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Purpose & Membership

The Towns of Hamilton and Wenham authorized formation of this Longmeadow Way Study Committee ("Committee") during their Annual Town Meetings on April 1, 2017 (see Town Meeting minutes, below in Appendices, page 3). The Committee was to explore the feasibility of acquisition for potential present or future school, recreational, and/or other municipal use, all or part of approximately 19 acres of land on Longmeadow Way in Hamilton, adjacent to the Hamilton Wenham Regional High School. The Committee was to report its findings, recommendations, and proposed action, if any, to the 2018 Annual Town Meetings.

The members of the Committee are: Jack Wilhelm, Wenham Board of Selectmen; Bill Wilson, Hamilton Board of Selectmen; Jeanise Bertrand, School Committee; John Cusolito, Joint Recreation Board; Kerry Gertz, School Committee; John Serafini, Hamilton resident and Joe Amico, Wenham resident.

Findings and Recommendation

In August, this Committee sent detailed questionnaires to all relevant departments, boards and committees in each town to solicit expressions of interest in the land. The questionnaires sought to elicit specifics from each entity about potential land use, timetables, necessary funding amounts, and funding sources. The Joint Recreation Board and the Selectmen of both towns reviewed their needs for the property (see below, Appendices, page 4).

Only the School Committee expressed any potential interest. Over the next six months this Committee attempted to engage with the School Committee to understand the School Committee's specific, even if

theoretical, vision for using all or part of the land. Despite this Committee's best efforts, we could not get the School Committee to cooperate with us on a committee level to explore specifics about its potential interest.

At most, the School Committee only superficially considered potential use of the land at three of its meetings on October 19, 2018, November 21, 2017 and December 6, 2017, as detailed in its excerpted minutes, which are part of its summary sheet chronicling its discussion of the subject, which appears at page 5 of the Appendices. Its current position, as expressed in that summary sheet is:

"While most of the discussion [of the School Committee] has revolved around the future need for a new school, we are cognizant that the land could be used for other infrastructure needs (turf field, parking, etc.). That being said, we do not currently have a need for the property and do not have an interest in buying the land at this point in time. However, we would welcome the opportunity to maintain an option to purchase the land in the future. There is currently work underway to explore funding options for a new school (see below), which we will have more clarity on in Q3 of 2018. We also continue to evaluate our long-term capital plan which includes other initiatives (turf field, etc.)."

The same summary sheet continues, noting action at the School Committee's December 6, 2017 meeting, and directing, "the superintendent to go forward with the Statement of Interest on behalf of the district to explore option in getting new schools." That Statement of Interest would be due March 5, 2018.

Despite numerous requests from us, the School Committee has refused to meet directly with us. In essence their opinion about the land was that they had no present use for any of it, exploration of it for a possible new school was premature and a years long process, and would depend on securing state funding for most of the cost, which was both uncertain and expensive even to apply for. They instead would take their chances with Harborlight Community Partners, who proposed to build affordable housing on some of the adjacent land, in hopes that Harborlight would grant them an option to acquire some of the land for a limited period of time, under Harborlight's own option on the land, which was itself limited in time. However, there would be no enforceable agreement with Harborlight about any option for the School Committee.

Effectively the School Committee and the Longmeadow Study Committee have conducted parallel inquiries about the same subject. It is understandable that the School Committee would want to do its own evaluation for the land. However, it is baffling why that committee would ignore the very committee that the two towns have commissioned for the express purpose of determining potential use for the land. The towns, after all, are the ultimate funding source for any land acquisition and indeed for all municipal expense. The School Committee also appears, at least in part, to have been distracted by a swirling controversy about possible affordable housing at the site.

Thus, the Longmeadow Study Committee is regrettably left with an incomplete picture to present to the towns.

NOTE: Since the report above was written on February 23, 2018, the School Committee, in a March 10, 2018 email from its Chairman, has provided additional comments about its position, in substance quoted in the "Addendum to Draft Report of February 23, 2018," (see below, Appendices, page 6).

