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Connecticut Fund for the Environment

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Exhibit #141

January 4, 2005

Old Saybrook Planning Commission
Town of Old Saybrook
302 Main Street
Old Saybrook, CT 06475

**Re: River Sound Development, LLC
Special Exception Application**

Open Space and the Town of Old Saybrook

Dear Chairman McIntyre and Commission Members:

Please accept the attached report from the Old Saybrook Land Trust for inclusion in the record of these proceedings. This report notes the quality of life, environmental and economic benefits of maintaining undeveloped areas in the town of Old Saybrook as open space as opposed to developing them. This report is of particular significance because of its recognition of the opportunities afforded by preservation of the Preserve site (the old Lyons property).

OLD SAYBROOK LAND TRUST
OPEN SPACE AND THE TOWN OF OLD SAYBROOK
~~Thursday, June 18, 1998~~

Outline

Introductions

Open Space and the quality of life in Old Saybrook
Town open space questionnaire / Small town atmosphere / Traffic concern / Ecotourism

Environmental issues
Water quality & quantity issues / Build out scenario / Aquifer protection / Habitat loss / Air quality

Economic issues
Public costs of Development / Property taxes / Planned growth / Analysis

Regional Examples
Governor's open space initiative / Killingworth / Madison

Lyon/Gleason Land
Map / Lyon biological significance / Gleason biological significance / Neighboring support

Conclusion
Partnership / Fiscal impact analysis / open space acquisition

Thank you for the opportunity, and your interest.

Informational Packet:

- Written material
- Map of town highlighting Lyon and Gleason property
- NEMO maps
- Tansi information
- Town of Madison information

of water infiltrating into the soil and increasing water flows offsite into streams and rivers. This runoff, or non-point source pollution, often carries sediment and pollutants that risk important town water assets. Water washing over developed land, whether from rain, car washing or the watering of lawns, picks up an array of contaminants, including oil, sand, silt and salt from roadways, and nutrients and toxins from fertilizers, detergents and solvents.

Studies have shown that forestland produces about 50 tons of sediment per square mile per year. In contrast, land stripped for construction, if not properly maintained, can contribute 25,000 to 50,000 tons of sediment per year. Trickle down consequences of increased non point pollution that results from upland watershed development include: declines in water quality, ultimately impacting our marine resources downstream, and the decline of wetlands and wildlife habitat.

The University of Connecticut's NEMO project (non point education for municipal officials) tells us that study after study points to common thresholds for water quality degradation at 10 and 25%. In other words, development levels below 10% affords the most protection to water quality, and over 25% results in the degradation of our water assets. The demonstration of the town's build out scenario (enclosed) belies the risks of this upland development.

Another environmental consideration is air quality: It comes as no surprise that trees and other vegetation possess a large capacity for removing CO₂, particulates and other pollutants from air, as well as the ability to regulate air temperature. Although not quantified, it stands to reason that the significant acreage in the northern part of town, representing a quarter of the town's total acreage, provides a key environmental service.

ECONOMIC ISSUES

I would like to cite several recent studies that highlight the fact that the cost of services associated with residential development exceeds revenues from property taxes. The public costs associated with development fall under five categories: educating children; constructing and maintaining public facilities, such as water and sewage facilities, solid waste disposal and parks; providing public services, such as fire and police protection, and health and welfare services; construction and maintaining roads and parking facilities and; maintaining local government.

In the 1995 publication entitled The Effects of Development and Land Conservation on Property Taxes in Connecticut Towns, the Vermont based Ad Hoc Associates documents relationships between development, land conservation and the property tax bills of residents of Connecticut towns. This study provides an analysis of tax bills on median value homes in each of Connecticut's 169 towns.

The common assumption is that property taxes are higher in more rural towns that have small tax bases. The corollary to this is that growth and development, by expanding the tax base, will result in lower property taxes and that permanent land protection, by reducing the tax base and limiting development, will lead to higher tax bills. It would similarly seem logical that towns that have the most commercial and industrial activity would have the lowest tax bill.

These assumptions proved to be inaccurate in Connecticut. Although there are exceptions, tax bills are generally highest in towns that are most developed and lowest in the most rural towns.

In the 1995 publication The Cost of Community Services in Southern New England, ten communities in Connecticut, Massachusetts and Rhode Island were studied. This analysis evaluated the financial costs and benefits to communities of various types of land uses. The results of this study indicate that "tax revenues received from residential properties are not sufficient to support the cost of services provided to them." This finding was apparent at the town, state and regional level.

