G&WH Corson in Whitmarsh Township as their VP of Sales and replaced his dairy herd with black angus. Later, he became intrigued by the Belted Galloway breed and slowly switched his herd over. They are all black with a wide “belt” of white color around their middle. Some people wondered why the black cows were wearing white blankets! Others called them “Oreo cookie cows”. In any case, anyone driving down Fisher Road loved the look of these cows grazing on the farm.

Dad would come home from his workday wearing his suit and tie, put on his overalls and putt-putt around on the tractor. As a result of raising the black angus, we always had meat in the freezer. Over the years, he had sheep, a pig, and always, a vegetable garden. Then towards the end, Scott Rothenberger harvested the hay that grew in the fields to feed his cows at the dairy farm Merrymeade.

The farmhouse was special because it had been built in 1744 by Peter Wentz, Sr., the father of the man after whom the Peter Wentz Farmstead was named. That was before we were the United States of America!

The home had high ceilings and lots of closets, a reflection of Peter Wentz’s wealth. Our parents made many improvements in remodeling the house without losing the precious historic parts of it that were so special to the colonial period. There are still five fireplaces with detailed mantle pieces, beamed ceilings, raised paneled walls, wide-planked hardwood floors, and staircases with the original banisters. The farm has a large barn and several original, quaint, utility buildings.

When we invited a historic expert to look through our home in 2022, he was at times breathless with the authenticity and condition of the historic house. They don’t make houses like this anymore with walls a couple of feet thick, holding the coolness in during the summer, never warranting air conditioning until the last decade or so when window air conditioning units were added seasonally.

About a decade after moving in, Rosalie and Oliver began to consider putting in a pond or a tennis court, since they were both athletes. However, Frog Hollow Racquet Club in Worcester was being built, so they decided to play tennis there and build a pond instead. The pond added a sense of serenity to the property and a beautiful view from the house’s back porch. We were glad our folks decided on the pond! Geese, deer, blue herons, turtles, frogs and lots of fish call that pond their home. Besides fishing on our pond, it was used for swimming, neighborhood ice hockey games, aspiring figure skaters, kayakers, as well as sailing.



A magnificent view of the “Oreo cookie cows” grazing with the Schwenkfelder Church in the distance.

Our 68 acres bordered the Central Schwenkfelder Church on one side and the Schweikers on another (now Meadowood Retirement Community). Twenty of our acres were sold to Meadowood when they approached our parents with their need for more land. Across Fisher Road was Sunny Ayr Farms, owned by the Curt Weigner family. They used their 100 acres or so to graze their dairy cattle. Their farm is long gone now, replaced by the Milestone housing development. Across the pond is ten acres inherited by our brother, Brad, and Sandy, his wife. They raised their family there while creating beautiful “farm-fresh furniture” inspired by his growing up on a farm.



Rosalie named Subracyol Farm after the five Smith kids: Su for Susan, Bra for Brad, Cy for Cyndy, O for Oliver and L for Leidy. (Pronounced Sue-BRAY-See-Ohl) Our mom used to get asked what Subracyol meant and she jokingly would say, “It means ‘I love you’ in Swedish!”

As children, we used to walk through the fields at the back of our property and through the woods to meet a friend, or walk for a snack to Allebach General Store located at the corner of Valley Forge Road and Skippack Pike. Our mother would always tell us, “Go outside and play,” which also meant, “Turn off the TV!” Having so much land and open space really helped nurture our imaginations. We think it may have contributed to all five of us kids becoming independent and entrepreneurs.

Our father loved farming all his life and adored the farm. As he entered his 80s, he made the hard decision to sell the cows in 2013 when our parents moved to Dock Woods retirement community. They decided to keep the farm during this time. They came to sit on the back porch, looking over the pond to all the trees that lined it, and soaked it all in. Our family gathered there for every important event and holiday. It drew us together and strengthened our bonds.



Many family gatherings were held at this bucolic setting on the farm (with the pond and trees added by Oliver and Rosalie Smith).

