

# Letter to the Editor: Selectmen oppose Boston Road article

\*\*\*\*\* Corrected Copy \*\*\*\*\*

Dear Residents,

A Special Town Meeting has been called by the Board of Selectmen on Thursday, June 18, 2009 at 7:30 p.m. at the Abbot School Gymnasium, in response to a citizen's petition. Petitioners are asking Town Meeting to designate 17.42 acres of Town owned land on the westerly side of Boston Road from the Route 495 Southbound on-ramp to Blakes Hill Road as conservation land. The petition is in response to a proposal by the Town to construct 20 single-family homes on approximately 4.5 acres of the parcel, all 100% affordable.

A 1987 Annual Town Meeting vote approved the purchase and authorized the Board of Selectmen, acting in the best interest of the Town, to sell or convey a portion of the land to defray the cost of purchase and to place the remainder of the parcel under the care and custody of the Conservation Commission for recreational purposes. The parcel was to remain under the care and custody of the Board of Selectmen until the conditions for the 1987 vote could be satisfied. The actual purchase of the parcel was finalized in 1995 for a total cost of \$125,000.

Over the next 10 years, Town Meeting consistently voted four times against proposals, which changed the use of the land, conveyed the entire parcel for development or placed the entire parcel under a Conservation Restriction. Municipal use was not approved as the parcel was considered for a transfer station, site of the Highway garage, Senior Center and Fire Station. In 2000, Town Meeting did vote to direct the Board of Selectmen to preserve the natural treed appearance as seen from Boston Road for any future proposals.

In 2006, Town Meeting overwhelmingly approved a resolution to direct the Board of Selectmen and other Town Boards to make sustained progress against the Town's affordable housing goals by using Town-owned land. The Affordable Housing Action Plan calls for construction of affordable housing distributed throughout town and creation of single-family homes. Developable land under the care and custody of the selectmen includes the Boston Road parcel. The Affordable Housing Committee and Board of Selectmen undertook extensive studies to determine if the Boston Road parcel was appropriate for affordable housing, given the conditions Town Meeting had voted.

The selectmen are satisfied the current proposal meets Town Meeting's past votes. The proposal is for the construction of 20 affordable, single-family homes on 4.5 acres out of 17.4 acres or 25%, a portion, of the parcel. A purchase offer per unit constructed, as well as excess profit refunded to the Town would defray the original purchase cost of the parcel proportionately. The site plan calls for the maintenance of a natural treed buffer between Boston Road, Blakes Hill Road and the development. Although the development will be permitted under Chapter 40B law, the proposed site plan adheres to Westford's wetlands setback regulations. Municipal construction is not part of the proposal and use will not change from the original 1987 Town Meeting vote. The selectmen also voted to ask residents to transfer care & custody of the remainder of the parcel to the Conservation Commission at a future Town meeting.

The petitioners are asking Town Meeting to place a conservation restriction on the Boston Road parcel in its entirety. This is a change in use from the conditions set forth authorizing the parcel's purchase in 1987. A similar article to deem 100% of the land as conservation failed at the 2001 Annual Town Meeting. A conservation restriction on the Boston Road parcel will severely restrict the selectmen's ability to meet the 2006 Special Town Meeting resolution to make progress against the Town's affordable housing goals.

The Board of Selectmen urge residents to attend the June 18, 2009 Special Town Meeting and vote. The selectmen do not recommend support of the article.

**Westford Board of Selectmen**