

12.7.17  
Re: OS-12

December 7, 2017

To: Town of Harwich Community Preservation Commission

From: Dave Callaghan, 131 Clearwater Drive

In the interest of full disclosure, let me first note that I am a member of the Town's Real Estate and Open Space Committee which has had its judgement questioned regarding support for the Judah Eldredge CPC submission. The comments I am about to make are my own and are not meant to represent the opinions of other committee members.

My family spent summer vacations in Harwich since before I was born, acquiring our first house near the Country Inn in 1968. During my working years I was always dismayed as I saw more and more property gobbled up into housing and commercial development, severely changing the Cape I enjoyed so much. Since retiring five years ago, I finally have the time to help protect this town against over development.

While not formally trained in deed research, I do a fair bit of it for the committee and the Harwich Conservation Trust. I've spent more than a few hours investigating this and other properties in Town so that it may be preserved forever.

Like many others, I wish we could put all undeveloped property into conservation. Sadly this will never be the case as there is limited funding for conservation land. Therefore the decision on which properties to acquire needs to be done carefully. In my second year on REOS we had multiple meetings where we discussed whether we should continue to be reactive, make recommendations on what comes available or should we be proactive going after specific properties that fit well with an overall vision. We decided to take the long view and focus on parcels that fit well with adjoining conservation lands and were severely threatened.

The Judah Eldredge property is on the east side of Hawksnest Road (also known as Seth Whitefield Road with approximately 1800 feet of frontage. North of it is 300' of a parcel the Town owns as Conservation, although I've been told that an abutter disputes that ownership. On the west side of the road from south to north is 100' of a house facing Haromar Heath Rd, 1100 feet of HCT owned conservation parcel, two house lots (300 feet), and the remaining 300' is Hawksnest State Park. This road is currently dirt with little traffic but is about to become very different, separating the east side from the west with subdivision traffic. A development has begun on Raptor Rd, north of the Judah Eldredge property and the Town has issued a permit to the developer to widen Hawksnest Rd up to Round Cove Road so additional lots can be developed.

I have spoken with the person developing Raptor Rd and property to the north. He acquired that property by doing deed research in owners unknown and turned that into taxable land. Most important to this discussion is that he also told me he looked into the Judah Eldredge property but couldn't figure out a way to get it because of the way the property is split between the estate's beneficiaries. In my opinion, if he couldn't get it, there is little risk that anyone would.

Purchasing the Judah Eldredge property with CPC funds now will limit the Town's ability to move forward on two opportunities that were deemed by the Real Estate and Open Space Committee as a higher importance. One is over 50 acres, also in the Six Ponds District of Critical Planning Concern, the other 30 acres abutting multiple Town owned properties, including the Water Department and Thompson's Field. It would be a shame to lose these owners unknown parcels because a developer got them before the Town.

Clearly this is the Town's choice. I am but one voice, but I am not convinced the Judah Eldredge purchase is needed at this moment. As long as it is kept off the tax auction list, in my opinion it will remain in its current undeveloped state.