



May 19, 2021

Dear Cape Cod Commission,

Thank you for engaging the community by soliciting comments on your Cape Cod Climate Action Plan (CCCAP). We are writing on behalf of the Citizens to Save Twin Brooks, a group working to coordinate with our governmental bodies, conservation collaborators, and local citizens in assisting the Town of Barnstable in acquiring the 40-acre Twin Brooks Golf Course located at 35 Scudder Ave., Hyannis.

We wholeheartedly agree with the Commission's efforts to improve the region's resilience to climate hazards. The Twin Brooks Golf Course is an environmentally critical parcel; dedicating it as a public park will enable it to mitigate negative effects of climate change in Barnstable and achieve crucial goals in the CCCAP.

Failure to preserve the Twin Brooks Golf Course could allow for a 312-unit apartment complex to be built on the land, which is next to the already congested West End Rotary. Protecting this property will not only directly facilitate numerous initiatives laid out in the CCCAP, but will prevent hardscaping and construction of buildings that would weaken the environmental resiliency of the region.

Below are five key reasons why preserving the Twin Brooks Golf Course as public open space aligns with the Commission's climate plan.

1. It will protect against sea level rise.

The CCCAP states that "the most notable risks to the region are the destructive impacts of increasingly intense coastal storms, extreme precipitation and associated flooding" (18). This location is just above the 100-year flood zone projection according to FEMA; largescale development of the Twin Brooks land will leave the area vulnerable to "dangerous storm surge in which the water rises above the normal astronomical tide" (26). In

contrast, allowing the land to buffer the estuary, salt marsh, and Nantucket Sound will help protect inland habitat and communities. Destruction to buildings from sea level rise and storm surge is predicted to cost upwards of \$13.4 billion (36). Placing a new, thickly settled neighborhood in this area housing 1,000+ people is contrary to the data in the Climate Action Plan and is fiscally and environmentally reckless. Twin Brooks feeds into an "estuarine habitat," which "are particularly susceptible to storms both because they also experience coastal storm surge and because altering the salinity of these systems can cause widespread effects" (27). "Inland flooding causes damage to critical facilities and infrastructure in or near floodplain areas" such as wellheads vital for public drinking supply (32).

2. It will improve the economic potential of the region by encouraging tourism.

A 2013 Trust for Public Land study found that for every dollar we invest in land conservation in Massachusetts, we see a fourfold return in the economic value of natural services.¹ "Tourism is the main driver of the Cape Cod economy," so it is vital that we invest in parks, natural areas, and working lands to support thousands of jobs in the tourist, outdoor recreation, agriculture, forestry, and commercial fishing industries (18). Ferry boats arrive and depart from Hyannis bringing thousands of seasonal tourists to the Cape and Islands, bolstering the economy and our dependence on a healthy ocean. Converting the Twin Brooks land into a thriving, natural park with trails and wildlife viewing opportunities will bolster recreation value for tourists staying at the nearby Cape Cod Conference Center. Unlike a private golf course, a public park is enjoyable year-round and accessible to a wider variety of tourists as well as locals.

3. It will benefit marginalized communities by providing greenspace and food to Environmental Justice neighborhoods.

The Twin Brooks Golf Course is surrounded by Environmental Justice neighborhoods on its northern portion; according to U.S. Census data from 2010, almost 20% of Barnstable's neighborhoods meet the necessary criteria for this designation due to annual median household income being equal to or below the statewide median and 25% or more of the residents identifying as a race other than white.² A lack of "access to quality parks and recreation opportunities" during the Covid-19 epidemic has led to a "disproportionate burden of

¹ *The Return on Investment in Parks and Open Space in Massachusetts*. The Trust for Public Land, Sept. 2013, cloud.tpl.org/pubs/benefits-ma-roi-report.pdf.

