



Field Notes

Newsletter of the Great Barrington Land Conservancy

Winter/Spring 2005

“PARKING LOT NATION”

The End of Suburbia on Feb. 27

Come join us to hear author James Howard Kunstler speak on “Parking Lot Nation: The End Suburbia” at GBLC’s Spring 2005 Lecture at 2 p.m. on Sunday, February 27, at Berkshire South Community Center at 15 Crissey Rd., Gt. Barrington.

Author of *The Geography of Nowhere* (Free Press), *Home From Nowhere* (Simon & Schuster), and *The City in Mind* (Free Press), Mr. Kunstler says he wrote *The Geography of Nowhere*, "Because I believe a lot of people share my feelings about the tragic landscape of highway strips, parking lots, housing tracts, megamalls, junked cities, and ravaged countryside that makes up the everyday environment where most Americans live and work. A land full of places that are not worth caring about will soon be a nation and a way of life that is not worth defending."

A portion of *Home From Nowhere*, which emphasizes remedies to this tragic landscape, appeared as the cover story in the September 1996 *Atlantic Monthly*. His third book in the series, *The City in Mind: Notes on the Urban Condition*, is a wide-ranging look at cities here and abroad, an inquiry into what makes them great (or miserable), and a projection of what America is going to do with it's mutilated cities. His next nonfiction book, *The Long Emergency*, which will be published in 2005 by Atlantic Monthly Press, describes

the changes that American society faces in the 21st century.

Mr. Kunstler is also the author of nine novels including *The Halloween Ball*, *An Embarrassment of Riches*, and *Maggie Darling: A Modern Romance*. He is a regular contributor to the *New York Times Sunday Magazine* and Op-Ed page, where he writes about environmental and economic issues.

Mr. Kunstler was born in New York City in 1948. He graduated from the State University of New York, Brockport campus, worked as a reporter and feature writer for a number of newspapers, and finally as a staff writer for *Rolling Stone Magazine*. He has lectured at Harvard, Yale, Columbia, Dartmouth, Cornell, MIT, RPI, the University of Virginia and many other colleges. He lives in Saratoga Springs in upstate New York.

At GBLC’s Spring 2005 Lecture, Mr. Kunstler will speak about making plans for energy-efficient living and subsequent effects on town planning. Admission will be a \$10 donation to GBLC, at the door.



James Howard Kunstler



River Walk

Annual Update

by Rachel Fletcher

The highlight of River Walk's conservation and educational activities last year was the comprehensive restoration of the severely blighted riverbank behind Brooks Pharmacy. This original section of trail, built in 1991 to minimal standards from salvaged materials, has long since required intensive upgrading and restoration. The site of a massive community clean up of 100+ tons of rubble and debris resulting from a burned building bulldozed over the riverbank, it is without question the most devastated section of riverbank in all of South County. Now, a model infiltration trench captures massive stormwater runoff from 6000 square feet of rooftop, while two 500-gallon tanks store some of the excess water to irrigate newly planted slopes. A full complement of native plants—propagated from



Irrigation system installed. Native species now replace the non-native iris and daffodils holding riverbank in this photo.

seed collected locally—has begun to create the herbaceous, shrub, understory, and canopy layers of a budding riparian urban forest.

To help these plants grow in ashen soil, our landscaper Heather Cupo led us through an experimental program of organic, bio-activated “compost tea” applications. Before and after soil analyses indicate that the “tea” most definitely improved the soil microbiology. We are tremendously excited by our success, and have shared our findings with the U. S. Environmental Protection Agency, which confronts similar soil conditions as they restore PCB-remediated riverbanks in Pittsfield.

Meanwhile, the trail behind Brooks, originally cobbled together from scrap materials, has been widened and completely rebuilt by our trail master Peter Jensen, with safety enhancements and a new stairway entrance.

Elsewhere, throughout the half-mile of River Walk, we continued our quest to rid the riverbank of knotweed, bittersweet, garlic mustard, multiflora rose and other exotic-invasives. In their place, we planted thousands of native plants propagated from seed collected locally. We are extremely pleased with the success of this program begun seven years ago by our landscaper Monica Fadding, who now teaches what she knows to River Walk interns and others in Berkshire County.