Oliver Smith died in 2016 and Rosalie Smith in 2022. We then had to make the difficult decision to sell the farm. We are grateful that the new owners we found really wanted a farm and came from a background of preserved land. They had an intrinsic appreciation for this now 22.74 acres of preserved farmland. We are certain our parents would be happy that Mike and Danielle are now the stewards of this beautiful property and historic home. Preserving the land as a farm was one of our parents’ greatest achievements and for which they were very proud.

*Contributed by Susan Smith and Cyndy Drue.* Thank you for sharing the history of the preservation of your family farm. 🌿

If you are interested in learning more about preserving your land, please contact us at [info@friendsofworchester.org](mailto:info@friendsofworchester.org).

## New Bellflower Development: Growth Balanced With Open Space

While driving along Skippack Pike, many of you have probably noticed that a new development called Bellflower is now under construction near the intersection of Skippack & Whitehall Road. This development was approved by the township in March 2023, for 16-single family homes on 34 acres of wooded land.

Unlike many standard suburban neighborhoods in our area, Bellflower is a shining example of thoughtful development in our township - protecting significant open space as part of the development plan, and balancing growth in Worcester with the existing rural character that makes our township so special.

This kind of open space success story is a direct result of Worcester’s leadership. In 2006, the township adopted Conservation Subdivision, a “Growing Greener” zoning ordinance. This ordinance provides for the preservation of at least 50% of open space on residential properties of eight acres or more. Because the original Bellflower property was over eight acres, Conservation Subdivision was applied.



The Bellflower Conservation Subdivision Development near Skippack & Whitehall, where over 50% open space will be preserved.

Nearly half of the woodlands on the original 34 acres will be permanently protected from development. The homes are being built in close proximity on 1/2 - acre lots, clustered on a small portion of the property. This creates a community that has a real neighborhood feel, while leaving the integrity of the surrounding woods intact. Instead of the negative clear cutting that often accompanies sprawling developments, each home being built will back up to a beautiful, preserved, forested open space.

Developments built on smaller lots help to preserve surrounding open space and are one of several development plan options offered in the Conservation Subdivision zoning. When chosen by developers, they benefit both the builder and the community. Less infrastructure helps protect our natural resources - which benefits the environment and better equips our community in managing stormwater runoff, and maintains the natural habitat for birds and animals. It also preserves the rural feel that makes the township so attractive, helps to limit excessive congestion, and creates scenic views from the road and within the community.

*(continued on page 5)*

# Palmer Validity Challenge Update

It looks as if the ongoing Palmer legal challenge against Worcester’s zoning code will continue into 2024. The challenge concerns the 55-acre farm on the northeast corner of Valley Forge Rd and Skippack Pike, currently zoned 48-acres residential and 7-acres commercial. If the Palmers prevail, all 55-acres will be re-zoned commercial and allow for very large structures far exceeding the size currently permitted.

Carl Weiner, The Palmers’ attorney, has finished presenting his witnesses and arguments. He argued that Worcester Township’s zoning codes are flawed by not allowing for construction of commercial uses such as hotels, department stores, clinics, research facilities, supermarkets, and/or indoor recreational facilities in the township.

Bob Brant, the township solicitor, began putting forth his legal defense of Worcester’s zoning. During the September Zoning Hearing Board meeting, the township’s first expert witness, David Babbitt, a certified land planner and zoning code expert, provided compelling testimony stating that Worcester’s zoning codes allow for the land uses being challenged.

The October 2023 Palmer Zoning Hearing Board meeting was cancelled, due to the unexpected passing of Bob Brant. Wendy Feiss McKenna is expected to cross examine Mr. Babbitt on Tuesday, November 28, 2023, when the next Palmer Hearing resumes. Scheduled meeting dates can be found on the township website, and we will keep residents informed on our website and Facebook page.

Community turnout at the Palmer Hearings is welcomed and encouraged. This is a great way for residents to be engaged as the township defends Worcester’s existing rural zoning codes and will show continued support for preventing the overdevelopment of Center Point Village, loss of our historic and rural ambience, and significant traffic congestion. 🗣️

**Robert L. Brant, Jr.**  
**February 14, 1955 — October 23, 2023**

On behalf of the Friends of Worcester, we send our condolences to the family of Robert L. Brant, Jr., who served as Worcester’s Township Solicitor in recent years.

