

The Cape Cod Sea Camps acquisition proposal in Brewster is the largest, most strategic one in a series of what I call “Conservation of Regional Impact” or CRI. Just as the Cape Cod Commission reviews Developments of Regional Impact, projects whose size or community knock-on effects can alter more than one town, the significance of CRI projects redounds beyond municipal borders.

In 2015 the Towns of Dennis and Yarmouth, backed by the State and County, nonprofits and private funders arranged a \$6 million drive to preserve 40 acres of Chapin Beach and rejuvenated the most significant shellfish hatchery in SE Mass. In 2020, the nonprofit Sipson Island Trust rallied almost 500 citizens and local land trusts in the four-town Pleasant Bay watershed to preserve the 24-acre island for \$5 million. These campaigns were daunting, but succeeded because Cape Codders knew how important it was not to lose these special places.

It’s Brewster’s turn to step up. The 66-acre Sea Camps parcel between Route 137 and Long Pond is the single largest private parcel east of Bass River whose fate has yet to be determined—developed for mega-manses or preserved for all? The 800+ feet of Bay shoreline on the 55-acre main Sea Camps campus is the longest stretch still in private hands on the Lower Cape. I have worked in all Cape towns for 35 years in preserving open space; I know a CRI when I see one. Here are two in the same package!

I commend the Brewster Select Board for its vision, leadership and determination not to lose the opportunity to acquire these parcels for community purposes. It isn’t always this way. I recall the Mashpee Selectmen in 2008 trying to scuttle the purchase of the 80-acre Camp Vinhaven on Wakeby Pond (another defunct summer camp). Mashpee Town Meeting voters rose up on the floor and said “No postponement!” and voted for the \$3.1 million conservation purchase (with \$1 million in state funds).

I have never seen a project spark the imagination of so many out-of-towners as the Sea Camps deal. In addition to the largest pledge ever (\$1.75m) to the Town from the non-profit Brewster Conservation

Trust, larger land trusts and private foundations have shown interest in helping. Support is out there, waiting to be tapped.

But first Brewster voters must do their job: approving the negotiated purchase at Town Meeting on September 25th and ratified in a special election on October 5th. An hour or two out of your day to signal this historic CRI purchase will pay dividends down through time.

Every dollar Brewster has spent on open space protection in the past 40 years has saved the Town ten dollars in avoidance of the immense sewerage costs now facing all of its surrounding towns. It has made Brewster the rural heart of towns outside the National Seashore, a vestige of what Cape Cod used to be to so many of us. Keeping the Sea Camps away from developers and available to all will ensure that a part of Brewster's past can be its future.

Mark H. Robinson has served as Executive Director of The Compact of Cape Cod Conservation Trusts, Inc. since its founding in 1986.