

Reading Town Forest Committee
Town Hall
16 Lowell Street
Reading, MA 01867
October 19, 2021

Town of Reading Select Board and Town Meeting Members
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Reading, MA 01867

Subject: Proposed purchase of Meadow Brook Golf Club Lots

Dear Select Board and Town Meeting Members:

The Town Forest Committee voted 5 to 0 at its October 19, 2021 meeting to support Warrant Article 9 for the purchase of the five Meadow Brook lots on Grove Street. One of the most common concerns received by the Town Forest Committee is about the safety of people walking on Strout Ave and the compost area while entering the Town Forest. The road is very narrow with no shoulder to walk on. Vehicles frequently travel at speeds too high for this road, often with trailers full of brush to be disposed in the compost area. The committee has explored the possibility of adding a pedestrian path next to the road, however the environmentally sensitive areas on both sides of the road make this impossible.

The purchase of the five Meadow Brook lots would provide two benefits to the Town. First, a portion of one of the lots could provide off-street parking and a safe route to enter the Town Forest as it would eliminate the need to walk on Strout Ave. The second benefit is that it would preserve this forested land from development. These lots are in National Heritage Priority Habitat for Rare Species. There is little forested land in Reading that could be added to the Town Forest. These lots may be the last opportunity to preserve forested land.

The proposal to convert the old water treatment plant land to a parking area has significant risks. Part of the reason the water plant was not rebuilt was due to environmental impacts. In addition to wetlands and vernal pools, the site is habitat for the Blue-spotted salamander which is listed as "Threatened" under the Massachusetts Endangered Species Act. Deciding to forego the Meadow Brook lots on the assumption that the water plant area can be used for parking would leave the Town without a means to improve parking and access if environmental permits for the water plant site are denied. On-street parking on Grove Street and the walk down Strout Ave would remain as it is today.

The cost of the Meadow Brook lots has been raised as a reason to not acquire the land. This same concern was no doubt raised during the Depression in 1930 when the Town Forest was created. There were other ways to use those funds, or the land could have been developed to

generate more revenue for the Town. However, because of the vision of our 1930's forebears, we all benefit greatly by their creation of the Reading Town Forest. The Town Forest Committee strongly supports the acquisition of the five Meadow Brook lots to improve safety for user access and to preserve this priority habitat.

If the decision is made to not purchase the five Meadow Brook lots, the Town Forest Committee would rather acquire the single Lot 5 for parking and access than try to use the water plant land since obtaining the required environmental permits may not be possible.

Thank you for your consideration.

Sincerely,

Reading Town Forest Committee

William Sullivan, Chair

Kurt Habel

Susan Bowe

Thomas Gardiner

Jeffrey Lamson

Nancy Docktor

Brian Scouten