

➤ **Article 7: Conservation Land**

Betsy Hall, Chair of the Open Space Committee, presented Article 7 which asks Town Meeting to approve transferring the care and custody of 10 tax title lots from the Town Treasurer to the Conservation Commission for conservation purposes. The mission of the Open Space Committee is to acquire open space land. Conveyance of these properties will preserve 116 acres of undeveloped open space, portions lying within the aquifer district, that abut open space lands owned by the Wildlands Trust, the Plymouth Conservation Commission, as well as other town owned land. Transfer of these parcels will aid in protecting the Zone II of the Ponds of Plymouth Well Site and create an area for passive recreational use while securing rare and endangered species habitat through the enhancement of a wildlife corridor along Bourne Road. This will also limit the number of additional septic systems in the area. Based on current Assessors data, there are approximately 3,800 either built or planned single family homes within the surrounding area including the AD Makepeace Redbrook Development. The only expense for this transfer will involve some legal fees to change the deeds. Economic Development requires Smart Growth which includes protecting open space. Land in conservation increases our ability to attract visitors through eco-tourism. It preserves the character and beauty of our town while helping to attract new business. It safeguards our aquifer and limits traffic congestion. It protects the many plants, birds, and animals which delight both residents and tourists. Both the Conservation Commission and Open Space Committee voted unanimously in favor of this article. They recommend conserving these 116 acres for our benefit as well as the benefit of future generations.

Questions:

- Every Town Meeting, we put more and more land in open space. Is there a master plan? How does this fit into that plan? (H Salerno) Plymouth does have a Master Plan and there is a 2009 Open Space Plan, both are available online. The plan addresses what this article involves: wildlife corridors, trails and protecting the aquifer. Transferring these parcels to conservation fits within the goals of the plan.
- Does the plan include specifics as far as number of acres or target areas? (H Salerno) Patrick Farah, Planning Technician, answered that the Open Space and Recreation Plan outlines criteria for many categories like flood control and passive recreation but does not have specifics such as the number of acres. The Open Space Committee was created by the Board of Selectmen and Open Space with the charge of identifying properties for the town to place in conservation.
- We are asked a lot of questions at caucuses about parcels being taken out of the tax rolls. There should be specific justification about how the lots relate back to the Master Plan. It would help everyone understand the process. (H Salerno) We are looking at rewriting the Open Space Plan now and will take your recommendation to heart in that process. Less than 7% of land in Plymouth is protected and owned by Plymouth.
- How do we know how we are doing with regards to the plan? When will we know we have achieved the goals of the plan? (K Canty) It is an ongoing process and there is no end in sight.
- Is there any interest in developing this land? (K Canty) Each department looks at each parcel in tax title to see if they are interested in the parcel for any purpose, and each signs off. These lots are land locked with no roads nearby. It would cost millions to develop any infrastructure to even create development potential.
- In the future, how can the lots be un-conserved? (K Canty) It would have to go through Chapter 97 legislation.
- These properties are in a Natural Habitat Priority Area so it is very difficult to receive permission to develop anyway, correct? (P O'Brien) Correct.
- Compliments to your committee on Map A which clearly identifies the Zone II Aquifer location and

direction of flow. (J Moody) Thank you, our volunteers and staff have spent hundreds of hours on this project.

- The 7% (land protected and owned by Plymouth) you mentioned leaves out all of the land owned and protected by the State, Federal Government, and private organizations, correct? (J Moody) Yes, 38.5% of land is protected in Plymouth, but only 7% is owned and controlled by Plymouth. We have no control over land that the state, federal government and private organizations own, there is a risk that the land they own may not always stay protected conservation land.

Patrick O'Brien made a motion to recommend Article 7 to Town Meeting. Scott Stephenson, second.

Discussion/Comments:

- If we don't actively preserve it, it will be de facto preserved. It'll be easier down the road to change its function if it's not put into conservation protection. I do not support this article. (K Canty)
- I am in favor of this article, it's land worth protecting and ties back to the master plan (H Salerno)

The motion carries (8-1-0). Kevin Canty, opposed.