

## Warren Woods appraisal expected in four to six weeks

**By Kendall Hatch/Daily News staff**  
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ASHLAND — The Massachusetts Audubon Society has hired a firm to carry out an independent appraisal of the Warren Woods, a 170-acre parcel that a local group hopes to protect from development.

The property, of which about 120 acres lies in Ashland with the rest over the town line in Holliston, is part of Northeastern University's Warren Conference Center property. The portion across Chestnut Street from the conference center went on the market last year.

The Save the Warren Woods Committee is urging the town to consider purchasing the property. Town officials say they are waiting on the appraisal before deciding their next step.

At the Warren Woods group's request, Mass. Audubon offered to pay for the appraisal in the town's name in the interest of getting the ball rolling.

"It can be difficult for the town to allocate funds for this type of thing," said Bob Ford, a land protection specialist at Mass. Audubon, who estimated the appraisal would cost about \$7,000.

"Instead of having that interfere with moving forward, we offered to pay for the appraisal," he said. "Timeliness is a factor to move forward."

Ford said Mass. Audubon hired Avery and Associates, an appraising firm in Acton, to assess the value of the property.

Town officials can expect to see a cash value for the property in four to six weeks.

In determining the market value of the property, Ford said Avery will be trying to determine what the property would be worth to a developer aiming to build on the site.

Selectmen said this week they were actively looking at the property and exploring ways the town might acquire it, although they wanted to see the appraisal before discussing the issue at length.

"Once we compile all the facts, the board will have a discussion," Selectmen Chairman Paul Monaco said,

But Selectman Adam Shuster said that times are tough and finding cash with which to buy the property could prove difficult.

Resident Jim Duane said at Wednesday's Board of Selectmen meeting that the town try to use Community Preservation Act funding to buy the property, which would come with a state match and can be bonded and paid off over time.

"It would behoove the town of Ashland to pursue whatever money is out there," he said.

Duane said if CPA funds were used, it wouldn't take away any funding from other initiatives that fall under the general operating budget, such as a consolidated police and fire station.

Shuster said there are multiple ways a land acquisition could be funded, and added that if it was funded through CPA it could potentially take away funding from other things, like the construction of new athletic fields.

Shuster said if the town bought the property, it could also potentially be funded through a debt exclusion override - which would temporarily raise taxes to pay off debt on the purchase - or through the town's general operating funds.

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