

The Barnstable Patriot

Letters: Barnstable could learn from Brewster, acquire 35 Scudder Ave.

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Town of Brewster and its voters for proactively approving \$26 million to acquire 121 acres of land that contains both salt and fresh water access. This action will help them fulfill a long-range goal of providing facilities and open space for the Brewster community, build on past acquisitions and control its future uses.

I wish the Town of Barnstable had such foresight to do the same with the 35 Scudder Ave. property.

Barnstable should be proactive in acquiring this entire property to satisfy diverse public interests and control its future. The village of Hyannis and the town are in dire need of accessible open space for recreational purposes. The town also needs rental housing. This property offers an opportunity to satisfy both of these needs.

The current golf course and surrounding open space offer the recreation and environmental protection we crave (see the Town's Open Space and Recreation Plan), while the existing hotel and conference center offer opportunities for diverse uses: housing for J-1 visa and domestic seasonal workers, traveling healthcare workers, veterans, and rentals for singles, couples, families and retirees plus

expansion of the conference/exposition center to host larger charity and commercial events.

According to a legal source, land can be acquired as long as it serves the public good: “Private property can be acquired for airports, railways, public highway, street, or roadways that are for generally the public’s use. Land can also be acquired for recreational purposes such as hunting, fishing, parks, playgrounds, forest preserves. Housing programs ... and urban development will also form public purpose.”

My research indicates that Town Council recently voted to acquire land by eminent domain for the purpose of creating sewer infrastructure. They approved the acquisition of approximately 1 acre total (2 parcels) for a total of \$833,000 in 2019. Precedent has been set.

Since the town is required to offer fair market value for property and this property is for sale, they should declare their intent to serve the public need via the acquisition of the property at 35 Scudder Ave. This property is currently assessed for \$14.8 million. The total property consists of 54.54 acres.

The Town of Barnstable Open Space and Recreation Plan is only three years old. It contains a terrific summary of goals and objectives, from which the following few are extracted:

Goal 1: Protect and maintain a maximum amount of open space to enhance environmental protection, recreational opportunities and community character.

1.2 Continue the town’s strong commitment to acquiring open space.

Goal 3: Provide diverse recreational opportunities and access throughout Barnstable, and ensure that the current and future needs of all user groups are met appropriately.

3.7 Explore opportunities for expanding park and recreation space in Hyannis south of Route 28 and in other villages as appropriate. All of these goals support the town's acquisition of 35 Scudder. The town's Housing Production Plan supports acquiring a town-owned parcel, too:

"To realize Barnstable's vision, the community's housing goals are aimed at creating more housing choice and affordable housing. The goals also support the town's ability to achieve other interrelated community goals, including goals for a strong local economy and protection of the Cape's fragile natural resources.

"Explore offering town-owned properties for creation of affordable rental units. To help address Barnstable's most critical housing needs, the town should explore offering town-owned properties for development affordable rental units. As the property owner, offering public land for affordable housing development provides the town with a high level of control over the ultimate development."

When's the last time the Barnstable Housing Authority acquired a building?

If only the town became proactive in the acquisition of this property and purchased it for fair market value (probably for about the same amount the small town of Brewster's voters approved), it could achieve many of the diverse public interest goals contained in its

plans as cited above. This property is ripe for solving our key problems: protecting the environment, creating recreational space and redeveloping an existing building for much needed rental housing and conference/exposition space. There are numerous funding sources for both open space acquisition and for the creation of rental housing.

Now is the time. Barnstable needs to follow Brewster's lead and step up to the plate. Don't let this opportunity slip through your fingers. Take control. Acquire 35 Scudder by eminent domain for the public good. It's not too late.

Felicia Penn, Hyannis