

**Information: Priest Farm, South Windsor**

(Information compiled by: Michele Lipe, Virginia Macro, Andrew Paterna)

At this time the building is in disrepair and has been vacant for fifteen years. The 75+ acres of farmland are leased out to a local farmer who has a potato crop planted this year.

There is tremendous potential for the building and property as an agricultural center that would contribute to the quality of life of South Windsor residents by increasing the footprint of the town center as a walk-able destination for culture, education and commerce. Because the property is so large, there are many passive recreation uses that could be supported – from picnicking to hiking on a boardwalk that currently crosses the southern end of the property and ties into other open space properties. As enjoyable gathering places for the public, the Farmers' Market and Community Gardens would provide opportunities to build cohesion in the community.

The Priest property is an outstanding example of a typical farm, existing in the same configuration and in the same family for almost 200 years. South Windsor's agricultural roots are well represented not only by the modest 19<sup>th</sup> century farmhouse and related outbuildings, but also by the type of cultivation and consumption practiced throughout the town. Unique in the recent history of the property is the concentration of rare plants collected by its last owner, Norman Priest.

The property was purchased by Lawrence Stoughton and, according to Edna Priest, the last resident of the property; the house was built in 1823. It remained in the same family until it was purchased by the Town and preserved as farmland. Norman Priest grew up on the farm, where his family raised a small amount of tobacco (six to eight acres), common in South Windsor, which provided enough income for the year. But the family was mostly self-sufficient, as they also kept horses, pigs, dairy cows and chickens. When Norman Priest took over the farm he concentrated on milk production for income. He may be best remembered for his passion for horticulture and rare plant species. Local historian, Barney Daley, reported four rare trees on the Priest property to the CT Botanical Society, two of which were new state champions for the species. According to Daley, Priest supplied many botanical gardens, such as Longwood Gardens near Philadelphia, with rare plants raised in his South Windsor garden.

As the only publicly owned remnant of a working farm, it preserves the key elements of a significant portion of the cultural landscape of the town. The 75-acre parcel of land is strategically located within the developing town center district of South Windsor. Its historical significance and location fits precisely in the newly adopted Plan of Conservation and Development and is integral to the center's overall plan for walk-ability and the historic preservation of South Windsor's agrarian roots.

**PROPOSED Priest Farm Project:**  
**The South Windsor Agricultural, Arts, and Nature Center**

**Short-term initiatives could include:**

SW Farmers Market  
Community Gardens with **High Tunnels construction**  
Classrooms for Educational Programs (organic gardening/landscape gardening)  
Master Gardener workshops  
Composting Location  
Daily Farm Stand/retail outlet for local farms  
Office Space/**in the farmhouse**  
Classroom Space/**in the farmhouse**

**Long-term initiatives could include:**

Demonstration Farm  
Food Hub for the sale of local farm produce  
Annual Farm to Table town-wide dinner (farms and local restaurants)  
Food Venture Center and Incubator Kitchen for local farms  
Art Studios/**in the farmhouse**  
**Barn construction** for a classroom  
**Barn construction** for a farm museum  
**Barn construction** for a SW Farming Museum and SW Tobacco Museum

Establishing this type of facility could assist in building a strong Agri-Tourism base in South Windsor.

**All of the programs noted in this Plan/Vision would be in partnership with:**

South Windsor Park & Recreation Commission  
South Windsor Agricultural Land Preservation Advisory Commission  
South Windsor Open Space Task Force  
South Windsor Schools, Rockville High School Ag-Program  
South Windsor Master Gardeners (and Down-to-Earth Garden Club)  
South Windsor Human Services Department  
South Windsor Recreation Department  
CT-Northeast Organic Farming Association  
South Windsor Community Foundation  
South Windsor Land Conservation Trust  
Manchester Community College (Culinary Arts and Biology)  
University of Connecticut /Extension Division

**The South Windsor-Priest Farm Project: Phase I**

At this point in the project plan, the SWFA is seeking funds to complete an assessment of the buildings on the property to determine both the feasibility of renovation of the home and barns, and the cost of construction/renovation in order to develop the Agricultural Center at that site.

**The goal of Phase I of this project is to commission an architectural /engineering feasibility study to evaluate restoration requirements and costs in order to****Facilitate the development of the:****South Windsor Agricultural, Arts and Nature Center for the Town of South Windsor.**

The Priest Farm was deeded to the town in 1990. The house dates back to 1823 and there are several barns on the property that were developed over time. Currently the house and barns are unoccupied and the buildings are in various states of disrepair. The town does not have the funds to pursue fixing these buildings and it is the goal of this project to determine whether or not such rehabilitation is feasible and meets the long term goals for this property. The Town of South Windsor has deep agricultural roots and the location of this property, within walking distance of the Town Hall and the town center, make it an ideal site for inclusion in the reconfiguration of the area, recommended in our recently adopted POCD. The addition of a unique historic component, such as the Priest Farm, will lend charm and a sense of the town's heritage to the future development of the center.

The development of the Priest Property is significant for the Town through the town's Plan of Conservation and Development, adopted 8/18/13, which promotes both the preservation of South Windsor's agricultural history and historical structures. The South Windsor FOOD Alliance has also identified this property's potential as a valuable resource center for its vision, goals and purpose.

This project could provide excellent facilities for a central office location for the South Windsor FOOD Alliance and for significant farming programs and classroom experiences for South Windsor students and the Rockville High School Ag Program. Another important partner in this effort is the collaboration of the Town of South Windsor with the CT-Northeast Organic Farming Association. This group, CT-NOFA, has expressed strong interest in offering many classes in organic farming for students and residents in the area.