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May 8, 2024

David Grisham, Chair  
Swampscott Select Board  
[dgrishman@swampscottma.gov](mailto:dgrishman@swampscottma.gov)

Sean Fitzgerald  
Swampscott Town Administrator  
[sfitzgerald@swampscottma.gov](mailto:sfitzgerald@swampscottma.gov)

Re: Comments on April 3, 2024 Proposal for Hawthorne Property

Dear Messrs. Grisham and Fitzgerald,

The Directors of the Swampscott Conservancy have reviewed and discussed the new proposal for the Hawthorne property presented at the April 3, 2024 Select Board meeting and offer the following comments.

As the Conservancy's stated mission is the protection and enhancement of Swampscott's natural resources and to act as an advocate and spokesperson for open space preservation, we believe that the property should be primarily open park land without a sizable structure on it.

We again appreciate the efforts of the Select Board and Town Administrator in acquiring this property and for offering the opportunity for public input on its ultimate use. Since acquisition, we believe that the majority of the town's residents have consistently expressed the opinion that the property should be developed as a public park and plaza.

It was an artist's rendering of this park-like vision of the property (see image below) that led many to vote in favor of buying the land at Town Meeting. The renditions first presented at the public forums also were primarily of open space (also below) and the majority preference for open space continued during those public forums. Most telling is that even the Power Point presenting the new proposal confirmed the importance of keeping the space open. Slide 4 of that Power Point (also below) showed that, for the public, the "most important" use for the property was "Public Park/Open Space" and the "important" use was "Waterfront Access," while "less important" was "create revenue."

Over the years, waterfront access - and open space in general - has decreased significantly in Swampscott, giving way to development. The public's connection to the ocean has been diminished, which is regrettable because Swampscott's coastline is something that makes our town different from many other communities - it gives residents a sense of place and identity. What better way to secure and enhance that connection than by creating an ocean front park at the gateway to our town?

Any building, even if mostly glass as the one currently proposed, and even with a green rooftop accessible to the public, will block and separate - both physically and psychologically -- the waterfront from the street and the town. And, as presented, the amount of open space is severely limited by the size of the proposed building. While a public rooftop was included in the design, it should not be used to measure the amount of space that is considered "open."

An opinion was expressed at the Select Board meeting that, by having primarily open space, the property would be "just a patch of grass with a few trees like Red-Rock Park in Lynn." This, however, is not what was ever envisioned for the property. Rather the vision was of a park and public plaza that included, among other things, terraces, native plantings and gardens, play structures, bathrooms, a stage area for performances, and seating areas to enjoy the spectacular views of Nahant Bay. (The photographs below are just a few examples of state-of-the-art parks in other communities and the activities they support.)

It is also not true that a park would be limited to only warm weather use and an indoor structure was necessary for year-round use. Aside from the fact that people frequent parks during all seasons, there can be a wide range of cold weather activities at a park, such as Salem's successful Frozen Fire Festival that has entertainment, crafts, and igloos, or Market Street's outdoor skating, to name just two examples.

Concerns have also been raised about the cost of maintaining a park. Aside from the fact that the cost of constructing a state-of-the-art park would be significantly lower than erecting a building (the proposed library is estimated to cost \$30 million<sup>1</sup>), a building also requires considerable long-term maintenance costs. The maintenance for a park would be much lower than those of a building that has lighting and heating as well as repair and upkeep costs.

An argument was also made that there is already public property open to ocean in Swampscott, specifically, the short strip of land from the Mission on the Bay restaurant to the town boundary line at the start of the Lynn Shore Drive. This narrow pathway, however, does not, and cannot serve the same purpose that a state-of-the-art park as envisioned for the Hawthorne property would provide for the public.

What of the other pluses of having the property as open space? According to the National Recreation and Parks Association, parks are emerging as important public health solutions in urban communities. "Nearly 40 years of research evidence confirms that nearby nature, including parks, gardens, the urban forest and green spaces, support human health and wellness." In fact, the relation between being outdoors in green spaces has led to a growing number of physicians issuing so-called "park prescriptions" to patients, both young and old, to spend more time outside to improve their mental and physical health.

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<sup>1</sup> While it was noted by the Select Board that state funding would be available and used to reduce the cost of the proposed library, there are likewise state grants and funding sources available for the creation of parks.

As for economic concerns, a Trust for Public Land (TPL) report, as well as many other studies, finds that “new parks have invigorated downtown businesses and neighborhood economies.” If the goal is to bring people to Swampscott’s downtown, a park and public plaza is what is needed, not more buildings. Considering that Swampscott’s location on the coastline is what attracted many a summer visitor and supported many a hotel at the turn of the last century, a park would also help make the proposed boutique hotel a success.

Conclusion? For economic as well as aesthetic and health reasons, it makes sense that the property be designed as primarily open space.

Fredrick Law Olmsted is quoted as saying that parks are the “lungs of the city” and “the heart of the community.” He also believed that they were “the perfect antidote to the stress and artificialness of urban life.” There seems little doubt that he would have wholeheartedly supported designing and developing the Hawthorne property as an open-air park and public plaza - one that would give people space to breathe and that would be the heart of our community.

Thank you for this opportunity for the Conservancy to comment on the proposal and, should you have any questions or wish to discuss this matter further with the members of the Conservancy, please don’t hesitate to contact me.

Sincerely,



Tonia Bandrowicz, President  
Swampscott Conservancy

cc:

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## Option for the Hawthorne Property Presented at Town Meeting



## Options presented at Public Forum

### Re-Visioning Hawthorne April 26, 2023



Black Will's Cliff Park



Swampscott Town Square



King's Beach Pier & Park

- KEY
- A Architecture
  - B Gathering Plaza
  - C Great Lawn
  - D Performance Venue
  - E Mobility Hub
  - F Play Area
  - G Promenade



Slide 4 from April 3, 2024 Presentation at Select Board Meeting

THE DATA – PUBLIC FEEDBACK

Idea Exchange -  
Most  
Important Use



Idea Exchange -  
Most  
Important  
Value



Scenario Presentation & Survey Results

QUESTION	RESULT
Most Important	Public Park / Open Space
Important	Waterfront Access
Less Important	Create Revenue
Not Important	Off-Street Public Parking

Public Feedback Resounding Goals

- (1) Maintain the property for **public enjoyment**
- (2) Create a **year-round destination**
- (3) Maximize **open space** and access to **waterfront views**
- (4) Find a way for the Town to get **revenue** from the site

Some Examples of Parks & Activities