Most recently residents may recall, Bob exhibiting his many skills during the Palmer Zoning Hearing Challenge, representing Worcester Township.

Bob will be surely missed by all who knew him.

# Worcester Open Space Analysis

Over the summer, the Worcester Township Board of Supervisors asked the Township Planning Commission to begin evaluating Worcester’s open space amenity needs.

This “*Worcester Township Open Space Utilization & Acquisition Analysis*” project will be looking at three categories of open space in the township:

- 1) Existing township community parks, trails and preserved open spaces in Worcester
- 2) Potential uses for the open spaces recently purchased by Worcester Township – Like the 40.6-acre farmstead property at 3335 Fisher Road the township purchased in 2022, the 10 acres of open space the township just purchased in October located at Griffith and Valley Forge Roads, and the Dutchie Church property (formerly owned by the Worcester Historical Society) on Valley Forge Road
- 3) Recommendations for future open space needs and purchases in the township

The purpose of this review is to determine if potential improvements can be made to existing parks to better serve community needs, and how Worcester can grow its open space network in a way that maximizes quality of life for current and future Worcester residents.

The discussion will look at considerations like: availability of sports facilities, trail and other recreational amenities, how geographically accessible open space is across the township, natural resource protection, preserving Worcester’s historic structures, and unique scenic viewsheds.

The Planning Commission will be engaging in this analysis over many months. They want to hear from you. Residents are encouraged to attend the Planning Commission meetings and provide public comment. The Planning Commission meetings are held on the 4th Thursday of each month, 7pm, at Community Hall (refer to the township website for exact meeting dates). If you cannot attend these meetings, you can reach out to the township with your input. 🗣️

**URGENT ALERTS — FOW works to keep you, our friends and neighbors, informed about issues that will forever change Worcester Township. Send us your email at [info @friendsofworcester.org](mailto:info@friendsofworcester.org) to stay up to date on the issues in this newsletter and on items that can come up at a moment’s notice. Thank you!**



WA works as an advocate for thoughtful development — encouraging people to attend meetings and hosting fundraisers as a means of helping to defray incurred legal and administrative costs of the Palmer Zoning Challenge. Examples of recent successful fundraising initiatives include: the Golf Outing at Worcester Golf Club in April 2022, and the wine-tasting Love Worcester Unity Dinner at Braise in May 2023.

Each group has its own board, monthly meetings, website, budget, and separate needs for funding. Both groups rely on your support either financially or in kind to reach their goals and objectives. And—each group seeks volunteers to assist them in their efforts. To become a volunteer with the WA please contact them at [worcesterresidents@gmail.com](mailto:worcesterresidents@gmail.com) or us at [info@friendsofworcester.org](mailto:info@friendsofworcester.org). To learn more about either group, go to the websites of [LoveWorcesterPA.com](http://LoveWorcesterPA.com) or [friendsofworcester.org](http://friendsofworcester.org).

*(Worcester Township Acquires.. continued from pg. 1)*

The cumulative impact of these three recent acquisitions will ensure the preservation of over 50 total acres of open space towards the 300-acre goal. Our supervisors’ proactive approach to preserving these properties has demonstrated their noteworthy vision for Worcester’s future while respecting its past. History has proven that costs associated with preserving land today will pale in comparison to purchasing land in the future.

Friends of Worcester is very excited to see these three properties acquired for the benefit of current and future residents. It is a great start towards accomplishing the goal of preserving 300 acres by 2033 in Worcester Township! 🌳

