

Ashland group has funding for Warren Woods appraisal

By Kendall Hatch/Daily News staff

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ASHLAND — Members of a local organization dedicated to preserving the Warren Woods announced at last night's selectmen's meeting that they had secured funding for an independent appraisal of the 170-acre parcel.

Ashland resident and land lawyer Carl Hakansson, speaking on behalf of the Save the Warren Woods Committee, said the group had secured total funding for the appraisal from the Massachusetts Audubon Society.

Hakansson said an appraisal is an important first step in preserving the land. With a solid number attached to the land, he said he hoped the town could someday move on securing the property.

About 120 acres of the parcel lay in Ashland, with the other 50 in Holliston. Hakansson said he expected the Holliston portion would also be included in the appraisal.

About 75 people packed the selectmen's meeting room to implore the board to help the loosely-organized Warren Woods committee ensure the future of the land doesn't include 80 to 100 single-family homes.

The land was placed on the market in April by Northeastern University, which received it as a donation from Edith Warren, wife of Henry Warren, the inventor of the electric clock and a nature-loving Ashland resident.

When Edith Warren donated the land, she stipulated that the university could dispose of it any way they wished after 1987.

"My request to the Board of Selectmen is that we seriously consider what this piece of property means to the town of Ashland," said resident Jim Duane. "It lends to the quality of life for the people in town."

Duane is the operations manager for Framingham's Parks and Recreation Department, and cited Cushing Park as an excellent example of capital planning and a boon to the quality of life there.

"Some good capital planning, which (Ashland) has done in the past, could be pertinent here," he said.

Hakansson said the parcel represents one of the town's lasting treasures beside the state forest and Stone Park.

"We are trying to protect one of the few jewels of Ashland," he said. "They are uniquely ours and ... they display the town's history."

The selectmen said they admired the dedication of the organization, which has been spurred into action primarily in the last few months, noting that they too, were concerned about the future of the land.

"I think this is an important issue and it would be irresponsible of this board not to pursue the possibilities to see if this can happen," said Selectman Jon Fetherston. "We are volunteers here that want to do the right thing for the town."

The board also reminded residents, however, that although preservation of the parcel is important, there are many imperative measures waiting to be acted on by the town - and they all cost money.

"If you went out and asked 500 people in town whether we should keep the land the way it is, 498 would say, 'Yes, absolutely,'" said Selectman Adam Shuster. "But there are other things to consider."

Shuster cited a new, consolidated public safety building as an immediate priority and one that will inevitably cost millions of dollars.

In other business:

- The board approved an entertainment license for the Trackside Grill, allowing it to host non-amplified music acts during the week and plugged-in bands Fridays, Saturdays and on evenings before a national holiday.
- The selectmen formed the seven-person Athletic Field Master Plan Committee, which will look at problems with the current field structure and ways to remedy them.

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