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A \$24.5 Million Development?

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HAMDEN — Some stand in lifelike majesty — an enormous Kodiak brown bear, undisputed monarch of the Alaskan river country; thick-necked bighorn sheep; surefooted Rocky Mountain goats; gentle-faced deer; elk; moose; big cats — even a tusked walrus, improbably out of place among his terrestrial neighbors.

In an adjoining room, big Atlantic salmon, walleye pike, world-record rainbow and brown trout, muskelunge and largemouth bass share space with mounted woodchucks, bobcats, beavers and an albino skunk.

And where is this extraordinary collection of North American wildlife?

Peabody Museum, perhaps?
Nope.

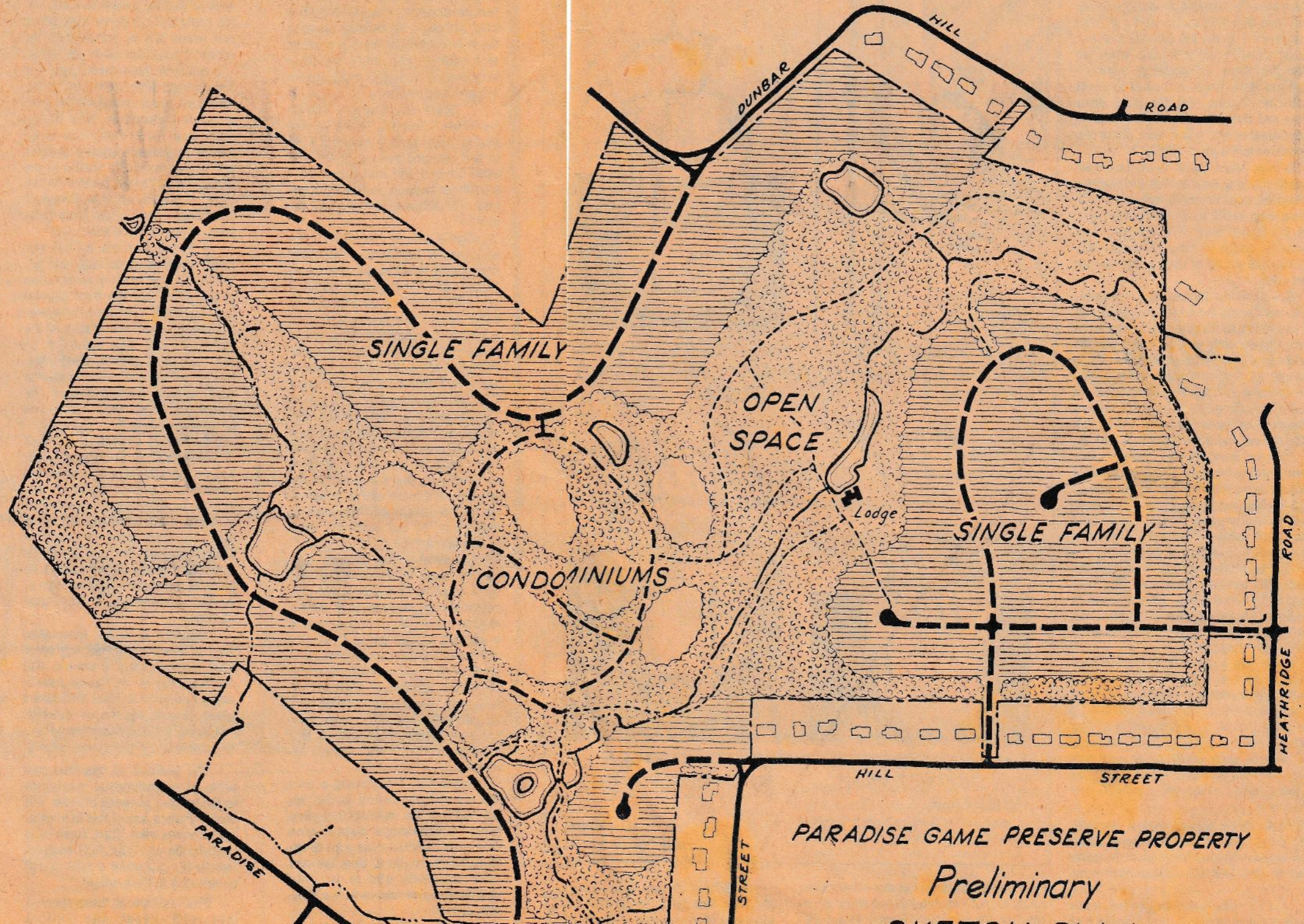
The twin trophy rooms which hold these and other specimens of hunting and fishing exploits are located here, literally over a hill from the Dixwell Avenue "Magic Mile" shopping area and just a few blocks from the municipal golf course, Laurel View.

