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Conservationists Question Pond Property Housing Plan

by Alan Pollock

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Several hundred feet down the driveway to the Sea Camps Pond Property are signs showing the limit of the proposed housing area to give visitors a sense of how much of the land would be preserved and how much would be developed. ALAN POLLOCK PHOTO

BREWSTER – The Brewster Ponds Coalition and the Brewster Conservation Trust are calling on town officials to review all other potential locations for creating housing before moving ahead with plans to build units on the Sea Camps Pond Property.

The trustees of the two groups issued a joint resolution, which was delivered to town hall last week. They outlined their concerns to the Sea Camps Advisory Committee Monday, and will bring the resolution to the select board shortly.

Conservation Trust President Charlie Sumner said the resolution was made “out of a concern for potential negative impacts on the community’s water resources.”

In May, voters strongly supported the development plans for both former Sea

Camps parcels, including the plan to reserve 85 percent of the 55-acre Pond Property as open space, using the remaining 15 percent, about 10 acres, to build up to 44 units of affordable and attainable housing. At the time, some raised concerns about developing any of the land, which is in a recharge area for public water supplies and which feeds groundwater to Long Pond and the Herring River watershed. As part of the town’s integrated water resources management plan, any houses built on the Pond Property would be connected to a neighborhood septic system designed to minimize or eliminate the flow of nutrients into the groundwater.

The resolution notes that “the Brewster Conservation Trust and the Brewster Ponds Coalition recognize the need for affordable and attainable housing in Brewster and support action to develop such housing,” but they “believe such housing should be located at the most advantageous locations” considering all relevant factors. Those factors include the number of units that can be built and time it takes to do so,

the accessibility of the property, its environmental sensitivity, “and realistic costs to achieve substantial environmental benefits if housing is to be built on undeveloped land in environmentally sensitive areas.”

According to the town’s water resources plan, it would cost about \$953,000 to build a cluster septic system serving the new housing development and up to 18 nearby homes, providing enough nitrogen reduction to meet wastewater targets for the area.

“While doing so would satisfy the requirements of the Herring River watershed permit, this plan alone will not reduce the amount of nitrogen currently flowing into Long Pond, or address phosphorus, the primary nutrient impairing ponds, or address chemicals of emerging concern, which might threaten our drinking water,” said Susan Bridges, president of the Brewster Ponds Coalition.

The resolution notes that, given the environmental sensitivity of the Pond Property, the town has committed to protecting the groundwater there in a way that results in a “substantial net positive environmental impact on the water quality in Long Pond, Herring River and Pleasant Bay watersheds.” The groups called for the town to carry out a feasibility study for housing locations — including but not limited to the Pond Property — before making a final decision on the Pond Property housing development.

“We believe such a study is needed to ensure the current plans will not pose a long-term and difficult-to-resolve threat to our water resources,” Sumner said.

Bridges said the groups are serious about wanting to work with the town “to help develop plans that both provide housing and protect our water resources.”

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