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LETTER: 'Why undermine the town's investment?'

The town has an environmental and recreational treasure in the Herring Ponds Watershed and has devoted great effort and funds to keeping it viable. Through the Department of Marine and Environmental Affairs, under the direction of David Gould, the town has been a constant helpmate to the young Herring Ponds Watershed Association (HPWA) in its efforts to maintain the health of the watershed – its ponds, its natural life and its aquifer.

Kim Tower, the town of Plymouth's environmental technician, has trained our volunteers in the techniques of pond water sampling, which is done four times a year. The office also obtained a three-year grant from the Massachusetts Environmental Trust, which paid much of the cost of laboratory analysis of the water samples.

When HPWA's storm water sampling showed a large influx of sediment, e. coli and other pollutants spilling into Great Herring Pond from a steep incline on the west side of the pond, the town applied for and received a large grant from Coastal Zone Management to mitigate the problem. This grant, together with the town's contribution of considerable and impressive work from the Public Works Department, did indeed mitigate the problem. Between the grant and the extensive work by the town, the cost of the project was close to a quarter million dollars.

Thus, the town and HPWA volunteers became partners in preserving this irreplaceable watershed environment – one of only 28 state designated Areas of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC).

But, now, the time, hard work and investment of the town and the HPWA may be undermined if the town Planning Board approves a proposed 10-home development between Little Herring and Triangle ponds. This development would sit atop a narrow, steep-sided isthmus of sand – on 15 acres, with homes clustered in far greater than zoned density. Such a development, with its septic systems, wells and paving (and so close to the wetlands of both ponds) is more than likely to pollute the ponds. Little Herring Pond's springs produce 80 percent of the water flowing into the two-mile Great Herring Pond and on to the Herring River and fish ladder at the Canal. The two Herring Ponds are among the most important spawning grounds for herring in the state.

Sadly, the proposed housing development, with its great potential for pollution threatens to undermine the town's investment in this vital environmental area. – Marleen von Goeler, HPWA Board member, Plymouth

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