A Brief and Unofficial History of Walden Woods

August 2017

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The Common Interest Community we today call Walden Woods is quite different than what was envisioned when the first public offering statement was made in 1990. The physical size of the planned community is the same; that is, 153.6 acres. The number of units is drastically different.

Today Walden Woods consists of 336 units. The initial public offering stated, “ultimately there may be up to 435 Residential Units, up to 280 Garage Units, and four Accessory Service Units.” The residential units were to be Lots (Woodmoor), Detached Homes (Village Homes), Semi-Detached (Ranch Homes) and Multi-Family Units (Townhomes.)

The offering also stated that there may be up to “202 Residential Units on additional land.” Walden Woods could have been about twice the size it is today.

The initial declarant was Culbro Homes II, Inc., a business of Culbro Tabaco, which in turn was a holding of General Cigar of New York. Permits from the Town of Windsor appear to have been obtained starting in 1987. Construction began sometime thereafter. The first Declaration was recorded with the Town of Windsor On February 12, 1990.

Phase I called for a Meeting House to be used temporarily as a sales office, 24 Village Homes and 53 lot units. This is what we know today as the lower Village or The Village on the Green and Woodmoor. (The home on Lockview near the tennis court became the 54th Woodmoor lot unit at some later date.)

Plans called for an outdoor swimming pool with changing facilities, open tennis courts, open spaces, ponds, walking trails, and an exercise facility that was to be part of the Townhome council, but would be open to all residents. The amenities were described as “must be built,” but timing was not specified. The Meeting House was eventually to become a limited common element for the use of the Village homes and the Ranch homes. Original drawings showed walking trail/sidewalks extending from the Meeting House in loops in the grass areas behind the Village Homes on Mercer and Pierce.

The initial Conservancy fee was $23.18 per month per unit. Of that amount $2.82 went to building a reserve fund. Today the Conservancy fee is $50.00 per month per unit, down from a high of $62.00 in 2009. Today’s Conservancy reserves stand at $195,103.00 as of the end of 2016. The reserves of the Conservancy and the councils total over $1,000,000.00

The lower Village was originally known as the Meeting House Council. The original Council fee was $113.57.per month. The fee today is $250.00 per month.

In 1992 Culbro assigned 40 of the lot units in Woodmoor to Walden Woods Development Limited Partnership, a Pennsylvania based company, with Toll Land Corporation as its general partner. Toll Brothers built many of the Woodmoor homes. The pattern of assigning portions of Walden Woods to various builders and various other developers would continue. The Town of Windsor records show Marshall Phelps Associates (perhaps a land holding entity) in the late 1980s, Culbro Homes II as the original declarant in 1990, and Griffin Land and Imperial Nurseries, a spin off Culbro in July 1997. Some homes were built by T.&M. Homes in 1995 and Roswell Development in 1999. Eventually the development rights were sold in 2002 to Garden Homes of New Jersey who established Connecticut Windsor Developers (CWD.)

During the period of 1989 to 2000, The Village, The Ridge, The Knoll, and Woodmoor continued to develop. Homes were built in sync with market demand. Building moved forward in phases. For example, Knollwood North preceded Knollwood South. The Ridge progressed around the Pond Bridge circle.

All seemed to be going according to plan. Culbro served as the first management company. The Conservancy Board, better known as the Executive Board, was made up of two officers of Culbro and one resident. This arrangement certainly favored the developer, but that was not extremely troublesome at that time. In November of 2000, 135 units were owned by home owners and 21 were owned by the developer, either for sale or under construction.

A bombshell was dropped on October 23, 2000. Culbro, then reorganized as Griffin Land, announced that it had reached an agreement with Garden Homes of New Jersey. The agreement called for Garden Homes to build 80 Duplex Units and 160 apartments. The apartments would be in a series of multi-story buildings with large common parking lots. The apartments would remain the property of Garden Homes developer as rentals. All would be built on the south side of Walden Meadow.

