



Photo by Dick Simmons

A Once in a Generation Opportunity

Swampscott's *Open Space & Recreation Plan* recognizes that "Swampscott's coast is one of its greatest resources." And it's fair to say that the town's coast is the primary attraction and identifier for many, if not all, of the town's residents. People enjoy living close to the ocean and having access to the waterfront. You only need to watch people of all ages stroll, run, or bike year-round along the Lynnway from Kings Beach to Nahant, or around the pathway at Fort Sewell in Marblehead, to appreciate that fact.

Unfortunately, over the years, access to the coast -- and open space in general -- has decreased significantly in Swampscott, giving way to development. The public's connection to the ocean is diminishing, which is regrettable because Swampscott's waterfront is something that makes the town different from many other communities. If the focal point of Swampscott was only Vinnin Square, it would not be any different from so many other towns with strip malls, Marshalls stores, and Stop & Shops. What makes Swampscott unique is its seacoast -- it gives its residents a "sense of place."

Today there is an opportunity to both provide open green space for the town's residents and public access to the coastline -- "it's a once in a generation opportunity," as was expressed by the Select Board at the Town Meeting approving the purchase of the Hawthorne property.

Instead of the existing paved parking lot and imposing structure blocking views of the ocean, there could be a park and public plaza with native plantings and gardens, play structures, and, of course, seating areas to enjoy the spectacular views and memorable sunsets of Nahant Bay.

Any suggestion that this property should be used for any type of storefront development should be rejected. It is far more important that it be, as also expressed by the Select Board, "property that generates memories, not money."

Residents need to come together to strengthen Swampscott's connection to the waterfront and its identity as a seacoast community, and to increase the quality of life of its residents and their descendants, by making this property open green space to be enjoyed by all.