



# Green Space Advisor

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## Message From The President.....John Chirtea

Ok. I give up. What happened to 2004? Is it just me, or are the years flying by at the speed of light? Although 2004 is now behind us, I am pleased to report some successes for GSSGS. In particular, approximately 25 acres of beautiful land at Auburn Village on meeting house road are now protected in perpetuity with a conservation easement. As some of our board members go into "retirement", we are fortunate to have others join us in our efforts to preserve open space in the greater Sandy Spring area. Our thanks are extended to Pam Saul who served as our executive director for the past two

years, and we welcome Joli McCathran as her replacement. Land conservation takes the cooperative efforts of the local community, support at the state level, and legislation at a national level. Tax incentives help make land conservation work, but a desire by the community's residents to retain "green spaces" is critical to achieving our goals. We look forward to 2005, and hope we will be able to count on your support to help us find additional land in our community to remain as open space. Let's make *green space a reality and not a memory.*

## Executive Director's Report

The goal of Greater Sandy Spring Green Space always bears repeating: "The mission of our organization is to preserve open space in Eastern Montgomery County." We are pleased to continue our strong association with the Maryland Environmental Trust and the Land Trust Alliance. We work with these organizations with common goals and interests. They offer so much support and it is inspiring to witness their dedication to preserving land.

It was my pleasure to accept the position as Executive Director of Greater Sandy Spring Green Space, replacing Pam Saul, who stepped down to work in her family's business. Pam served the organization with incredible

efficiency and good cheer and she maintains a keen interest in the mission and goals of our organization. Many thanks to Pam for her commitment and dedicated work. I enthusiastically took over the position mid-summer and am pleased to offer my expertise.

The Board Members are an impressive and dedicated body and I can assure you the trust you hold in Greater Sandy Spring Green Space is well founded. Greater Sandy Spring Green Space is an organization that relies on your membership to continue to achieve our common goals. Your membership and donations are effectively used toward this end.

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## **Mission Statement: Preserving the Open Space in the Greater Sandy Spring Area**

Greater Sandy Spring Green Space, Inc. (GSSGS, Inc.) is a land trust, formed to help preserve open space in the greater Sandy Spring, Maryland area. As urban sprawl continues to encroach on valuable farmlands, efforts are being throughout the country to preserve the rural character of our communities. GSSGS, Inc.'s mission is to promote for the benefit of the general public, the preservation, protection and balanced use of open space and natural resources within eastern Montgomery County and the Patuxent River Watershed.

Landowners of qualifying property can protect their land in perpetuity with conservation easements, and in return they may receive income tax, property tax, federal estate tax, and Maryland estate tax benefits. A conservation easement is a perpetual legal agreement a property owner makes with a Land Trust (and/or government agency) to restrict the development and uses that may take place on the property. They are tailored to the particular property and to the interests of the individual owner.

The easement concept includes a separation of rights of ownership. Development rights may be separated away and voluntarily conveyed to other owners or sold. These rights have value, and if they are donated to a land trust in the form of a conservation easement, there are potential tax benefits including income tax deductions for the charitable gift property tax benefits and estate tax benefits.

The new Taxpayer Relief Act, signed into law on August 4, 1997, includes new federal estate tax incentives for land conservation. This law allows beneficiaries to exclude from the taxable estate up to 40% of the value of eligible land subject to qualifying conservation easements in addition to the reduction in value already attributable to the easement itself.

Landowners are encouraged to consult their own financial advisors, and if interested, to contact GSSGS, Inc. Our group has formed a partnership with the Maryland Environmental Trust to receive conservation easements and they will work with us in establishing these easements.

## **2005 Membership Drive**

Are you concerned about the pace of development in Sandy Spring? Wonder what's going to happen next? We are running as fast as we can, just to keep up. Greater Sandy Spring Green Space can't stop development. What we can do, and have done in a number of instances, is lock down the 65% open space required by the current cluster zoning which is being used in our area.

We can also help **you**, if you don't want to think

about bulldozers on your property. Contact us about a conservation easement to keep your land "dozer free."

We need your help to keep this organization alive! Please join or renew your membership using the envelope bound in with this newsletter. If you can spare some time and effort, consider joining the Board. GSSGS needs you. Join us!

