



Ashland will try to buy Warren Woods

**By Kendall Hatch/Daily News staff
MetroWest Daily News**

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ASHLAND — Selectmen last night voted to negotiate with Northeastern University to buy the sprawling Warren Woods and explained the process for acquiring the land.

Selectman Adam Shuster said Town Manager John Petrin and Town Counsel Lisa Mead will represent the board in the negotiations with Northeastern which has owned the 140-acre parcel for about 50 years.

If Petrin and Mead reach an agreement with Northeastern, Shuster explained the board will take a two-pronged approach to the final purchase.

First, the board will provide information about the agreement to the Community Preservation Committee and an article will be put on the May 5 Town Meeting warrant for voters to approve or reject funding.

Next, the board will sponsor a non-binding question on the ballot for the May 18 town election for approval of the purchase.

On May 19, the selectmen, who have the final say in property acquisitions, will meet and discuss the outcome of the referendum and decide if the town will go ahead with the purchase.

All that is assuming, however, that Petrin and Mead are able to reach an agreement with the university, which put the land on the market last spring.

Board members said they chose the process outlined last night to ensure the final decision was made by voters and not the five-member board.

"We all agree that this is an important issue for the town," said Shuster. "We all agree that this is an expensive issue, starting in the millions of dollars. This decision needs to be made by the entire town."

"This is much too big of a decision for this board to make alone," said selectmen Vice Chairman Arthur Shapiro.

After a heated and somewhat polarizing discussion about Warren Woods at a selectmen's meeting two weeks ago, Shapiro urged residents and elected officials to collaborative.

"We need to exchange ideas and thoughts," he said, invoking the words of Benjamin Franklin. "If we don't hang together, we will certainly hang separately."

Since the ultimate decision will be made by the board, Shuster, who is not running for re-election in May, encouraged residents to question selectmen on whether they would abide by the results of the non-binding referendum.

"I advise you to ask them what they think," he said, adding that voters should ask the same question of selectmen candidates.

The board entered into executive session following the meeting to discuss negotiations with Northeastern.

(Kendall Hatch can be reached at 508-626-4429 or khatch@cnc.com)

Comments (10)

clockertalker

1 day ago

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I highly suggest that the 'Friends of Warren Woods' be represented on this negotiation team. Any team that includes Petrin on it is tainted and a watchdog is needed. He seems to be cowardly influenced by the Board of Selectman.

I would also suggest term limits for these BOS positions. Mark Twain once said 'Familiarity breeds contempt' The hired hands seem to be able to manipulate our BOS into situations that make things easier for them, rather than be honest route that may take the longer. This Warren Woods situation is the perfect example. Petrin and the Chairman immediately dismissed any negotiations with Northeastern to potentially have this land purchased by a developer and have more houses built to gain a quick fix tax base. In any event I hope the Friends gets a Rep on this team to watch their every move.

sandho

1 day ago

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Northeastern has enjoyed ownership of this property with the benefit of not having to pay property taxes to the town. Now because they are in a position of needing to make some 'easy' money are they willing to sell us out to the highest bidder? I certainly hope not. They enjoy tax benefits that citizens do not, in part because our society values and respects education and educational institutions. I hope that their position in these negotiations are worthy of that respect. There isn't much open space left in Ashland, we need to protect Warren Woods and I believe that Northeastern should help do that.

SLGR

1 day ago

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Sandho, you are spot on. I would think that the Warren family did not bequeath this land to NU with the intention of it eventually being auctioned off to the highest bidder. Shame on Northeastern University.

AshlandObserver

1 day ago

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clocktalker is right on. The committee is too small. My concern however is not that Petrin is cowardly, he is dominant. Behind closed doors he yields even more power and control than he does in the open. So if he would prefer to see controlled residential growth on the property, either they will reach no deal or one that will be unacceptable to the majority, hence the brave board of selectmen punting to the voters and deciding the day after the election. laughable.

f

1 day ago

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Why to go AshlandObserver. I can't wait until the next election Ashland needs new faces on the board.

DKHogs

1 day ago

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The kids need new athletic fields. Throw that out the window.

practical

1 day ago

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[Redacted comment box]

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When will the press get basic facts into articles so people know what they are being asked to consider? Not all the property held for '50 years' is for sale, certainly not the part by the reservoir. Some of the property for sale is in another town. Is that up for sale to Ashland? I can't tell from the report. Good idea, wrong time.

yepypypItoldya

1 day ago

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sandho - There isn't much open space left??? What do you call the 500 acres on Oregon Rd (town Forest), or the state parks - there are two in your town, what do you call the Oak St. property? The town has a ton of open space.

What the town doesn't have enough of is recreational fields -Soccer, football ,baseball, etc.

ClOCKertalker - in one sentence you say the Town Manager controls the BoS and in the next sentence you say the BoS controls the TM. Which is it?

By the way, the town doesn't create a 'negotiating committee'. This is what the Board of Selectmen was elected to do. They have two professionals doing the negotiations for them. They are to be level headed and have a fiduciary responsibility to the town. That means they needs to represent the town's best interests. having a Warren Woods supporter on the committee does not represent the town's best interest it only represents the group's interest.

ashlanddad

14 hours ago

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[Redacted comment box]

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Sandho is right about one thing, that Northeastern has gotten huge tax breaks for what is mostly a commercial enterprise in the Warren Conference Center and they should be given the town a break, but I highly doubt they will.

I think the sale of the land speaks for itself. If they were interested in preserving the Warren legacy and open space, the land would not be for sale.

yepypypItoldya

3 hours ago

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Preserve the Warren Legacy????

Warren Conference Center, Warren School, Warren Rd. How many kids that were born wit the first name Warren? The High School's nickname is the product he developed.

I think his legacy is not preserved, it's petrified.

Also, I understand the Northeastern gave cash to the town and scholarships to kids that lived in Ashland.

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