This year, we conducted nine service-learning programs for nearly two hundred students from Searles Middle School, Simon's Rock College, and Great



Application of compost tea soil amendments

Barrington Waldorf High School. To celebrate Housatonic River Summer 2004, we conducted our first native plant workshop with twenty or so participants who learned first hand about the ecological restoration taking place along the Housatonic River Walk. It was a grand event that took place in the W. E. B. Du Bois River Garden—the most glorious learning lab anyone could ask for.

Next year promises to be equally special, with new opportunities for ecological restoration and plans for a second year of “compost tea” applications at the Brooks site and elsewhere. Our educational programs will supplement student workdays with tours and lectures about ecology and the river's rich historical heritage.

Since 1995, when Bernard Drew published *River Walk: History Underfoot*, we have endeavored to draw attention to the river's special role in our local and national history. In 2002, we named the park at the downstream Church Street entrance, located just fifty paces from the birthplace of the great civil rights activist W.E.B. Du Bois, in recognition of his efforts as an early Housatonic River advocate.

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We now have an opportunity to highlight the contributions of electrical inventor William Stanley, who in 1886 became the first to successfully transmit high voltage alternating current electricity such as we use today. Stanley's experiments were conducted along the Housatonic River at the Rubber Factory, located directly across from the upstream section of River Walk, where he ran wires across the river to light stores and offices on Great Barrington's Main Street. Stanley later established a factory in Pittsfield to manufacture transformers and other electrical products. By the early 1900s he sold the factory and it became General Electric Company.

A new terminus to the upstream section of River Walk will provide the perfect venue to celebrate Great Barrington's early industrial history and Stanley's important contributions to electricity. We are tremendously excited about this new opportunity to celebrate the river's rich historical heritage, and are grateful to Dale Culleton for providing the site, as well as significant labor and materials.

We are also grateful to the Berkshire Environmental Fund, Massachusetts Environmental Trust, Berkshire Garden Club, Lenox Garden Club, Robbins-de Beaumont Foundation, Town of Great Barrington, Katherine L.W. and Winthrop M. Crane III Charitable Foundation, Riverways, and many others in the community for providing the financial resources to make this year possible. Of course, we greatly appreciate our volunteers—more than 2000 at last count—and countless others who provided myriad materials and services.



Native plant workshop: Du Bois River Garden

Rachel Fletcher



Membership Form

Enclosed is my tax-deductible **membership** contribution to GBLC to support efforts to preserve and enhance the community's natural resources and distinctive character.

- | | |
|---------------------------------------|---|
| <input type="radio"/> \$20 Individual | <input type="radio"/> \$250 Guardian |
| <input type="radio"/> \$35 Family | <input type="radio"/> \$500 Steward |
| <input type="radio"/> \$50 Supporter | <input type="radio"/> \$1000 Sustaining |
| <input type="radio"/> \$100 Conserver | <input type="radio"/> \$____ Other |

CHECKS PAYABLE TO: GBLC

In addition to my membership, I would also like to support my favorite projects:

- \$_____ RiverWalk for protection and stewardship of the Housatonic riverbank.
- \$_____ Pfeiffer Arboretum for forest stewardship and the study and management of invasive and native species.
- \$_____ Farmland Fund for the preservation of agricultural land and working farms.
- \$_____ Lake Mansfield Alliance for the stewardship of the lake and its surroundings.
- \$_____ Neighborhood Initiative for establishing preservation programs in communities.
- \$_____ Conservancy Endowment Fund to ensure the future preservation of Great Barrington's natural resources.

NAME _____

ADDRESS _____

CITY/STATE/ZIP _____

PHONE _____

EMAIL _____

GREAT BARRINGTON LAND CONSERVANCY
 PO Box 987
 GREAT BARRINGTON, MA 01230
 (413) 528-2583

Neighborhood Initiatives

Town Planning in Practice

by Anthony J. Barnaba

Much of the civic beauty that surrounds Great Barrington today is the result of beautification efforts from the latter half of the 1800's and on through the pre-war years of the 1900's. As we look at our town and identify the physical attributes that define our unique sense of place, we should note that the civic and natural beauty surrounding us is in fact the result of civic initiatives.