The setting is the hunting lodge at the Paradise Game Farm, the 180-acre tract of fenced, rolling Connecticut countryside originally operated as the private hunting preserve of the late A. C. Gilbert.

Known throughout the world as an inventor, industrialist, naturalist, Olympic athlete, Yale coach and big game hunter, Gilbert once owned a tract of 600 contiguous acres, of which the game farm was a part.

Today, the game farm portion of that tract is owned by Game Preserve Associates, a partnership headed by Elliot and Philip A. Stone, brothers and Woodbridge-based developer-builders, who intend to develop the property for residential use sometime next year, should various approvals and permits be granted by municipal agencies.

The Stones' property contains about 60 acres of open fields and meadows, 68 acres of lightly-wood-



water courses and 6.8 miles of unpaved roads and trails. These characteristics serve to shape development and planning considerations.

While no final development plan has yet been produced, the developers last week unveiled a general development concept before about 100 invited guests at the lodge. Most are members of the Dunbar Hill Civic Association, a group made up of 125 residents of the area in which the Paradise Game Farm is located.

The meeting was one in a series of briefings which have been conducted in recent weeks by the Stones and which has included a preliminary briefing session before the Hamden Wetlands and Conservation Commission.

The meetings and briefings indicate a significant pattern in current land development and building practices in the housing industry, particularly when approaching large expanses of previously underdeveloped land.

Elliot Stone tells it all in this overview: "Community involvement is a virtual requirement in major real estate development these days. If you don't have the neighboring residents agreeable to what you'd like to do, you're simply inviting organized opposition every step of the way."

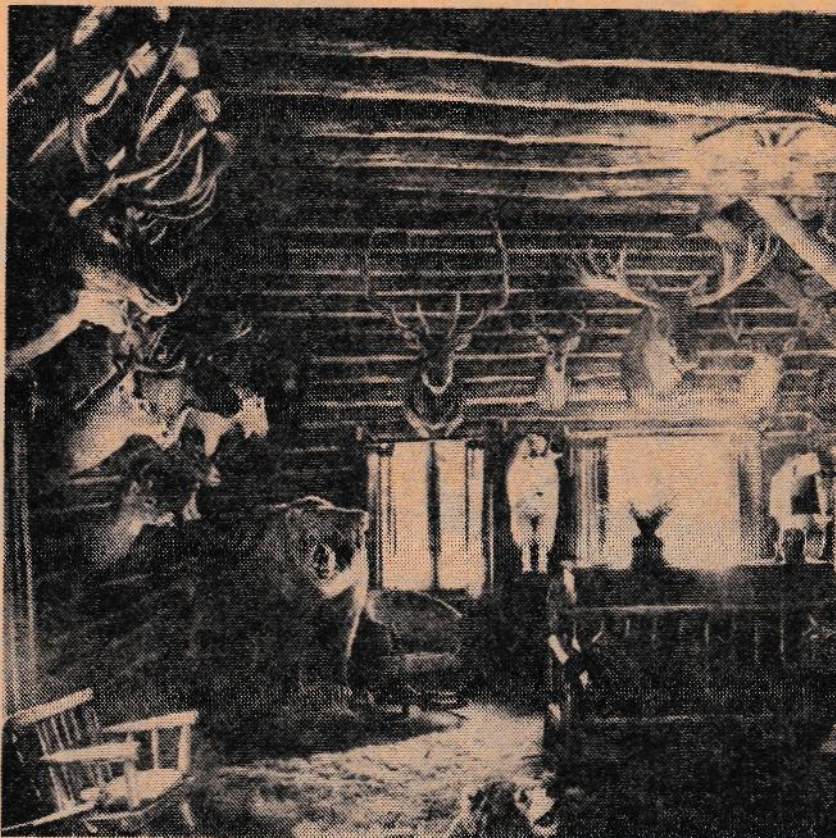
The steps along the game preserve's way began with planning and engineering studies, and include appearances before inland wetlands agencies, planning and zoning commissions, with city staff engaged in a variety of planning and engineering functions — sewers, traffic engineering, construction supervision — and with political leaders.