**Letter to the Governor:** *GSSGS this month sent the following letter to the Governor of Maryland following news reports about the sale of public lands*

The Honorable Robert L. Ehrlich, Jr.  
State House  
Annapolis, MD 21041

Dear Governor Ehrlich:

Greater Sandy Spring Green Space, Inc. (GSSGS, Inc.) is a land trust formed to help preserve open space in Eastern Montgomery County. Our mission is to promote, for the benefit of the general public, the preservation, protection, and balanced use of open space and natural resources in the Sandy Spring area, which includes the Patuxent River Watershed area. We feel strongly that we need to build a legacy for the future by preserving the integrity of the land.

We are writing to you to express our dismay concerning recently disclosed proposals to sell to developers State owned parkland dedicated to open space. It is simply unbelievable to us that you and your current administration would be willing to sacrifice the State's long-term environmental health by selling off property for short-term economic gains. The citizens of the State of Maryland paid for the preservation of these properties and should have a say in any use that is contrary to this purpose. Your actions are a violation of the trust of the residents of the State.

Our volunteer organization works diligently, along with the Maryland Environmental Trust, to ensure properties with conservation easements owned and maintained by Greater Sandy Spring Green Space remain in open space. We work with homeowners and developers to achieve our mission. We have earned the trust and faith of the community by promising them that land can be protected in perpetuity through conservation easements. The basis of the faith placed in us by our community to protect land in perpetuity has been undermined because land preserved elsewhere in the State is now viewed as vulnerable and susceptible to political and economic expediencies, the very forces from which we promise to protect land.

The State of Maryland is widely known as a progressive leader in land conservation. Funding for conservation projects, however, is currently severely reduced due to budgetary considerations. We know some cuts are inevitable and additional taxes may be necessary in the short run. This is acceptable to us, if the trade-off is the long-term environmental gains through maintaining the current level of open space property that you hold in trust for the Citizens of Maryland. The benefits we all derive from these conservations lands are well-known and widely supported. Their loss would be detrimental to all.

By copy of this letter, we are asking each of our District 14 Legislators to take action to halt any future sale of public land and to block any future sale of public land in Maryland.

## Community Supported Agriculture: Fresh from the Farm

Sandy Spring CSA (Community Supported Agriculture) brings members purposeful camaraderie, great produce and a healthy appreciation for their farmers.

From late May to early October, every Monday between 3-7 p.m., 75 members of Sandy Spring CSA drop by the old school house Meeting House Rd to collect their week's share of organic produce straight from the Maryland Certified Organic Growers Cooperative. At 7 p.m., all the unclaimed food is turned over to the Friends Retirement Home to be distributed to residents. In a typical week, a share might consist of lettuce, onions, garlic, chard, spinach, potatoes, peppers, tomatoes, cucumbers, eggplant, squash, basil, parsley, and other items – depending on when each is ready to harvest. The typical season runs 20 weeks.

Joining Sandy Spring CSA means more than the novelty of getting produce straight from the farm.

- You get fresh, organic food full of nutrients – no chemicals- that tastes great!
- You get safety from genetic manipulation, radiation, pesticides, and preservatives.
- You will be helping to sustain healthy, organic farming practices and support local, independent farmers.
- You will be supporting a form of agriculture that doesn't harm the environment- it doesn't pollute waterways, diminish the soil or reduce biodiversity.

What is Community-Supported Agriculture? The CSA concept goes like this: Subscribers pay for a seasonal share, usually enough for two to four adults, at the beginning of the season,

when the farmer must pay for seed and other supplies. Then over the course of the subscription, members share in the rewards – as well as the risks. In the U.S., the movement is twenty years old. Today, there are more than 1,000 CSAs all over the country. In the D.C. metro area, there is a waiting list for most CSAs. For more about the CSA movement, please to [www.csacenter.org](http://www.csacenter.org)

Grocery stores may offer exotic produce, but your purchase includes the cost of transportation and fuel plus marketing and distribution. With CSA, your food is much fresher because its picked shortly before you get it and the money goes straight to the farmer. With CSA, you are also relieved of one more decision about what to eat since Nature makes your selection for you.