Madison - within the last year the town of Madison purchased 659 acres of open space for \$4.8 million. The town split the cost of a property appraisal and fiscal impact analysis with the land trust. 1500 people turned out for a public referendum to vote in favor of the purchase. The First Selectman "firmly believed that the town would save significant amounts of money in the future by purchasing the land, rather than having the land privately developed."

LYON/GLEASON LAND

A map is enclosed showing the locations of the Lyon and Gleason properties in the town. Although these are not the only parcels of importance for open space preservation in Old Saybrook, current circumstances, and the fact that these two parcels constitute, collectively, an opportunity of regional significance, are why we are here today to recommend town action regarding these tracts.

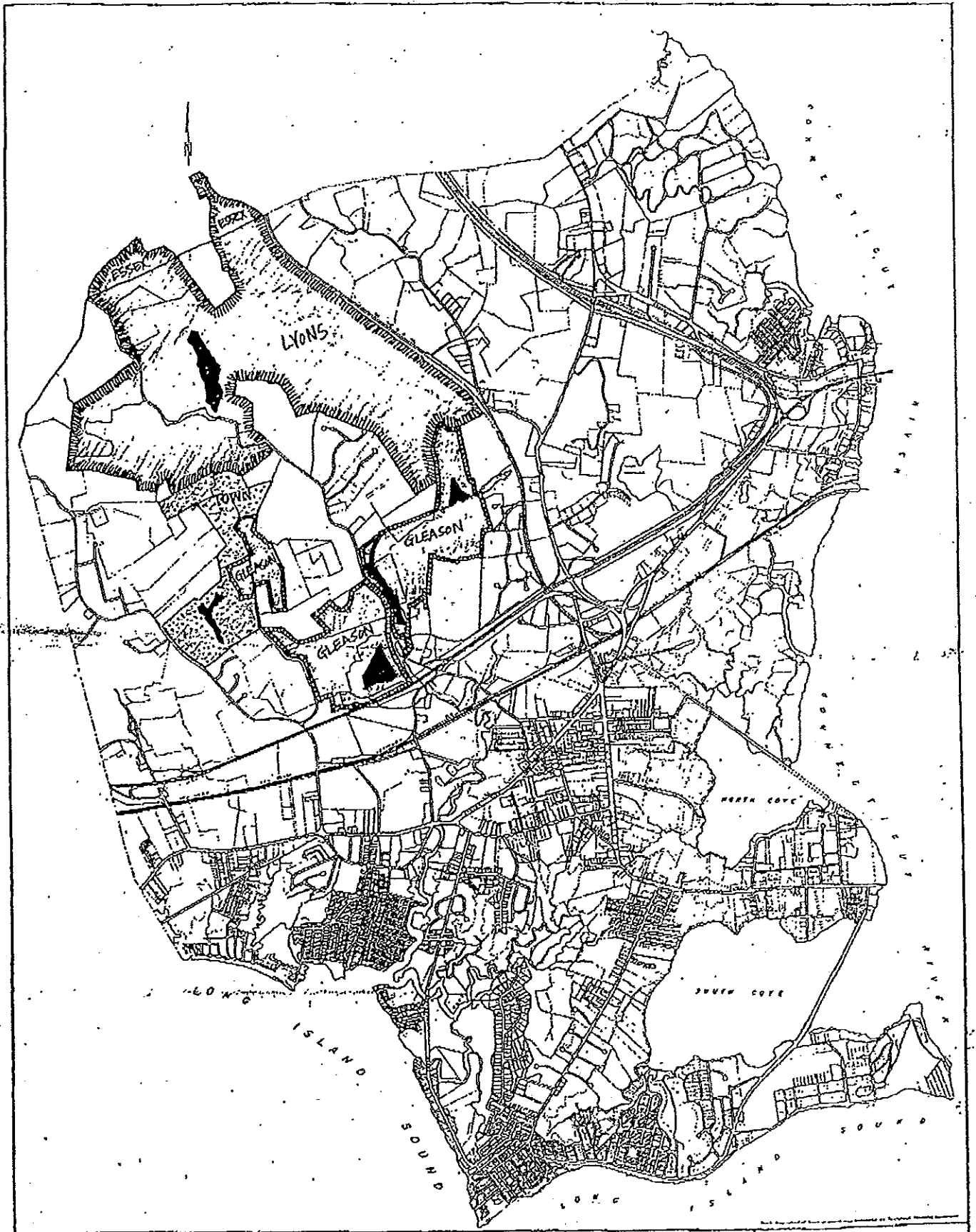
Although currently under contract, and potentially mired in legal issues, the 960 acre Lyon property constitutes an unprecedented opportunity for the town to demonstrate its commitment to open space. Briefly, the Lyon land is significant to the town of Old Saybrook for the following reasons: it is a large unfragmented woodland, one of very few of this size remaining in the state along the north Atlantic coast, with connectivity to state protected forested land to the north and west of the site. This provides essential habitat for migratory, forest interior birds, and wildlife requiring large open space. This land is important to aquifer protection in the town, harbors tremendous inland wetland habitat, and is known to support rare and endangered plant species, including a high quality Atlantic white cedar swamp, one of the twelve most imperiled natural communities in the state.

