

Conservation Commission's Proposal
Adding 6.6 acres of Municipal land to the 9.1 acres of
Open Space Parcel at 650 Asbury Street (Patton Homestead)
June 2019

The Hamilton Conservation Commission (HCC) proposes that the Town grant HCC control and authority over the Town owned land ("adjacent land") shown on the attached sketch plan (map) "HCC Proposal April 2019". The land is located at 650 Asbury Street in Hamilton Massachusetts and is adjacent to the Patton Homestead and HCC's 9.1 acres of Open Space. There are 3 crucial lines on the plan. The green line indicates approximately 6.6 acres of the proposed adjacent land. The blue line is the boundary of the 9.1 acres of Open Space. The red line is the wetlands buffer zone.

While HCC has regulatory jurisdiction over wetlands and the adjacent buffer zone out to 100 feet ('AURA'), as conferred by the State Wetlands Protection Act and Hamilton Conservation Bylaw, regardless of ownership, it has no authority to manage these areas for the benefit of the public. If granted such authority¹, the HCC will discuss the following ideas (and other items that may arise) at one or more of its regular meetings, giving Hamilton residents and other interested parties an opportunity for input.

1. WETLANDS, WETLANDS GARDEN: There is a small pond between the base of the Patton Ridge hill and the large mowed field extending up toward the Patton Homestead (see map). The contour of the Pond creates an 'alcove' of the field suited to establishment of a wetlands garden. An easy walk from the new parking lot would provide public access to the Garden. Non-paved pedestrian paths with signage describing the various plants will be a part of this garden area. The intent is to help educate the public about the benefits of wetlands preservation, and create a destination of interest and enjoyment, while increasing the desirability of Patton Homestead for some fee-generating uses.³

2. IMPROVED PUBLIC ACCESS TO THE 9.1 ACRES; NEW TRAIL: One purpose of the 9.1 acres of Open Space was to provide the public an area for passive recreation in this scenic part of town. As laid out in the subdivision plan of land, the 9.1 acres of Open Space is not particularly amenable to such activities. Sections of the 9.1 acres are narrow, angular, and close to the units at Patton Ridge. Adding the adjacent land creates a much wider area for passive public use with boundaries easily marked and favorable to creation of a Loop Trail, one possibility for which is shown on the map.³ HCC may seek assistance from the Essex County Trails Association (ECTA) in creating and maintaining this trail.

3. CANOE LAUNCH ACCESS: The proposal adds authority and control of the cone-shaped canoe launch area. Public use of this resource fits squarely within the idea of passive recreation, but despite its clear benefits and being touted as an attraction, it is not widely known or used. Improvements to the canoe launch, such as dredging and a picnic table, raises wetlands regulatory issues, while liability and insurance need to be considered by the Town.⁴

4. MISC. WETLANDS PERMIT ISSUES; AND GENERAL LAND MANAGEMENT: If given authority and control over the adjacent land, the HCC would add management for this area to the Plan in progress for the 9.1. In general, any activity within the AURA should be reviewed, conditioned (conditions such as repair of damaged areas) and approved by HCC beforehand, but the HCC has no intention of restricting normal events or mowing north of the culvert and Pond.⁵ The fields south of the culvert, north and south of the large beech tree (James Totten or "elephant" tree), would be allowed to revert to meadows like those on the east side of 9.1, see yellow areas on the map.

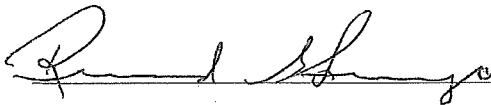
¹If this agreement remains 'informal', then no new survey and registry filing is required, but such conveyance would not confer a level of protection comparable to that for the HCC 9.1, an Open Space parcel required for developing Patton Ridge. This grant of authority and control to HCC was by Town meeting vote, preserving the 9.1 acres as Open Space while also allowing public passive recreation. *CB

² As for the contents of this Garden, native plants are preferred, but several issues must be resolved by the HCC including the definition of 'native', the relative importance of education vs attractiveness, provision for changes, and long-term maintenance.

³ Hiker friendly crossing of the swale which parallels the access road into Patton Ridge needs to be resolved. The best solution seems to be a footbridge across the swale at the level of the existing Town easement just W (upslope) of Patton Ridge's catch basin at the bottom of the swale (see map), but this would be costly. Alternatives are hiking down and up across the swale (any position) or traversing the field and crossing onto the access road near Asbury St. on the E side of the basin, but this is a long way around. As for parking, best access would be from the abandoned Well House (outside the Patton property), where there may be room for about 5 cars. Improvement to this area would require HCC review as it is within the AURA.

⁴ Use of the single lane 'wood road', which begins at the Well House, for access needs to be resolved by the Town, HCC, and the public: barring vehicles from bringing canoes/kayaks to the launch would compromise its use as it's a long way to drag a canoe, while the wood road probably shouldn't be open to all traffic. Perhaps signage to indicate allowed use would be sufficient. Access paths would be maintained by HCC, as it does now for Greenbelt's viewing platform, about half-way to the canoe launch.

⁵ Annual Military History (Service) Day would retain full use of mowed fields from Asbury Street west, and north of the culvert draining the Pond, but the tank demonstration should not cross this culvert and damage portions of the southern fields (largely part of the 9.1). Note: the deep ruts left by the tank last year are clearly visible on Google Maps, and should be repaired.



Richard Luongo, Hamilton Conservation Commission

07/31/19

Date

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* THE HCC PREFERS A FORMAL CONVEYANCE IN ORDER TO MAXIMIZE PROTECTION.