Jeanise Bertrand, School Committee

John Serafini, Hamilton resident

John Cusolito, Joint Recreation Board

Jack Wilhem, Wenham Board of Selectmen

Kerry Gertz, School Committee

Bill Wilson, Hamilton Board of Selectmen

Joe Amico, Wenham resident

Appendices

Citizens' Petition

Commonwealth of Massachusetts

Citizen Petition

Pursuant to General Laws, Chapter 39, section 10.

TOWN HAMILTON

DATE and TIME received by
 Registry of Deeds
 TOWN CLERK'S OFFICE
 HAMILTON, MA

2017 FEB 21 AM 10 24

SUBJECT OR SUBJECTS REQUESTED FOR ACTION AT THE MEETING: (To be filled in by petitioners. If space is insufficient attach an additional page of description to each petition form before signatures are gathered.)

To see if the Town will direct the Selectmen to appoint a joint committee with the Selectmen of the Town of Wenham to study the acquisition by purchase, eminent domain, or otherwise of all or a portion of parcels of land in Hamilton designated Lots A, B, C, and D as shown on a Plan of Land entitled Plan of Longmeadow Way dated October 15, 1980 and recorded in Essex Registry of Deeds at Plan Book 161, Plan 31 for school, recreational, and/or other municipal use and to report findings, recommendations, and proposed action, if any, to the 2018 Annual Town Meeting or such earlier town meeting as may be called to consider the issue, said committee to consist of a Selectman from each member Town, a member of the Hamilton Wenham Joint Recreation Board, a member of the Hamilton Wenham Regional School Committee, and one or more residents from each member town, or such other membership structure and membership as the Selectmen from both towns shall mutually agree, or take any other action thereon or relative thereto.

Hamilton's Annual Town Meeting Decision, April 1, 2017

Bill Shields made the motion that the Town request the Selectmen to appoint a joint committee with the Selectmen of the Town of Wenham to study the acquisition by purchase, eminent domain, or otherwise of all or a portion of parcels of land in Hamilton designated Lots A, B, C, and D as shown on a Plan of Land entitled Plan of Longmeadow Way dated October 15, 1980 and recorded in Essex Registry of Deeds at Plan Book 161, Plan 31 for school, recreational, and/or other municipal use and to report findings, recommendations, and proposed action, if any, to the 2018 Annual Town Meeting or such earlier town meeting as may be called to consider the issue, said committee to consist of a Selectman from each member Town, a member of the Hamilton Wenham Joint Recreation Board, a member of the Hamilton Wenham Regional School Committee, and one or more residents from each member town, or such other membership structure and membership as

the Selectmen from both towns shall mutually agree, action under this article does not call for any appropriation of funds. Vote: motion carries.

[Wenham's Annual Town Meeting Decision, April 1, 2017](#)

Amber Woolfenden, of 367 Grapevine Road, moved that the Town request the Selectmen to appoint a joint committee with the Selectmen of the Town of Hamilton to study the acquisition by purchase, eminent domain, or otherwise of all or a portion of parcels of land in Hamilton designated Lots A, B, C, and D as shown on a Plan of Land entitled Plan of Longmeadow Way dated October 15, 1980 and recorded in Essex Registry of Deeds at Plan Book 161, Plan 31 for school, recreational, and/or other municipal use and to report findings, recommendations, and proposed action, if any, to the 2018 Annual Town Meeting or such earlier town meeting as may be called to consider the issue, said committee to consist of a Selectman from each member Town, a member of the Hamilton Wenham Joint Recreation Board, a member of the Hamilton Wenham Regional School Committee, and one or more residents from each member town, or such other membership structure and membership as the Selectmen from both towns shall mutually agree; action under this article does not call for any appropriation of funds. Vote: article passed with a majority.

[Hamilton Wenham Regional School Committee Decision, October 19, 2017](#)

Decision: The Hamilton-Wenham Regional School Committee would like to carefully evaluate the potential future need of any amount of land available on the Longmeadow Property in order to determine if the land might best serve to support the future educational infrastructure needs of the School District. Jeanise Bertrand explained, as a member of Longmeadow Study Committee, that the schools were the only ones to come forward to express interest.

[Joint Recreation Board Decision, December 18, 2017](#)

Decision unanimously approved: the Recreation Committee declared that the proposed Hamilton Wenham Regional High School Athletic playing Field Renovation Project remains our top priority. The Committee does not wish to entertain other options for field development at this time.