² "Environmental Justice Populations in Massachusetts." Commonwealth of Massachusetts, 2010, [www.mass.gov/info-details/environmental-justice-populations-in-massachusetts#what-is-an-environmental-justice-population?-](http://www.mass.gov/info-details/environmental-justice-populations-in-massachusetts#what-is-an-environmental-justice-population?).

illness and death among racial and ethnic minority groups."³ Because "marginalized populations are disproportionately affected by climate change issues and solutions," it is these citizens who will bear the brunt of our failure to protect this vital parcel of land (109). They are also among those who have the most to gain from its responsible cultivation. Designating five of the Twin Brooks' 40 acres as community agriculture plots will support the local population by providing locally sourced produce and reducing carbon emissions from trucking it. The Cape Cod Commission lists "economic equity, environmental justice, equitable dispensation of mitigating resources, [and] equitable distribution of climate impacts" among its priorities in addressing equity in the CCCAP, and Barnstable is a superlative community in which to make real headway (114).

4. It will contribute to carbon sequestration and heat absorption.

As climate change worsens, "higher average and extreme temperatures will...increase the risk of people experiencing heat-related illness" (21). Replacing open space with more rooftops and pavement is a poor and potentially dangerous use of these 40 acres due to the subsequent increase in urban heat. Preserving the land as a park will allow for the planting of trees and gardens to filter pollution and carbon dioxide from the air, mitigating climate change through carbon sequestration (a particular concern of coastal communities due to ocean acidification). The grassy banks and marshland along Joshua and Stewart Creeks are powerful carbon sinks. "New England's capacity to mitigate and adapt to climate change is diminished by forest loss and poor management"⁴ according to studies conducted by Harvard University. "For the Cape, forestland has the most potential for carbon sequestration...[and] soils and wetland ecosystems also have the potential to sequester large amounts of carbon," so the loss of Twin Brooks' trees and marshland to development would be doubly devastating (70). Increased pollution has a detrimental effect on human health as well as the environment, driving up medical costs. It is our duty to plan ahead, as "the Cape's future is projected to include more frequent heat waves and droughts" (18).

5. It will conserve habitat for native and vulnerable wildlife species.

The Twin Brooks Golf Course contains a variety of landscapes that at-risk native species call home. The grasshopper sparrow, eastern meadowlark, and northern bobwhite thrive in grassland; the brown thrasher,

³ *Centering Health Equity in Recovery Efforts*. National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), 2021, www.nrpa.org/our-work/Three-Pillars/health-wellness/coronavirus-disease-2019/path-to-recovery/centering-health-equity-in-recovery-efforts/.

⁴ Foster, David, et al. Harvard University, 2017, p. 4, *Wildlands and Woodlands: Farmlands and Communities*.

towhee, and New England cottontail require shrubby habitat. These species have all declined significantly in New England over the last 50 years; when climate change brings about "higher average or extreme temperatures...species that cannot...find suitable habitat face local extinction" (21). According to the 2018 Barnstable Open Space and Recreation Plan, "the spread of roadways and subdivisions has reduced and greatly fragmented the habitat of many native wildlife species...There are twenty-nine MESA [Massachusetts Endangered Species Act]-listed animal species in Barnstable."⁵ We have a responsibility to both our human and non-human neighbors to protect this invaluable parcel.

Protecting Twin Brooks Golf Course as public open space is the perfect opportunity for the Cape Cod Commission to put the CCCAP into practice. In the face of rising sea levels, Twin Brooks is essential for safeguarding flood storage capacity in the decades to come. It will prevent water and air pollution by sequestering carbon, providing both Hyannis residents and tourists with outdoor recreation facilities. Time is of the essence, and we will need to act fast to preserve this vital piece of land for present populations and posterity.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Sincerely,

The Citizens to Save Twin Brooks

<https://savetwinbrooks.org/>

⁵ Jenkins, Elizabeth. Ridley Associates, 2018, *2018 Barnstable Open Space and Recreation Plan*, town.barnstable.ma.us/Departments/planninganddevelopment/Projects/Open-Space-and-Recreation-Plan-2018-Update.pdf?tm=11/4/2020%204:51:38%20PM.