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Modern day equivalent can be seen in the efforts of people involved with projects like RiverWalk , Lake Mansfield Alliance, Housatonic the Beautiful and Friends of East Mountain. On a neighborhood-by-neighborhood basis, these projects have all had to think ahead, set priorities, and decide what we want our community to be – and then take specific steps to make that vision a reality. Organized neighborhood initiatives can embody effective change.

All four of these projects benefit from and share in common civic-minded individuals with a collective vision of a specific project. These efforts and the participants' ability to garner the required resources to successfully advocate through a public process, will continue to make our area a viable community. Neighborhood initiatives require the balance of short-term goals and long-term planning that can be documented for future generations.

Typically, neighborhoods organize out of fear of a proposed development. Many neighborhoods have already been through the process of having to decide if they should band together and fight a proposed development in their backyards. This kind of process is confrontational and often includes legal and engineering fees. Instead, people need to be more proactive, especially in regards to what we perceive to be our neighborhoods.

By design, planning as practiced today does not confer power to the hands of one person. But the basis for defining our neighborhoods around environmental, historical, and even economic principles, is fairly well-proven as both a science and an art. By organizing ourselves around the enhancement of our immediate surroundings, we create a context for broader civic involvement and problem solving.

If you have concerns about future development pressures on your neighborhood and would like to find out more about what you can do to enhance and protect your neighborhood environs contact <anthony@bluelinedesign.com>.

GBLC

Mission

The Great Barrington Land Conservancy is dedicated to preserving and enhancing the community's natural resources and distinctive character. Through promotion and fund-raising endeavors, GBLC enables the dedication of open space to agricultural, recreational and scenic purposes thorough acquisitions, conservation easements, and agricultural preservation restrictions.

Board of Directors

Anthony Barnaba, President
Barbara Witschonke, Secretary
Peter Flemming, Treasurer
Dale Abrams
Dennis Downing
Jonathan Hankin
Peter Jensen
Lou Oggiani
Susan Witt

If you are interested in learning more about how to participate in Great Barrington Land Conservancy projects, please contact us at (413) 528-2583.

Treasurer's Report

Ordinary Income/Expense 2004
[Exclusive of Special Projects]

Income	
Donations/Memberships	\$ 6,713.50
Interest Income	10.13
Lecture Income	1,414.14
Total Income	\$ 8,137.77
Expense	
Advertising	\$ 170.00
Annual Report Fees	35.00
Dues	125.00
Insurance	1,143.34
Lecture Expenses	2,182.90
Office	10.45
Postage	48.00
Printing/Brochure	850.00
Professional Fees	1,916.66
Promotion	299.40
Rentals	487.50
Property Taxes	949.45
Total Expense	\$ 8,217.70
Net Income	-\$ 79.93

Lake Mansfield Alliance Partnership

by Christine Ward

Lake Mansfield, a space essential to the quality of life in Great Barrington, is an easily accessible natural habitat that has historically provided residents and visitors with a tranquil setting for recreation and reflection. More needs to be done, however, to preserve and enhance this vital open space. As Great Barrington works to effectively manage the pressures of development, the stewardship of Lake Mansfield should be of primary concern.

Members of Lake Mansfield Alliance have worked toward acquiring the expertise necessary to help promote strong stewardship of our beautiful lake. In the coming year, we will continue to work with town officials and local organizations to generate creative solutions to key Lake Mansfield concerns that include safety, access, weed control and preservation.

In 2004, Lake Mansfield Alliance efforts included sponsoring the Spring Lake Clean-up Day and co-sponsoring the June Fishing Derby. These two events provide the community with opportunities to appreciate and care for Lake Mansfield.

In June, Lake Mansfield Alliance members took advantage of training offered by the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation to help us understand and respond to concerns about weed growth in the

lake. Through participation in the "Weed Watcher Program," we obtained skills necessary to identify aquatic plants, allowing us to monitor our lake's plant population and quickly respond to the presence of any new invasive species. This ongoing program provides us with much needed data and gives validity

to our request to the town of Great Barrington for an updated Lake Study. We look forward to coordinating our efforts with Burke

LaClair, town manager, who is currently seeking a proposal for a 2005 Lake Study.