[Hamilton Board of Selectmen Decision, October 30, 2017](#)

Decision: Allison Jenkins made a motion to take a vote about whether the Town has any need of the Longmeadow property for municipal use. Mr. Hubbard seconded the motion. The Board voted unanimously to oppose purchasing the site at Longmeadow Way for the Town's needs, aside from the School's needs (0-5). They additionally recognized that Mr. Wilson was doing a great job working with all the parties involved.

[Wenham Board of Selectmen Decision, December 5, 2017](#)

Decision unanimously approved: the Board declares that the Town of Wenham has no known or anticipated municipal uses for the Longmeadow Way property currently being evaluated by the Study Committee and defers any potential uses that would be of interest or benefit to Wenham residents to those identified by the Joint Recreation Committee and/or Hamilton-Wenham Regional School Committee. If any such recreational or school uses were to be positively identified now or in the future, the Board asserts their authority to be

actively involved in any related discussions, negotiations, and/or feasibility studies relative to the potential purchase of the Longmeadow Way parcel(s), should said transaction require appropriation or expenditure of any town funds.

School Committee's Statement of Position, of February 2, 2018

Below is a summary of the discussions that the Hamilton Wenham School Committee has had to date regarding the Longmeadow property. While most of the discussion has revolved around the future need for a new school, we are cognizant that the land could be used for other infrastructure needs (turf field, parking, etc.). That being said, we do not currently have a need for the property and do not have an interest in buying the land at this point in time. However, we would welcome the opportunity to maintain an option to purchase the land in the future. There is currently work underway to explore funding options for a new school (see below), which we will have more clarity on in Q3 of 2018. We also continue to evaluate our long-term capital plan which includes other initiatives (turf field, etc.).

While a summary is provided below, you can find the full set of minutes at the following site: <http://www.hwschools.net/page.cfm?p=1654>

Longmeadow – Summary of School Committee Discussions

- On **10/19/17** the Hamilton Wenham School Committee made the following motion: “The Hamilton Wenham Regional School Committee would like to carefully evaluate the potential future need of any amount of land available on the Longmeadow property in order to determine if the land might best serve to support the future infrastructure needs of the school district.” The motion passed.
 - o The motion was made in response to discussions with Andrew DeFranza, Executive Director at Harborlight Community Partners (“HCP”), and Bill Wilson. Mr. DeFranza indicated that they would provide an option for the school district to buy a portion of the land. The School Committee thought that a free option was better than no option given that we are not in a position today to buy the land ourselves but could be in the future.
- At our school committee meeting on **11/21/17** Dr. Harvey presented a 2016 school survey report completed by the MA School Building Authority. The school committee discussed the building condition ratings across the district. We also discussed how the ratings impact our decision to prepare a Statement of Interest (“SOI”) for a new school. It was highlighted that without support from the MSBA, it would be very unlikely for anyone to support a new building.
 - o The SOI process opens in January and closes in April, with decision usually taking about 3-6 months.
 - o We decided not to sign the draft MOU from HCP which we received on 11/20/17. If the developer wanted to provide us with the option to purchase, that would be great, but we didn’t want to be bound by the MOU as currently constructed.
- At our school committee meeting on **12/6/17** we continued our discussion about submitting an SOI. The Hamilton Wenham School Committee made the following motion: “I move that the Hamilton Wenham School Committee direct the superintendent to go forward with the Statement of Interest on behalf of the district to explore option in getting new schools.” The motion passed.

Mr. Sands indicates that a draft SOI would likely need to be completed by 3/5/18.

Addendum to Draft Report of February 23, 2018

After the draft report of the Longmeadow Way Study Committee was printed in Wenham's 2018 Annual Town Meeting Warrant Book, on March 10, 2018 the Chairman of the Hamilton Wenham School Committee provided comments to that draft report, in pertinent part quoted below:

"... (i) we have a potential interest in the land; (ii) we are working to evaluate the long term plan for our infrastructure needs; (iii) we are not in position to buy the land today or even make an offer; and (iv) it would be great to be provided an option to purchase the land in the future, whether from the seller, the current buyer, or future buyers..."

The Longmeadow Way Study Committee

March 28, 2018