



Four Town Conservation Trusts Chip In To Acquire Sipson Island 16 December 2019

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Topics:

Conservation groups in the four Pleasant Bay watershed towns have pledged funds to help acquire Sipson Island. COURTESY PHOTO

ORLEANS – It’s a watershed moment.

Conservation groups in the four Pleasant Bay watershed towns have pledged a total of \$326,000 toward the acquisition of Sipson Island, the only island in the Bay that is still privately owned and has no public access.

“This level of commitment – recognizing the importance of the Pleasant Bay watershed regardless of municipal lines – sends a powerful message of collaboration to the entire Lower Cape community about the value of water quality and open space,” Mon Cochran, chair of the Friends of Pleasant Bay’s fundraising committee for the effort, declared in a joint press release from the Friends and the Sipson Island Trust.

The pledges from the Brewster, Harwich, and Orleans conservation trusts and the Chatham Conservation Foundation, along with private donations, total more than \$4 million, leaving \$1.4 million to be raised by the end of March.

“We are thrilled that the land trusts have stepped forward so strongly,” Sipson Island Trust President Tasia Blough stated in the press release. It’s hoped that the unprecedented participation of the four trusts “will prompt the same from private donors... SIT thrives on collaboration, and we look forward to working with these experienced groups as we plan for the island’s future as protected habitat and a ‘blue-green oasis’ for people.”

Also in the release, HCT President Tom Evans noted that “folks have been stepping up in each of the four watershed towns, including three anonymous donors who provided Harwich Conservation Trust’s contribution.”

With the advice of The Compact of Cape Cod Conservation Trusts, the Friends and SIT have been working to acquire title to 22 of the island’s 24 acres. In April, Rich and Cheryl Nadler, year-round residents of Orleans since 2010, came forward as the buyer-backer for the acquisition. They signed a purchase and sales agreement with the owner to take the island off the market during the fund-raising campaign. The couple will retain a seasonal home on the island as private property.

“We’re making good progress,” Cochran told an audience gathered on Dec. 6 at Pleasant Bay Community Boating, noting that the sales price has been reduced from \$12.5 million to \$5.4 million.

“At present, you see four dwellings with septic systems and nine lots on 24 acres,” Cochran said during his talk on “Sustaining Pleasant Bay.” “By 2023, there’ll be upland trails with three of the four dwellings gone and the septic systems sealed off. There will be public access from two docks, and beaches all around. There are plans to replace one of the houses to be torn down with a pavilion for students and teachers. We see Sipson Island as an education destination and as a research station, a location from which the Center for Coastal Studies and other researchers can operate.”

Students will need a way to get there, and the Friends will soon be turning over its Floating Classroom to PBCB. The 30-passenger vessel was born of a stray thought on a hot summer day a couple of years ago.

Cochran, an adjunct scientist at the Center for Coastal Studies, recalled running a two-week summer program at PBCB in the boathouse in 90 degree weather. “We very quickly built a 45-minute-long swimming session into the camp,” he said. When a Center colleague said, ‘Wouldn’t it be great to have some kind of platform to take kids out on the bay and do research?’ Cochran said, “fireworks went off in my head.”

The Floating Classroom, built in South Carolina, has been on the water for two summers. The 18 solar panels on the roof feed eight lithium ion batteries and two electric outboard engines. “We’ve never had to plug in,” Cochran said. “We’ve traveled around on nothing but electrons straight from the sun to us.”

Cochran said the vessel can carry 25 students and three to five adults. “It has materials designed into it to make data collection easy,” he said. “The Center for Coastal Studies will do research off the vessel into the condition of Pleasant Bay, (while) helping kids understand the bay, fall in love with marine science, go off and get an education and come back to look after our beloved cathedral, as I think of it.”

To help acquire Sipson Island, go to www.sipsonisland.org