

Environmental Assessment

1. Description of the Proposal

The Conservation Commission of the Town of Durham proposes to purchase 44⁺ acres in the interior of Durham Point for passive recreation for its citizens and those of the State. The purchase price is \$20,000, of which the Town's share will be \$12,000 -- to be accomplished as soon as BOR funds are available.

This particular property is in a central section of an area designated in the 1969 Comprehensive Plan as a "Conservation Corridor" with recommendations to acquire and preserve. It has also been the prime concern of the Commission over several years to protect and preserve this area from encroaching developments. The Commission sees its immediate use as one of passive recreation; the preservation of open space, a natural area which is a veritable microcosm of New Hampshire, with its marsh low lands, fields, woods, bold outcrops, flowing streams, and beaver pond. Although future uses might include a center for nature study for such groups as the Boy Scouts and University students and might include trails, the immediate concern of this proposal is for preservation in its natural state.

2. Description of the Environment

The property is located on the Class VI portion of the Longmarsh Road, 2.5 miles from the center of Town off Route 108. The road is tarred to about 100 yards past the Wedgewood Development, continuing as gravel for three-fourths of a mile ending 200 yards from the property as it becomes a Class VI road, used extensively as a bridle path.

The 44 acres of the property is bisected by the roadway with 26 acres to the North and 18 to the South. The Northern section contains cellar holes of the original Langmaid Farm, with surrounding fields on the West and low overgrown meadow wetland to the East. The Southern section is mainly pine woods on granite outcrops. Crommetts Creek flows through this section roughly paralleling the road flowing West to East. The stream originates in a beaver dam on the property which floods the abutting Town-owned Colby marsh. The stream flows at the foot of a bold granite outcrop, and descends through a mini flume and under an ancient stone bridge into a marshy meadow. This year the beaver have abandoned the Colby marsh and appear to have taken up residence downstream on the easterly edge of the property.

In the past 200 years or more, all of the low marshy land was drained, fenced with walls and prized as meadow hay fields. With the neglect of the past 50 years, the alders have taken over and the beaver returned. The fields and woodlot are typical of bare subsistence farming of much of 19th Century New Hampshire. From neighborhood reports, the last farming

venture was chicken raising which was wiped out with house and several wood acres to the East in the fires of 1947 and 1948.

The soil of the property is about equally divided between Scantic A and Hollis-Charlton, with a small area of Hollis Gloucester sandy loam in the open fields. Granite outcrops are evidenced throughout and in the Southerly section they jut bare and abrupt 30 to 50 feet. There is evidence that some quarrying took place and the plentiful stone walls and large slab bridge reflect the extensive stone culture of the early settlers.

The meadows of the Easterly sector are natural aquifers and with the recent beaver activity will probably flood.

The vegetation is well handled in the Sawyer appraisal report.

The fauna is extensive and typical: Deer, fox and small forest animals. Water creatures; beaver, otter, ducks. This was an area where studies of the Fisher were conducted a few years ago. In short, it has become a wild life refuge.

To describe the property's probable future if not preserved is to see low density housing of a suburban character. Since about a third of the area lies in the R.B. Residential Zone, this is more than likely as there are good building sites.

3. Environmental Impact of Proposed Action

There appear to be no Historical landmarks that will be affected.

To preserve this area in its natural state will probably have little initial effect on land use in the area. However, it has been suggested that it would make housing near such a natural area more desirable and might push prices upward.

To remove this land from taxation will have little or no effect. But if surrounding properties are truly seen as more desirable, by this action, then taxes as well as prices might appreciate. However, with urban and suburban sprawl creeping ever closer it is imperative that open spaces be maintained. It should make Durham a more desirable place to live.

If the use of the area exceeds our expectations it could certainly adversely affect the fauna and call for more supervision than we presently anticipate. We anticipate a slight rise in use from present levels which now include walking, bird watching, cross country skiing and horseback riding; mainly along the roadway. There is limited parking space which

should discourage great numbers, but if this becomes a problem it will be dealt with as it arises. It is not our intent to create a Park but to preserve a natural area. If future acquisitions and population pressures indicate expanded or different recreational use, we should be flexible enough to cope with these as they arise. Periodic monitoring will be required.

4. Mitigating Measures Included in the Proposed Action

Restrictions on all motor vehicles, including snowmobiles now in effect will be maintained. If evidence of overuse is adversely affecting the natural environment, restriction on use will have to be imposed, published and implemented.

5. Adverse Environmental Effects Which Cannot be Avoided

The beaver damage can be extensive and while we have no intention to eliminate the beaver, some control of dam heights and population will be considered in consultation with the Fish and Game Department.

6. Relationship Between the Local Short-Term Use of Man, Environment, etc.

This does not seem to apply to this Proposal.

7. Any Irreversible or Irretreivable Commitments of Resources

This does not appear applicable to this Proposal.

8. Alternative to Proposed Action

In attempting to preserve and protect the aforementioned Conservation Corridor, the Commission has tried, for a number of years, to obtain easements. Although many of the landowners are conservation-minded, they balk at any public access, no matter how limited. We have had no success thus far.

Another alternative is establishment of a Conservation District. This is under study but not resolved.

The real alternative is "No Action." Many of the Town fathers would prefer this course as they see this as an overpriced purchase for land that many think cannot be developed and may come to us eventually for less.

The history of land prices hardly supports this view and the fact that one-third of the property is zoned "Residential" hardly precludes development. The seller insists he has an out-of-State buyer if we do not act. He bought the property for investment and has already entertained an option from Onassis in the vicinity of \$50,000, and would certainly sell to a developer.

If indeed another buyer did purchase the property and only built one house, it would destroy the natural aspect of the whole area because this location is central in the Conservation Corridor area contemplated by the Comprehensive Plan.