Sandy Spring CSA got started in 2002 when Robert True, part-time blueberry farmer and plant manager for 15 years at Sandy Spring Friends School, pursued a longtime vision of starting a CSA. He persuaded the Friends in Unity with Nature (FUN) to support the idea with the members of Sandy Spring Quaker Meeting as well as the Sandy Spring Friends School faculty, staff and parents. Since then the CSA has attracted residents from Rockville, Derwood, Aspen Hill, Olney, Sandy Spring, Brookville, Columbia, Ellicott City and even further away.

A share price is \$595 including a one time new member fee due by January 1, 2004.

Questions? Contact Erin Johnson at 301/438-3927 or [erintjohnson@comcast.net](mailto:erintjohnson@comcast.net) You can also contact Robert True at 301/570-5468 or [robertt@ssfs.org](mailto:robertt@ssfs.org).

Or go to [www.sandyspringcsa.com](http://www.sandyspringcsa.com)

## **A GREAT STREAM VALLEY PARK**

**by Bill Howard, President, Neighbors of the Northwest Branch**

**Did you know?** -- that the Sandy Spring area sits at the headwaters of one of the most



beautiful, rugged and pristine natural wonders of the area? Up here the feeder streams may be quiet meandering trickles, but not far south they gain force and flow through *the Northwest Branch gorge*, which runs along a beautiful rocky valley from Route 29 at Burnt Mills south to the Beltway and beyond. The best access point is at the Burnt Mills East Park (near the Citgo station and the construction for the new Trader Joe's shopping center), where there is parking behind a red brick former WSSC building that fronts on Route 29.

**What is the Northwest Branch?** The Northwest Branch (NWB) is the largest sub-watershed of the Anacostia River. It is a non-tidal, free-flowing tributary that joins with the Northeast Branch in Bladensburg and their confluence forms the 8.4 mile Anacostia River, which eventually flows into the Potomac River and the Chesapeake Bay. The Northwest Branch watershed stretches over 19 miles, covers approximately 42 square miles, and includes over 180,000 residents. In this area the

watershed boundaries are generally outlined by Olney-Sandy Spring Road to the north, New Hampshire Avenue to the east, and Georgia Avenue to the west. Seventy-four percent of the watershed is in Montgomery County, with 18% in Prince George's County and and 8% in the District of Columbia.

**Who are the Neighbors of the NWB?** The Neighbors of the Northwest Branch is a non-profit organization, incorporated in the state of Maryland. We are a local, citizen-based action group dedicated to protecting, promoting and restoring the water quality, natural habitat, recreational resources, and ecological well-being of the Northwest Branch watershed. We intend to:

- (1) foster environmental awareness, outreach, and education,
- (2) take action by initiating and engaging in various water quality, habitat restoration, land preservation and litter reduction efforts, and
- (3) enlist broad-based public participation in support our goals and activities.

**What is the condition of the NWB?** The Northwest Branch has been in decline for many years, caused first by destructive agricultural practices and then more recently by urbanization and stream channelization in the downstream areas. Fortunately, the upper portions of the Northwest Branch still support some of the healthiest fish and aquatic insect populations in the entire Anacostia watershed. However, there are still many threats to the environmental integrity of the Northwest Branch, such as invasive plant species, stormwater runoff, bank erosion, trash, and water pollutants, all of which need to be addressed.

*Director's Report from page 1*

The price of membership is small, but the rewards are momentous.

Tremendous growth has occurred in the area over this past year. More is slated in the future. It is vital we work together as a community with the idea of preserving open space to be effective. Despite the amount of development, there is still much to conserve and we all can be grateful there is a local organization such as Greater Sandy Spring Green Space set up to make local land conservation a reality.

I feel I must acknowledge the Maryland National Capitol Park and Planning Commission for working with Winchester Homes to dedicate an acre of land to protect the impressive and beautiful White Ash tree, *Fraxinus americana*, in the Auburn Village development. This wonderful tree has a circumference of 216", a height of 100', and a crown of 97', (the bark is really worth seeing)

and is truly worthy of the land dedicated to it. This is a wonderful precedent as there is no legislation in place to ensure the preservation of such trees or the land surrounding them. Joe Howard, a member of the Montgomery County Forestry Board, was instrumental in making this happen. I mention this because Joe is slated to be our guest speaker at our Annual Membership Meeting scheduled for Tuesday, March 29, 2005. Please mark your calendars to reserve this date.

