

Done deal

Brewster takes the Sea Camps land



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Now comes the vision, the planning, and coming to terms with what public access really means.

Brewster voters put an exclamation point on their town meeting's vote in late September to purchase more than 120 acres of the former Cape Cod Sea Camps for \$26 million. A special election October 5 reinforced the meeting's judgement by huge margins; 2877 to 395 in favor of taking about 66 acres with frontage on Long Pond for \$6 million, 2846 to 414 to take 55 acres with frontage on Cape Cod Bay for \$20 million.

The town expects to take ownership by November 30.

Two articles on the ballot addressed the parcels individually, and here's the actual language that created a very broad mandate that will need to be honed and defined in the months ahead.

For the Long Pond land, the town is now authorized to do any of the following, in any kind of combination:

“... habitat protection, watershed protection, open space, conservation and passive recreation, active recreation, community housing and/or general municipal purposes, and for the purpose of granting conversation easement and/or restrictions on such portions of the property as the Select Board may determine to provide for habitat protection, open space conservation and passive recreation.”

For the parcel on the bay, the words “community center” were added after “community housing.” Clearly this was meant to allow for yet more flexibility related to the handsome “mansion” visible from Route 6A that was the structural focal point of the old Sea Camps, and could serve the community in a variety of ways.

Here’s a layman’s translate of that language and mandate:

“Trust us, trust yourself. Let’s buy it, then decide what we want to do. We don’t need to know exactly just yet. Let’s keep every option on the table because we sure as hell don’t want to preclude anything right now.”

Town leaders have promised that a public process will drive toward a master plan that addresses the laundry list created in the articles. How those line up will be a fascinating next step. Already, constituencies are beginning to form around various opportunities and values; a great public beach, wellfield protection, affordable housing, a community center, active and passive recreation, conservation.

One encouraging fact: The combined parcels are large and varied enough to be able to accommodate more than one use. And so it’s possible that the town could find a way to satisfy multiple priorities, to have a lot of cake and eat a lot too.

The community conversation soon to begin no doubt will sometimes become tedious and frustrating, but the hope is that big picture it will be as inclusive and inspiring as the process that got Brewster to this point.

This is why democratic process exists, why idealistic town administrators choose their professions, why idealistic citizens choose to run for select boards and planning boards, why public officials put up with a lot of difficult, unsatisfying moments along the way:

People coalesce, a town follows through, and we all remember how profound transformative moments can be for a community, a peninsula, our future.

<https://sethrolbein.substack.com/welcome>

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