On November 30, 2004, Lake Mansfield Alliance hosted a community forum at the Berkshire South Community Center. In agreement with the 1998 Great Barrington Open Space Plan, we were acting on the belief that "successful planning implementation depends on collaboration between individual citizens, local organizations, and Town government." The forum, highlighted by a presentation on the RiverWalk by Rachel Fletcher, was well attended by town government officials and concerned citizens.

Current Lake Mansfield discussion echoes historic concerns. Primary among these concerns are road safety and the erosion of the lake buffer zone. Lake Mansfield Park users are faced with increas-



LMA logo

ing traffic, and drivers are concerned about safely negotiating around pedestrians. The lack of space to safely accommodate mixed use in this vital open space is frequently mentioned. Concern about accidents that could occur as a result of present conditions is often voiced. These concerns are not new. Concrete actions toward

solving these concerns must be taken. Lake Mansfield Alliance is committed to encouraging the town to actively pursue solutions to the safety concerns on Lake Mansfield Road and to move toward realizing the goal of "providing an alternative means of access to Lake Mansfield that would accommodate pedestrians, bicyclists, and other non-vehicular traffic," as stated in the 1998 Open Space Plan. We will need membership support in bringing these concerns to the town of Great Barrington as we seek creative responses to the pressures of traffic and development.

Lake Mansfield Alliance will be working to provide the community with information, education, and opportunities to actively join in lake efforts. Look for our 2005 newsletter, which will include this year's calendar of events and specific ways for all community members to become lake stewards. Our task is great. Our mission is clear. Please join us in working to protect Lake Mansfield!

For further information contact:
Lake Mansfield Alliance, PO Box 944,
Great Barrington, MA 01230.

Tax Benefits for Preserving Land by Peter Flemming

If a family would like to leave the scenic beauty of the woods and fields they own as a lasting legacy not only to their heirs but to the community with whom they have shared this beauty, there are tax laws that reward such a vision. No tax law gives back to the family the full monetary value that such woods or fields might represent to a developer ready to subdivide and build; but the tax law will afford the family either savings on current income taxes, or savings on future estate taxes.

To obtain a savings on income taxes, a family may create a "Conservation Restriction" on a parcel of their land which is presently woods or field. This permanently restricts any future development of the parcel, and requires that the parcel be maintained as woods or field for recreational, agricultural, or scenic purposes. An appraiser calculates what the family's property might have been worth on the open market if there were no such Conservation Restriction, and its worth on the open market with such a Restriction. The difference, or reduction in value, constitutes a gift for income tax purposes, and over the next several years the amount of this reduction can be gradually (or all at once) deducted as a charitable contribution against the family's current income.

In some circumstances a family may make such a gift part of its estate planning by making it a part of the owners' wills, or by requesting the estate's executor to do so upon consent of the heirs. Landowners can also gift a parcel of woods or field to a Land Trust, which may result in a larger charitable gift, depending on the appraisal of that parcel as free-standing developable land. Typically, however, an outright gift requires a cash gift to the Trust as well, to endow the ongoing responsibilities of the Trust to maintain the property in perpetuity.

Land Trusts may in some special cases be interested in paying a landowner some part of the value of the gift, if in doing so it will enable the landowner to afford the balance of the gift and if the scenic value or location of the property is of paramount importance to the community. GBLC would be glad to consult with any landowner who would like more information about putting restrictions on their land.

Note: This article touches only on income and estate tax provisions, and does not discuss "Article 61" real estate tax reductions relating to farming, lumber or recreational activities on the property; or Agricultural Preservation Restrictions under the State's sometimes funded program to purchase "development rights" from farmers.



Great Barrington Land Conservancy

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SEE INSIDE FOR DETAILS ON THE **FEBRUARY 27 ANNUAL LECTURE:**

— JAMES HOWARD KUNSTLER ON "PARKING LOT NATION: THE END OF SUBURBIA" —