Similarly, the Gleason property, comprising two (possibly three) tracts off Ingham Hill Road, comprises approximately 350 acres. This land has, among other things, rich habitat diversity, including open field, woodland, Chaulker Pond (representing the northernmost reaches of the tidal Oyster River, and potential for fisheries reintroduction), Atlantic white cedar, and several ponds that are botanically noteworthy at the state level.

The two properties, when combined with the existing town park off Schoolhouse road, could provide an interconnected greenway for passive recreation that was originally envisioned close to five years ago through the Conservation Commission's conservation plan for the town. Collectively, these two properties constitute close to 1200 acres of coastal woodland that, regionally, is both biologically important as well as an unprecedented opportunity to protect a dwindling Connecticut commodity; undeveloped land.

There is strong support from surrounding communities and interest at the state level. All are dependent on leadership from the town of Old Saybrook. The first selectmen from the neighboring towns of Westbrook and Essex have both indicated their strong support for the open space protection of the Lyon property. The Westbrook Chair of the conservation commission has indicated his support as well, as has the Essex conservation commission. The Essex Land Trust has even gone so far as to offer substantial financial support (50K) toward this project.

The Old Saybrook Land Trust has received strong support and much encouragement from the community. Through 300 new members, financial support exceeded our expectations (and continues) we are optimistic about the groundswell of residents that not only share a vision for the town, but are eager to make it happen. Similarly, with the receptive and supportive leadership that we have seen from the town's selectmen, we believe this is an opportune time to move forward.



OLD SAYBROOK
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OLD SAYBROOK PLANNING COMMISSION
Ripon & Pines, Planning Consultants • June, 1964

COST BENEFITS OF OPEN SPACE PRESERVATION*

The Economic Issues Surrounding Open Space versus Residential Development

Old Saybrook General Statistics (1996 figures)

Population:	10,000
Number of Homes	4,830
Condominiums	666
Grand List	\$1,157,803,373
Education Budget	\$10,661,530
Number of Students	1,283
Cost per Student	\$8,310
Mill Rate	14.66
Average Annual and Residential Tax	\$3,050

Recreational Development: Purchase of Lyon Property for Open Space -- Cost to the Town

Purchase Price:	849 acres at a 1996 proposed cost of \$2.4 million.
Method of Payment:	Bond anticipation notes and bonding over a 20-year period
Annual Cost:	@ 10% interest the annual cost would be \$360,000; less depending on municipal bond rates. At the end of 20 years, the town would be debt free.

Residential Development of Lyon property -- Cost to the Town

# of Homes Built:	Recent developer estimated 350 houses; conservatively at least 300 new homes could be built.
Number of Children:	Estimate one (1) child per household.
Educational Costs:	If the cost to educate each student is \$8310 and each household pays \$3050 in taxes, the shortfall (difference between cost to the town and tax income) is \$5260. If 300 homes were constructed and occupied by families the overall shortfall is \$1,578,000 annually. This does not take into consideration the cost of new schools that may be necessary.

Economic Comparison (Cost to Town) - Open Space vs. Residential Development

The annual cost difference between recreational or open space development (\$360,000 for bonding), and residential development of the same parcel (\$1,578,000 in educational costs) is \$1,314,000 per year of future savings for the town. In addition, infrastructure costs (roads, police and fire service) are significantly less for open space than a new housing development.

*Analysis provided by Mr. Ted Tansi, Hartford Courant editorial, October 22, 1996.