In recent years, progressive developers have expanded the steps to include meetings with leaders and members of neighborhood organizations, such as the Dunbar Hill Civic Association.

A little over a week ago, the association was invited to a presentation of the current status of preliminary planning for the lodge property.

Heading the presentation were Bernard A. Pellegrino Jr., a prominent Hamden-New Haven attorney whose practice includes a lot of planning and zoning matters, and Anthony J. Panico, a principal of the East Haven-based planning and engineering firm which bears his name.

Panico's company has been intensively involved in planning and engineering studies since January,



when his agency was hired by the Stones.

The development concept unveiled by Panico last week has been seven months in the making and will be subject to continued modification and refinement over the remainder of this year, as the plan takes its final form.

Basically, the plan calls for the development of approximately 150 single family homes around the perimeter sections of the land and about 135 condominiums in the interior, buffered and screened from the nearby neighborhood.

A "very large" portion of the tract would be retained in its natural state, totaling about 70 to 75 acres, running from approximately two o'clock at the northeast quadrant into the center of the property. This portion includes a deep ravine which serves as a water course from one pond high on the property, feeding the main trout pond adjacent to the lodge.

From here, the ravine continues south toward Paradise Avenue, feeding two other ponds near the entrance to the property.

Both the lodge and the main trout pond are presently designated for community use, either by residents of the proposed condomini-

ums or by all residents of this ambitious development, including the owner-occupants of the one family homes.

This, the Stones explain, is a determination which won't be finalized for several months.

The lodge itself is one of the most unusual structures in the New Haven area. The building is just about irreplaceable under today's building costs and methods.

Toy tycoon Gilbert bought two Norwegian ships' carpenters to Hamden in the late 1920s to erect his lodge. Using what appears to be native woods from trees felled on the site, including a great deal of cedar, they handcrafted the log-cabin style lodge with shipbuilding techniques.

The joints are notched and fitted; seams mortared; stairs, railings and other trim fashioned from hand-split logs and rails.

Until some renovation work was undertaken a few years ago, Elliot Stone says, no nails were used in the building.

Even its furniture is handcrafted, including cedar chairs, beds and stools and oak tables and stands.

Massive floor-to-ceiling stone fireplaces in the main floor rooms provide heat during the winter

developed as currently planned, the project could have a cost, at today's prices, of \$24.5 million. At lower left, a section of one of the trophy rooms in what was the lavish lodge of toy tycoon A. C. Gilbert. At lower right, the lodge is obscured by the heavy foliage surrounding it.



months, while smaller fireplaces heat the bedrooms on the second floor. An oil-fired floor furnace provides backup heat for kitchens and pantries near the main entrance.

The roof is covered with hand-split shingles.

Even the lodge's ASHTRAYS, lamps and magazine racks are handmade!

On the lodge's second floor, eight bedrooms, including a master suite opening to a balcony overlooking the pond, accommodate a dozen guests.

The character of the lodge is decidedly spartan. Its rugged qualities speak, perhaps, of the man who built and long inhabited it.

While Gilbert shot and mounted hundreds of trophies during his years as a big game hunter — eight of his trophies are entered in the book of North American Big Game Trophies — he turned to cameras in his later years to capture his prey. One of his most remarkable camera experiences involved the filming of huge Kodiak bears "fishing" for salmon meals in Alaskan rivers.