**“Once It’s Gone, It’s Gone Forever”**

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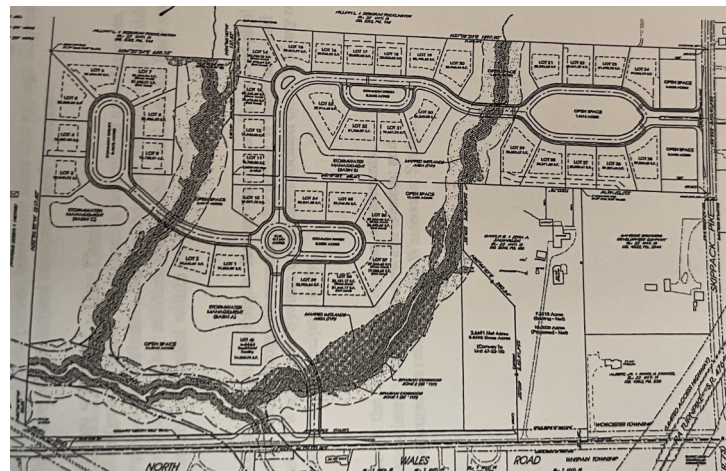
Friends of Worcester is a 501(C)3 non-profit organization. All donations are tax-deductible to the fullest extent of the law.

Bellflower is the 3rd major residential development construction in recent years to build on smaller lots while protecting surrounding open space. Whitehall Estates began in 2018 on Whitehall Road, and the Preserve at Worcester began in 2016 at the intersection of North Wales Road & Skippack Pike, also applied this type of development using Conservation Subdivision.



The Whitehall Estates Conservation Subdivision is between Berks, Potshop, and Whitehall Roads.

In the case of Whitehall Estates, the original tract was 117 acres. Thirty-six new homes were built along two different cul-de-sacs, with streams and woods left protected as additional open space surrounding the cul-de-sacs. There were three additional lots created as part of the subdivision for a total of 39 lots in all. One of these lots is a nearly 50-acre working horse farm once referred to as “Our Farm” on Potshop Road. This property was permanently protected from development to satisfy open space requirements of Conservation Subdivision. In addition to Our Farm, one of the three additional lots was created to preserve a stone farmhouse fronting on Whitehall Road. Worcester was able to grow, while also preserving our agricultural and historic heritage, open space, and rural feel.



Worcester’s first development to use Conservation Subdivision and TDR’s—The Preserve at Worcester.