Opposition by the home owners was immediate. As the Conservancy Board was still controlled by the developer, another means of representing the home owners’ views had to be found. By the end of November a Limited Liability Corporation (LLC) had been formed to fight the apartment concept. The LLC was titled POWW for People of Walden Woods. The story of POWW is remarkable, especially for the show of unity from residents and neighbors. Over its four year history, the organization raised over $170,000. Sizeable contributions were made by Woodmoor, Village, and Ridge residents as well as residents from the various Lockview areas. POWW opposed Culbro and Garden Homes, now organized as Connecticut Windsor Development, on several fronts for the next four years.

Culbro still controlled the Conservancy Board. The Common Interest Community Act and the 1990 Declaration called for governance of the community to be turned over to the unit owners if the developer did not declare any units finished and ready for sale for a period of two years. Culbro had not declared any new units since July of 2001, but just prior to the two-year expiration in the spring of 2003, they made an attempt to circumvent the requirement and retain control of the board. Culbro “built a garage unit” (a pre-fab shed) down at the end of the pool turn around. A motorcycle was parked in the “garage.” Building that first “garage” was intended to extend the time period for building the remaining number of garage units. The POWW went to court and nearly a year later a judge ruled that the shed did not constitute a garage. The time limit had expired.

At the same time in 2004 the courts found in favor of POWW, ruling that the plan for apartments were not consistent with the intent of the original 1990 Declaration. The homeowners gained control of the Conservancy Board. The Board reached agreements with CWD that eliminated the apartments and reduced the number of units to 180. Planning and Zoning approved the 92 Duplex units and the 88 Town Home units which were built and marketed by CWD as Country Walk. A certain number of garage units were also allowed, but they were never built. POWW, LLC dissolved and turned its small treasury balance over to the Conservancy.

Having won control of the Conservancy in 2004, the homeowners voted overwhelmingly to amended the 1990 Declaration in December of 2005. The developer CWD retained certain Declarant’s rights and still does as of this date.

The Declaration of February 12, 1990 stated that the declarant’s building rights were to expire no later than twenty-one years from the date of the filing of the Declaration. That meant that the rights to develop extended to February, 2011. Connecticut Windsor Development (CWD), the last declarant, worked right up until that date to finish 180 units of Country Walk (Duplex and Townhome). As of this date, CWD owns 54 units within Walden Woods. No longer the developer, as a homeowner, CWD is a valued member of the community, having worked with the Conservancy to build the pond patio and the community garden.

Today Walden Woods is governed by a Conservancy Board of twelve directors elected each year by the unit owners. Duplex, Town Home and Village each have three directors. Woodmoor has two and the Ridge has one. There are 92 units in Duplex, 88 in Town Home, 72 in the Village, 54 in Woodmoor and 30 in the Ridge.

Added August 2021: There have been a few major events since 2017. .

The first was the settlement of the Conservancy and Council boundaries. The 2005 Declaration called for Walden Woods to be divided into six areas. The Conservancy area was to be defined as well as the areas belonging to each of the five councils…..Village, Ridge Woodmoor, Duplex and Town Home. The problem was that the boundaries were never defined and a map was never drawn. Since the purpose of the boundaries was to define who was to pay for what, needless to say there were many different opinions. It took 10 years to resolve this issue. The matter was finally resolved in 2017 when the unit owners adopted an amendment to the Declaration. The boundaries dispute was finally resolved after compromises on the part of all.

The second major event was the 2020 update/revision to the 2005 Declaration and ByLaws. At the present time this is still ongoing. The proposed revisions must be approved by 2/3rds of the unit owners. The revision is necessary as there have been many changes to Connecticut law and to the community since 2005.

The third major event was Covid 19. In the spring of 2020 all amenities were closed as the state and the nation went into lockdown to combat the virus. During the ensuing months it was discovered that the association’s insurance policies would not cover any legal action brought against the association or its directors that was related to Covid. During the summer of 2021 an amendment to indemnify the directors was passed by 2/3rds vote of the unit owners. The amenities reopened in August with residents who wished to use the amenities required to sign a waiver.

While the path to the Walden Woods of today may have taken some unexpected turns in the road, Walden Woods is a beautiful place to live. The different types and styles of homes in the five separated council areas, the beauty of the environment, and the amenities of the Conservancy make it a wonderful place to live.

*Note: This write up is neither an official or legal record. It is merely a compilation of what several individuals recall. Its only purpose is to provide some insight into the history of the common interest community.*

*Walden Woods Communications Committee*