Gilbert used the lodge as a part-time home, away from his fabulous permanent residence, "Hilltop," which was located on

what is now the highest point of the Laurel View Country Club. He entertained generals and admirals in "Hilltop" in the 1930s and 1940s, when Yale alternated annual football games with Army and Navy. (As an aside, this was in the period when Connecticut was wild about Yale teams, and the senior cadets from West Point and Annapolis marched several miles (and back, after the game!) from Union Station in New Haven to the Bowl.

Industrialists, financiers, businessmen and other associates from around the world were also guests of A. C. Gilbert at "Hilltop," hunting on the land and fishing, literally, from porches and decks which open directly onto the main pond.

Gilbert managed the property under the auspices of the state Wildlife Commission and stocked the lakes with rainbow trout and the land with white-tail deer imported from Virginia.

In his autobiography, "The Man Who Lives in Paradise," he wrote that the white-tails were his favorites. He said they would approach his home at "Hilltop" in the early evening, more curious than frightened by the activities inside the large glass-walled living room.

Each fall, Gilbert would reluc-

tantly thin out the herd, maintaining a balanced population of deer on the land and provide meat for the Gilbert table and meals for employees of his huge factory at Erector Square in New Haven. (More than 2,000 people worked there in peak years).

At one time, the small white frame buildings near the entrance to "Hilltop" housed Gilbert's kennels, where retrievers and hunting dogs were raised and trained alongside an enormous flock of poultry — turkeys, quail and pheasant.

The turkeys provided meals at Erector Square. The game birds provided hunting stock for the Gilbert guests.

An anecdote in the autobiography describes the contraption Gilbert erected to teach newborn ducks to fly.

There was a comical parade of quacking "youngsters" following an adult up a long ramp which ended abruptly over one of the ponds. Shoved from behind by quacking brothers and sisters, a duckling had no choice at the end of the ramp but to jump and eventually to learn to fly.

Today, the pheasants, quail,
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Housing Complex Planned For Game Preserve

(Continued from Page F1)

turkeys, ducks and hunting dogs are long gone, but a small herd of deer still inhabits the grounds. One became "curiouser" at the goings on last week and several times ventured down the sides of the ravine for a closer look at the largest gathering at the lodge in many years.

Generally, Elliot Stone feels, neighborhood response to the current development concept is favorable, although he readily admits there is opposition from a number of residents who have become accustomed to living near undeveloped land for years.

"Their concerns are understandable," he says, "and I suppose that if I were in their place I'd want to see the land remain in its wild state forever. But that simply isn't a realistic position, and we think the majority of residents recognize the fact."

Carl Secola — who, at 17, is the president of the Dunbar Hill Civic Association — takes the view which Stone feels is the majority opinion.

"We tried for some time," Secola says, "to have the land acquired by someone who would preserve it in its natural state. We even contacted the Nature Conservancy in Washington and the Sierra Club, without success."

Consequently, says Secola, who will enter Fairfield University as a political science major this week, "We recognize that if it is going to be developed, there is potential for good development and a potential for bad development. We want to make sure the end result is a good development."

Skeptical some months ago, and perhaps understandably so, since no plans or development concept had been revealed then, Secola says he has begun to come around to a position of accepting that the developers are sincerely working to produce the best possible development plan, in terms of treatment of the land, compatibility with the neighboring area, etc., and feels many members of the Dunbar Hill association share his current assessment.

While still maintaining a wait and see attitude toward further refinements of the development plan, Secola acknowledges that Game Preserve Associates has gone to extraordinary lengths to treat the land with sensitivity and to include neighborhood residents in the planning process.

(Secola, incidentally, may be the youngest president of a civic association in Connecticut, if not in the entire nation).

Last month, the partnership which now controls the Gilbert preserve announced that it had assembled the first four in a team of five specialists in environmental sciences who would provide additional specialized input to Panico Associates and some of whom will be retained for continuing service as the project moves forward.

