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PLYMOUTH PLANNING BOARD: Little Herring Pond development hearing continued

PLYMOUTH – If S.P. Realty Investment gets the go-ahead to build 10 homes on a 15-acre strip of land between Little Herring and Triangle ponds, the Herring Ponds Watershed Association says the environment of this sensitive area will suffer terribly.

Herring Ponds Watershed Association Vice President Lee Pulis and other members and neighbors attended the Planning Board's hearing on the matter Monday night to voice their opposition to a plan that appears to have taken them by surprise.

Why? Because, maps and plans of the area dating back decades show this parcel as open space. The problem is, in those days, Plymouth had not adopted mechanisms to safeguard open space intentions, such as these against change. In short, the owner never entered into a formal covenant with the town that legally set aside the parcel as open space, and now a developer wants to build on it.

Town officials have flirted with the notion of seeing if the town could possibly buy the land. Director of Planning and Development Lee Hartmann said the town would like to see the land protected, and he has urged the developer to start a dialogue with the Watershed Association and Department of Marine and Environmental Affairs Director David Gould regarding a possible acquisition.

But as of last week, there was only one plan for the property, and that was to develop it.

Pulis spoke at length about how environmentally sensitive this area is, noting that the site is designated by the state as an ACEC, or Area of Critical Environmental Concern, one of only 28 such sites in Massachusetts. The area abounds with endangered and protected species, he added, as well as plant life that plays a critical role in the ecosystem. The land is located at the headwaters of the herring fishery where these fish spawn, he added, and the proposed development with its septic systems and wells would negatively impact the abutting ponds, causing toxicity.

"We all understood this to be open space," Dennis White of Little Herring Pond Road said. "What was the pressure that was brought to bear for this to be buildable?"

Local attorney Bob Betters, representing S.P. Realty Investment, noted that his client could simply propose a traditional subdivision on the parcel, which would not require a special permit. His client opted for a Village Open Space Development, or VOSD, in order to save more open space by clustering the homes closer together.

Betters said he needs to carefully review the town's engineering report and other data and asked for a continuance.

The board voted to continue the hearing to 7:15 p.m. Nov. 17.

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