9. Consultation and Coordination

The residents of the Town have made it clear in Town Meeting that they wish to have land accessible for public use, and have endorsed the Conservation Corridor concept of the Comprehensive Plan. They have, on numerous occasions, voiced approval of the acquisition of Conservation properties and again this year voted funds for this purpose.

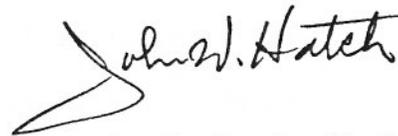
In 1976, the Planning Board requested a long-range Plan from the Commission and received our report in which acquisition of this property was a key factor. The report was approved.

Although the Public has not been aware of the specifics of the negotiation of this acquisition, the Commission published its intent in the Annual Report for the 1977 Town Meeting: Saying we were "...negotiating a purchase of a forested area abutting the Colby Marsh and extending the Town's holdings in this key conservation area of the Crommett Creek Corridor..." (Page 80, Durham 1976 Annual Report).

If there is any controversy -- it is not over the purpose of purchase except for a minority who philosophically reject public ownership.

There is, however, controversy over the price asked, which is more than twice the Town's published evaluation for the property. The arguments pro and con were handled under Item No. 8. The real concern here is centered on the precedent of the Town yielding to inflationary land price pressures.

The majority of the Town voters support such acquisitions -- it is a need felt and voiced by the people of Durham.

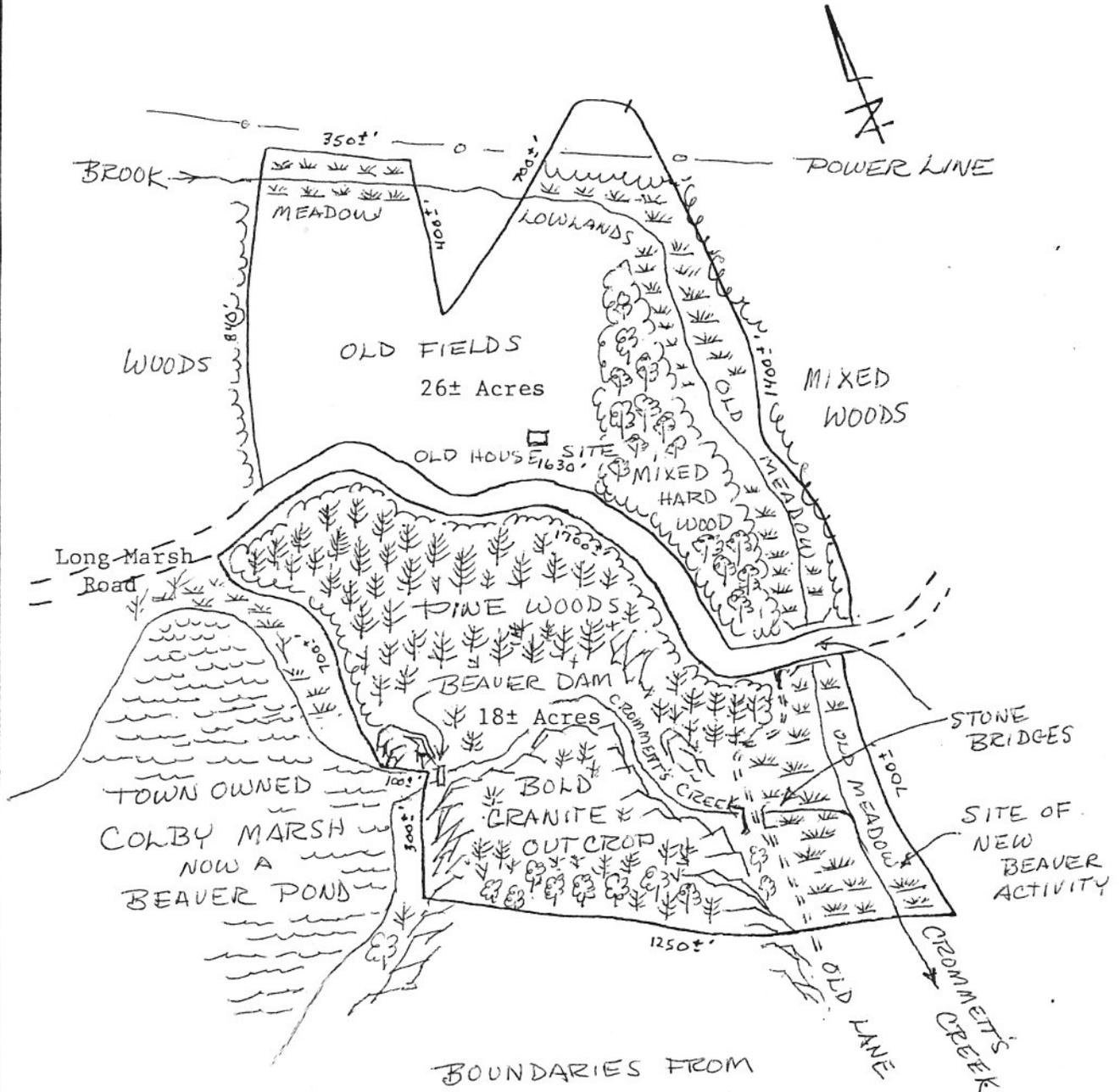


John W. Hatch, Chairman
Durham Conservation Commission

PLOT PLAN

SKETCH MAP
ONLY
NOT ACCURATE

Land of Gerard Olivier
North and South Side of
Long Marsh Road,
Durham, New Hampshire



BOUNDARIES FROM
DURHAM TAX MAP
NOT ACCURATE IN SCALE
OR
DETAIL
APPROX. LOCATION OF
LAND MARKS
John W. Hatch

Scale 1"=400'