Kenneth J. Faroni, a graduate of the University of Connecticut

College of Agriculture and Natural Resources and the Yale University School of Forestry and Environmental Sciences, has been hired to conduct an inventory of vegetation and wildlife on the property, especially in those sections presently designed for preservation as open space. His work will be used by the planners to refine site plans for individual portions of the property, such as cutting pedestrian and hiking trails through dense underbrush and woods and in determining the routes of vehicular roads and paths.

Aquacon Associates, Inc., the Woodbridge firm now conducting lake and pond management programs in Connecticut, New Hampshire and New York, has been named to prepare aquatic profiles and related scientific studies of the five lakes and ponds located on the tract. In particular, it will conduct an in-depth study of the main trout pond, adjacent to the lake.

J. Bruce Shattuck, a Ph.D who heads Aquacon Associates, said following his preliminary observation of the pond, that the trout population appears to have been completely dissipated and the quality of the water is "less than optimal." He also said algae growth, weed infestation, silting and other problems seem to have developed since the personal hand of "A.C." ceased to care for the property.

E. Robert Gregan, a member of the American Society of Landscape Architects and considered particularly knowledgeable in the agronomical aspects of horticultural design and landscape architecture, has been hired to furnish a broad range of services involving transplanting of existing stock, tree planting programs and the design of various landscape architectural features.

Barkan & Mess Associates, Inc., of Branford, traffic engineers and transportation planners, will work closely with Panico Associates to prepare internal circulation plans, access to major external roads and a variety of other services, including air quality monitoring.

The addition of this five-area array of environmental specialists to the normal planning process will enable Panico Associates to eventually produce what Elliot Stone likes to describe as "the first environmentally planned residential community in Connecticut."

The addition of these specialists will boost the initial development costs by thousands of dollars, but Stone refuses to say how much.

He does, however, say that the studies to date indicate that about \$2.5 million will be needed in site development costs just to get the property ready for development.

That figure would be greatly increased if there is a followthrough of plans to locate all utilities, including electric lines and possibly cable TV lines, underground.

The additional costs can eventually be recovered, the Stones

say, since the price range of the homes planned for the tract will range from approximately \$75,000 to \$125,000 for single family homes to \$75,000 and up for the condominiums.

A bit of simple arithmetic and a call to the Hamden assessor's office produce some interesting figures.

Assuming an average sale price of \$100,000 for the 150 single family homes and a low estimate of \$70,000 for the 135 condos, the market value of a fully-developed ex-game farm would be \$24,450,000.

The assessors say this figure represents 60 percent of market value, reflecting the age of most existing assessments in the city. The net assessed value of the property would work out to about \$8,772,000 added to the grand list.

At the city's current 70.2 mill rate, the development would produce about \$632,000 in additional tax revenue. In addition, the large areas of open space preserved in their natural states and common recreational areas around the condominiums would be cared for and maintained by residents of the development, attorney Pellegrino told members of the Dunbar Hill Civic Association last week.

Elliot Stone late last week stressed that the development firm doesn't yet have a single green light to proceed on anything. It still must obtain required approvals from the Inland Wetlands and Conservation Commission, various city agencies and, most importantly, from the Planning and Zoning Commission.

Prior to making its initial submission to that agency, a great deal of detailed work remains to be done, including obtaining studies and making one more presentation to the Dunbar Hill association. The developers pledged to the group last week that no final plan would be submitted to the Planning and Zoning Commission without a prior review before the association.

Current timetables call for the submission to be made around October, after which the commission will schedule a public hearing. If approval is obtained and the overall development is approved, construction of the first homes would begin next spring or summer.

Will that construction mark the end of an era at the Paradise Game Farm?

"I think it's more accurate to say the era ended more than 15 years ago, when Mr. Gilbert passed away," Elliot Stone says. "He was an extraordinary man in everything he did. He left an extraordinary legacy, including the game farm, and we have a responsibility to live up to our responsibility, as the custodian of the land, in its planning, its development and its ultimate occupation."

Only the passage of several more months will finally determine the future of Gilbert's legacy.

In the meantime, the elk and bighorns, the surefooted sheep and scores of deer and the mighty Kodiak bear stand in silent majesty.