Want to help more? We are currently seeking new members to serve on the Board of Directors. If you are interested in learning more about serving the community, please contact me at 301-869-5358. The Board of Directors meets on the last Tuesday of each month. All are welcome to attend these meetings.

Joli McCathran

### Fond Farewell

*From the MET LandMarks, with permission*  
By Nick Williams, MET Acting Director



Many of you have probably met and talked with John Bernstein over his seven-year tenure as director of MET. John was always very accessible, visited communities and landscapes throughout the state, and was

ready to discuss almost any topic, from the fine points of charitable tax law to the architecture of 19th century farmhouses to the humor found in odd and unusual names of places around the state. This past January, John left MET to take a position as Director of Conservation Programs at the Land Trust Alliance, the national association of land trusts headquartered in Washington, DC.

John's time at MET was highly productive: Under his direction, MET made great strides in land conservation at a time marked both by the development boom of the late 1990s and the

Smart Growth initiatives of the Glendening administration. He brought MET into new partnerships with programs such as Maryland's Rural Legacy Program and the Federal Farm and Ranch Protection Program. He successfully introduced legislation providing Maryland income tax credits to qualifying donors of conservation easements to MET or the State's farmland preservation program. John lived in Baltimore County (Glyndon) and put his knowledge of local farms and landowners to work there, greatly expanding MET's base in that county in terms of acres preserved and a growing constituency for conservation.

John came to us by a circuitous route; in previous lives he had practiced medicine, run an historic restoration business, and served as president of the Valleys Planning Council in Baltimore County. The good news for all of us is that he remains in Maryland; John now lives in Baltimore City with his family and commutes on the train to Washington D.C. We miss him and wish him well in his current position at the Land Trust Alliance.

**MLTA Stewardship Training**  
by  
**Bobby Berg**

The Maryland Land Trust Alliance gave this 3-hour course on 5 June 2004. In attendance were myself and 15 others from Frederick, Harford, Anne Arundel, Prince Georges, Charles, and Montgomery counties. The course consisted of the following two items plus “Proactive stewardship vs. legal action”, but talking to attendees belonging to more experienced land trusts was valuable also.

**Setting up a stewardship program**  
*Don Wilson, Scenic Rivers Land Trust*

Success brings responsibility! As GSSGS acquires more conservation easements, we likely will need a permanent Stewardship Committee, whose main job will be inspections. A *baseline inspection* records the state of the property when the easement was established. Periodic *formal inspections* confirm that the terms of the easement are being satisfied. (The SLRT inspects every 4 years if there is no known threat to the property, but GSSGS easements may require shorter intervals.) More frequent *informal inspections* can be as little as a drive-by.

The remainder of Wilson’s talk was the nuts-and-bolts of stewardship. The topics of his handout, which will be posted on the GSSGS website, give an idea of the many useful details he discussed:

1. Makeup of the stewardship committee.
2. What to require in a deed.
3. Use of the state coordinate system.
4. What inspections will you need to perform?
5. What files should be maintained?
6. Problems to watch for when working with private owners.
7. Problems to watch for when dealing with developers.
8. The importance of photographs.
9. Use of GPS.
10. How all this gets paid for.

Wilson covered some of these topics with more handouts, many of which he made available in electronic form also.

**Cultivating and maintaining good landowner relationships**

*Jon Chapman, Maryland Environmental Trust*

Land trusts such as GSSGS sometimes assume that their relationship with the landowner is good. After, all the conservation easement was donated willingly. But what happens when ownership changes due to sale or inheritance? Most easement violations occur under successor owners, sometimes simply because the terms of the easement weren’t understood.

Chapman emphasized the importance of creating and maintaining a good relationship with the landowner. Mementos, such as refrigerator magnets, and formal recognition at annual events can help, but personal contact is the most important. He’s even heard that the phone call with the landowner that sets up an inspection visit is better insurance against an easement violation than the inspection itself.

Chapman’s handout, which we hope to post on the GSSGS website, covered the following topics.

1. Issues.
2. How to deep your land trust in the donors’ minds, in a positive light.
3. Monitoring and/or periodic personal contact.
4. If not monitoring annually, how else to stay in touch?
5. Changes in ownership.

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