

YOUR VIEW

Making it right: the land between Triangle and Little Herring ponds

By Lee Pulis

HPWA vice president and Education Committee chairman

At the conclusion of the Sept. 29 Plymouth Planning Board public hearing on a 10-home Village Open Space Development proposal, Board Chairman Paul McAlduff repeated again what he had earlier stated in a radio interview, "We can only work with the rules we're given; it's up to the parties (proponent and opponent) to come to agreement."

As pointed out at the hearing, Mr. McAlduff is overlooking a rule in Plymouth Zoning Bylaws, which provides sound basis for outright rejection of the proposed development.

Bylaw 205-9B (1)(a) provides special permit rules (in this case VOSD) that require the permitting body to evaluate the proposal's impact on a number of environmental features including "... impact upon the landscape and natural ecological processes..." The Planning Board has broad

environmental decision-making power "to advise against a special permit if the proposed use is not appropriate to the zone and specific site in accordance with a comprehensive plan."

Excerpts from the town's current strategic action plan and the 2009 open space and recreation plan, both co-authored by the town Planning Department, were cited at the hearing as clear evidence of the inappropriateness of residential development on the proposed parcel. Clearing land and building a road and 10 homes with onsite septic systems does not fit the town's rules for an environmentally sensitive site previously considered open space and remote from a village center.

Here are several excerpts from Plymouth comprehensive plans relevant to the inappropriateness of the proposal:

Growing Smarter in Plymouth's Fifth Century - Plymouth's Strategic Action Plan 2004/2024:

"...outside the Village Centers ... further

development should be limited as much as possible to the carrying capacity of the land without substantial infrastructure." p. 14

"... growth pressures threaten the sustainability of natural systems town-wide, while sprawl development in some areas has already compromised the quality of the water and wildlife habitats." p. 18

"... the average cost to service single family homes in the rural areas of Plymouth, where most residential growth is occurring, is more than double the cost of servicing the higher-density houses in older village centers." p. 24

Plymouth 2009 Open Space and Recreation Plan:

"...intensive development can result in the nitrification of groundwater, a serious public health concern." p. 42

"...the use of individual septic systems can also endanger the water quality of the Plymouth aquifer and town surface waters."

The following problems

associated with individual sewage disposal systems in Plymouth have been identified.

1. Percolation capabilities of even well drained soils are exhausted within a period of 10 to 15 years, at which time relocation of the system and its leaching field or hook-ups to the public system is often needed.

2. There is no practical way of monitoring the capabilities of existing septic systems. A domestic disposal system may be draining directly into a ground or surface water source without the owner's being aware of this condition.

3. The use of individual disposal system near Plymouth's ponds can lead to their premature eutrophication (filling in with weeds, algae and eventually sediment). Highly permeable soils do not always allow for the removal of nutrients, such as nitrate. The result is a substantial increase of algae, fertilization, and eutrophication of water bodies. Importantly, this is occurring at many of

Plymouth's best recreation water bodies... p. 82 (Note: the average person flushes five times per day.)

BioMap2 - Plymouth 2012 also speaks to the issue at hand.

"Conservation of wetland buffers alone does not fully support the habitats and functionality of each wetland, if it does not include the adjacent uplands that are important for many species that move between habitat types."

A preponderance of additional evidence was presented at the hearing attesting to the extraordinary environmental sensitivity of the specific site, located within a state-designated Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). State maps show the site as Priority Habitat, Core Habitat, Estimated Habitat and Critical Natural Landscape. Site uplands and shoreline wetlands border and drain to one of the commonwealth's most productive river herring populations (because of its size and accessibility, this population is the primary

source of mature adult alewives for the Division of Marine Fisheries' stocking program).

For those who missed the hearing and presentation of the all-volunteer Herring Ponds Watershed Association (citizen stewards of the ACEC), the PowerPoint slides can be viewed or downloaded at www.theherringpondswatershed.org.

This site reverted (by reason and process not fully explained) from developer-designated open space on master plans presented at Planning Board public hearings in the late 1980s to buildable by a 2005 Planning Board executive session decision. The Planning Board now has a chance to make things right by acknowledging its own environmental review responsibilities and outright rejecting the VOSD special permit sought.

Quite simply, this narrow isthmus of land separating two great ponds is a perfect example of why Bylaw 205-9B (1)(a) was written.

LETTERS TO THE EDITOR

In support of Matt Terry

I urge you to vote for women's health champion Matt Terry on Nov. 4

over five years, now is the time to develop a marketable service to move the

voters are unenrolled and are not overly concerned about party labels. Most

every election since he has been in office. I ask you to join me in sending the best

friend I can count on. Matt has been our selectman since 2010. During that