



January 14, 2015

Finance Committee
Town of Brewster
2198 Main Street
Brewster, MA 02631

Dear Brewster Finance Committee members,

The Brewster Ponds Coalition has become aware of your interest in issues related to further preservation of undeveloped land in Brewster. The Coalition urges that you view land preservation favorably and advocate for preservation of further open space. We believe that preserved land provides a valuable service to the Town, adds greatly to the desirable nature of Brewster and actually saves tax dollars compared to many forms of development.

The primary concern of the Brewster Ponds Coalition is the protection of our water resources, particularly our fresh water ponds. Our ponds are an invaluable resource – a source of recreation (swimming, fishing, boating), a source of beauty, and through their connection with groundwater, a source of drinking water. The ponds help make Brewster an extraordinary place to live and visit; they are one of the major attractions of Brewster. They even have great economic value as evidenced by the far higher property values for property on or near a pond.

As you probably know, all Brewster ponds are kettle hole ponds intimately connected to groundwater; basically, wherever the land elevation dips below the groundwater table, we have a pond. Recharge of the pond water comes from rainfall, groundwater movement, and storm runoff. To protect our pond water quality, protection of groundwater and prevention of contaminated storm runoff are essential. Development of currently undeveloped land can jeopardize the quality of water in our ponds in several ways:

- Septic systems release nutrients to groundwater, notably phosphorus and nitrogen. If the nutrient-enhanced groundwater reaches ponds, then the nutrient levels in pond water go up. This creates a risk of algae blooms and increased invasive or undesirable water plants – a situation that already exists at a number of ponds. Of course, the septic systems for any new development must meet the strict standards of Title V for design, size of lots and location on lots, which minimizes nutrient releases. However, even with advanced design and layout, over time septic systems will result in increased nutrient levels in groundwater, and eventually nearby, down-gradient ponds.
- Development necessarily results in increased storm runoff due to the construction of roads, driveways, roofs, and other impervious surfaces. This runoff can pick up contaminants which impact the quality of ponds if discharged to them. These contaminants can be nutrients from fertilizers, suspended particles from roads or roofs which add to the turbidity (lack of clarity) in ponds, or undesirable organic materials such as pet wastes and oil. While good design can reduce the impact from increased storm runoff, there is still an impact.
- Development of pond-front properties can lead further disturbance of natural and desirable pond ecological features – native (and sometimes endangered) plants and animals. In fact, there are indications that the turtles, frogs, rare dragonflies and other

- species that indicate good health of ponds – and rely on undeveloped shorelines – are already in decline in some Brewster ponds.
- Development can lead to introduction or further increase of undesirable species. An example is Canada geese, which are attracted to short grass lawn areas and whose wastes are a significant source of nutrients and organic loading to pond waters.

In addition to our desire to protect our ponds, the Brewster Pond Coalition, whose members are largely homeowners in town, is also concerned about other impacts of development of current open space. Of particular concern is the possibility that increased development will cause the town to reach a “tipping point” beyond which construction of a sewerage system will become necessary for much of the town. The “tipping point” happens when the collective loading of wastewater (through septic systems) to the groundwater exceeds the sustainable capacity of the groundwater (and ponds) to accept the nutrients and bacteria, such that drinking water (all supplied from public or private wells in Brewster) is impaired and the elevated nutrient levels in ponds and bay waters cause algae blooms and other impacts. This has happened in neighboring towns like Harwich and Orleans. As you know, such systems can cost over \$100 million, born by the taxpayers. The cost of passing the “tipping point” far exceeds any tax revenues that may be gained from development or the cost of increasing resources to responsibly preserve undeveloped land.

Development presents other costs beyond the potential cost of sewers. Examples are increased local education costs if the development entails homes for families, increased road maintenance costs, and increased needs for services (police, senior services, etc.) if the development leads to substantial increased population or commercial activity (including summertime temporary population increases.) The Brewster Pond Coalition is aware of studies, as we are sure you are as well, that show the cost of community services is greater than the property tax revenue raised for many types of development, particularly residential development that increases year-round population and high intensity commercial development (such as a large strip mall). In contrast, the cost of services for undeveloped land is far lower than the property taxes raised from such land (if taxable) – lower than for seasonal residences or low intensity commercial development.

Finally, undeveloped land and open space is essential to the character of Brewster. The rural or semi-rural nature of much of the town is as much an attraction for residents and visitors as our bayshore, ponds and attractive historic areas. The feeling that Brewster is still uncrowded (as compared to nearby towns or much of suburban Boston) is an essential and highly valued attribute. This is a feeling that must be kept.

For all of these reasons, the Brewster Ponds Coalition urges you to support the continued preservation of open space and undeveloped land in Brewster.

Thank you,

Karen Malkus-Benjamin, President

For the Board of Directors: John Keith, Rick Kuzman, Tony Ortiz, Gwen Pelletier, Konrad Schultz, Tom Vautin, and Dawn Walnut

Brewster Ponds Coalition PO Box 459, Brewster, MA 02631 www.BrewsterPonds.org
The Brewster Ponds Coalition is dedicated to preserving and nurturing the natural beauty, healthy habitats, and recreational opportunities of Brewster's Ponds, and to safeguard them for current and future generations.