

## Hakansson: A second chance to save Warren Woods

By Carl Hakansson/ Guest columnist

**GHS**

Posted Nov 09, 2010 @ 08:03 AM

Recommend

Be the first of your friends to recommend this.



ASHLAND — In the 1950's, Ashland had the opportunity to own the Warren farm. At that time, Ashland was a sleepy hollow of a town, rife with farms, meadows, woods, quiet streets, good schools, and an abundance of the best water in the area. Our relatives actually brought our water back to neighboring towns in glass bottles. The town rejected Mr. Warren's offer at that time for reasons that may have made sense in its day, however it was a decision lacking in vision of what Ashland's future may have in store.

Those farms and meadows are now distant memories, our streets are congested, our infrastructure is at a breaking point, we experience chronic water shortages, our recreational areas are worn from over-use, and the Warren farm was eventually bestowed upon Northeastern University. Ashland's folly was the University's good fortune. They have maintained that land in a condition that closely resembles the farm at which the Warren's resided and where Mr. Warren made history while almost single-handedly building the town around him through his creativity, entrepreneurship, and generosity.

Fifty years later, Ashland now has a rare second opportunity to own Warren Woods. Several years ago this opportunity may have been impossible. But the convergence of the downturn in the real estate market, coupled with Ashland's adoption of the Community Preservation Act, has created the unique environment where the land, while not inexpensive, is affordable, and the town in the form of CPA funds, has the option of purchasing the property without additional taxes and without draining the CPA fund of sufficient resources to sponsor future endeavors. The reasons for supporting this purchase are numerous and range from economic, historic, and recreational, to environmental, aesthetic, and quality of life.

Although the purchase price is not insignificant, to not purchase the property will cost Ashland dearly in future revenues required for services needed to support any residential development of the property. Combined with the privately owned former 4H property on the opposite side of Eliot Street, there is potential for in excess of well over 100 houses in that area. In contrast to commercial development which enhances town revenues due to the low demand on public services, residential development provides a short term bump in revenue due to developmental fees, followed by a sustained long term drain on the town's schools, police and fire protection, infrastructure, and natural resources. Witness what has transpired in Ashland over the past 30 years. Too rapid and uncontrolled residential growth has led Ashland, and many other local communities, to the dire economic and infrastructure challenges they currently experience.

The 120 acres of Warren Woods are also central to a much larger, relatively contiguous, area of 1,600 acres of publicly and privately owned conservation land extending through Holliston and Hopkinton. This land is critical for effective ground water recharge at a time when adequate potable water is a chronic concern. Warren Wood's central nature to these other properties also provides a relatively intact ecosystem for wildlife, as well as a vital area for numerous other recreational activities.

Although well known as entrepreneurs and philanthropists, the Warrens were also farmers and lovers of nature. A natural community center which encompasses the interests of athletics, outdoor activities, community gardening and other recreational activities on this bucolic setting so steeped in Ashland history is a great opportunity for the town. The Warren Woods is Ashland's last jewel, let us be remembered as the generation that saved a portion of what makes this town special for future generations. The residents of Ashland have a chance to preserve a piece of their past while charting a new direction for their future by supporting the purchase of Warren Woods at Town Meeting on Monday, Nov. 29.

*Carl Hakansson lives in Ashland.*