The Preserve at Worcester is a 39-home subdivision with

*(New Bellflower Development ... continued from pg. 5)*

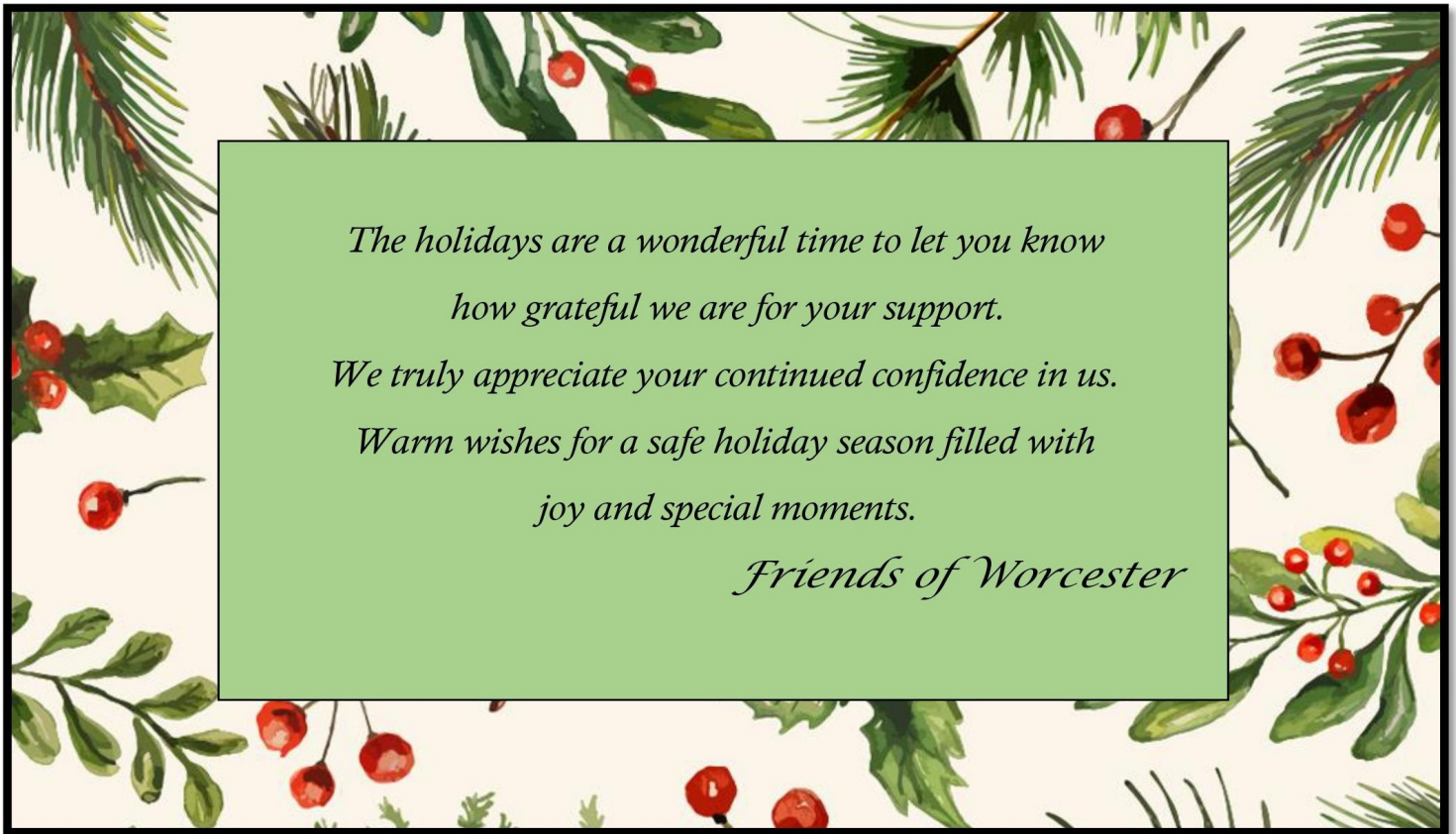
48 acres of HOA-owned open space at North Wales Road and Skippack Pike. It was Worcester's first development to use Conservation Subdivision and also to use Transfer of Development Rights (TDR's). The subdivision consisted of five separate parcels totaling 130.8 acres. Two of the parcels allowed for 39 homes to be built with the remaining three parcels to be permanently preserved as public or private open space. By using TDR's the developer was able to build more homes than would have been allowed by transferring the development rights of one or more properties to the subdivision.

This resulted in approximately 50 acres of land being dedicated to Worcester Township for public open space.

This was a win-win for the developer and for Worcester residents.

Worcester's proactive Conservation Subdivision zoning and thoughtful developments like these should be applauded.

The ongoing Palmer Validity Challenge is a legal effort being mounted to overturn the township's existing zoning codes, including Conservation Subdivision. This is a critical reminder of how important it is that our community stands up for Worcester's thoughtful, rural, open space minded zoning; now and into the future. 🌲



## **Worcester Volunteer Fire Department**

*We are always in need of new volunteers, whether young or old. We have a cadet program for ages 14-16 and a junior program for ages 16-18.*

*For more information, please visit our website at [www.worcesterfd.com](http://www.worcesterfd.com)*

*Please check out our website for upcoming events and sales to help out Worcester's Volunteer Fire Department!*



***The Worcester Volunteer Fire Department thanks you for all of your support!***



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*Important President's Letter Enclosed*



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**Join us for an upcoming meeting**  
**2nd Tuesday of the month at 7:30 p.m.**

*visit [friendsofworcester.org](http://friendsofworcester.org) for details*

**Worcester Township Public Meetings**

**Community Hall, 1031 Valley Forge Rd,  
Fairview Village**

**Board of Supervisors**

3rd Wed. of the month. Work session, 6:30 p.m.;  
business meeting, 7:00 p.m.

**Planning Commission**

4th Thursday, 7:00 p.m.

**Zoning Hearing Board**

4th Tuesday, 6:30 p.m.

Check [worcestertwp.com](http://worcestertwp.com) for meeting date changes or cancellations.