

May 15, 2026

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Dear Ms. Phelan and Mr. Connors,

We, the undersigned represent a nonprofit organization and several town committees that have an interest in the preservation and enhancement of open space in Swampscott. We submit this joint letter advocating that any long-term plan for the town-owned Hawthorne Restaurant property - the highly visible "gateway" to Swampscott - be primarily open park land without any sizable structures.

The Open Space & Recreation Plan Committee is responsible for the development and maintenance of Swampscott's *2021-2028 Open Space and Recreation Plan* which continues the Town's commitment to improving and expanding its valuable open space resources and providing accessible places for people of all ages and abilities.

The Town's *Climate Action Plan*, administered by the Climate Action & Resilience Committee, has as one of its goals "to enhance, protect and maintain natural resources and public green spaces."

The Swampscott Conservation Commission is charged with the protection of the community's natural resources and plays an important role in municipal open space planning, acquisition, and management. In fact, this was the primary role of conservation commissions from the time they were created in 1957 until they began additionally administering the Wetlands Protection Act in 1972.

In addition to protecting and promoting the health of the Town's public trees, the Swampscott Tree Committee's mission is to plan for the planting of trees to improve diversity and expand the Town's tree canopy.

The Swampscott Conservancy is a 501(c)(3) nonprofit with a mission of protecting and enhancing Swampscott's natural resources for the benefit and enjoyment of the public by, among other things, maintaining and improving public natural areas and open space.

## Strong Support for Open Space in Town

We believe that developing the Hawthorne property be developed as primarily open space is in line with the position of a large number of the Town's residents who have consistently indicated a preference that the property to be mainly developed as a public park and plaza:

- It was an artist's rendering of a park-like vision of the property that led many to vote in favor of buying the land at Town Meeting (*pictured below*).
- There was strong support for open space in the public forums that followed. The surveys conducted showed that the "most important" use for the property was "Public Park/Open Space" while "less important" was "create revenue" (*included below*).
- A strong preference for more rather than less open space was expressed at the public forums of the Hawthorne Reuse Advisory Committee (HRAC). The majority of survey responses regarding the Hawthorne property conducted by HRAC (and previously by the consultant hired by the Town, HDR) show a strong preference for significant open green space. Of 545 responses to the HRAC survey, 271 favored open space/park/green space, per data collected by the town.

In addition, information presented at a visioning workshop for *Swampscott 2035: The Master Plan* noted that Swampscott has the lowest percentage of green/open space compared to neighboring communities. A survey in support of the updated Master Plan found that residents put a priority on more green spaces. Under the topic of "Land Use," residents prioritized "more green spaces, small businesses, recreational facilities, conservation areas." A topic of concerns was "insufficient open space protection." And there was a strong "anti-development sentiment." The desired changes included "requiring green spaces in new developments."

People in neighboring communities are also attracted to the coast. For example, people of all ages stroll, run, or bike year-round along the Lynnway or around the pathways at Red Rock Park in Lynn, Fort Sewell in Marblehead, the Willows in Salem, Lynch Park in Beverly, and Stage Fort Park in Gloucester.

Recognizing the importance of waterfront public parks, in 2025 the City of Lynn opened the first phase of its newly created Lynn Harbor Park with two miles of walking paths and trails. The vision for the park, the result of planning with public input and support, was for a redeveloped waterfront that features a network of open space and green corridors, providing access to the Lynn Harbor and serving a range of open space and recreational amenities.

It is no surprise that there is strong support for open space at the Hawthorne property given Swampscott's waterfront is something that makes the town different from many

other communities. What makes Swampscott unique is its seacoast -- it gives its residents a "sense of place." People enjoy living close to the ocean and having access to the waterfront and Swampscott's coastline is the primary attraction and identifier for the Town's residents. Accordingly, Swampscott's *2021-2028 Open Space & Recreation Plan Update (OS&RP)* ([www.swampscottma.gov/1273/Open-Space-Recreation-Plan](http://www.swampscottma.gov/1273/Open-Space-Recreation-Plan)) recognizes that "Swampscott's coast is one of its greatest resources."

Two of the goals of the OS&RP are to "preserve the character of the town" and to "commit unbuildable and suitable property to open space uses." The OS&RP specifically "encourages the Town Administration and the Select Board to consider all municipally owned land [which includes the Hawthorne property] as future options for open space and recreation uses."

Parks are the "lungs of the city," Frederick Law Olmsted is quoted as saying, and "the heart of the community." In landscape design, he advocated for "consult[ing] the genius of the place in all." In other words, any improvements of the landscape have to pay close attention to the inherent character of the land. Consistent with the goals of the OS&RP, in our seacoast town that would mean enhancing our connection to the shoreline, not creating barriers to it. Such a green space would be a natural extension of the nearby Olmsted Historic District.

#### Decline in Public Access to Coastline

Unfortunately, over the years access to the coast in Swampscott - and open space in general - has decreased significantly, giving way to private development. As a result, the public's connection to the ocean has diminished. With the creation of an ocean front park at the gateway to the town, the Hawthorne property offers an ideal opportunity to preserve unobstructed views of the water and could include terraces, native plantings and gardens, play structures, a stage area for performances, and seating areas to enjoy the spectacular views of Nahant Bay.

While Town park land already exists near the Hawthorne property at the Town Hall lawn and Linscott Park, these areas are not waterfront properties and do not contain the state-of-the-art amenities that a new park at the Hawthorne property could contain (*photos of some examples of such amenities included below*).

Swampscott's sizable open space is inland and off the beaten track, such as Harold A. King Forest located in the far northeast corner of the Town and the newly acquired Archer Street property. While these are great conservation resources they are not readily accessible to the public, and not coastal.

We believe it is not true, as has been suggested, that a park would be limited to only warm weather use and an indoor structure is necessary for year-round use. The path along Lynn Shore Drive and Red Rock Park, as well the park areas in the other towns,

are regularly used during the winter months, even when the areas are covered in snow as they have been this winter. Aside from the fact that people frequent parks during all seasons, there can be a wide range of cold weather activities at the park, such as Lynnfield Market Street's outdoor skating rink, the Salem's Frozen Fire festival it has held in the past, and its So Sweet Chocolate & Ice Sculpture festival this year.

### Removal of the Hawthorne Restaurant

For a number of reasons, not the least of which is to ensure that the public has access to the coastline as required by the warrant article originally passed at Town Meeting, the Hawthorne restaurant should be removed. On this point, we agree with the report of the HRAC as it also recommends removing the restaurant. In addition to allowing for the requisite public coastal walkway, the existing building, which needs extensive repairs and updating, blocks views of the ocean. As noted in the public surveys, creating ocean views is an element many in town feel imperative no matter what option is chosen for the property.

### Structures on the Property

While we are not opposed to limited structures on the property, we believe that the majority of the property should be open space providing clear views largely unimpeded by buildings or other structures. To create an inviting entrance to the open space, any structures should be placed so as to leave an open view of the ocean. They should definitely not be built along Humphrey Street because, even with an opening between the buildings, there would be a significant loss of views. *(see Aerial renditions of property with two story buildings below. Though the building style will be presumably different, these renditions clearly show how the views of the ocean, especially coming down Humphrey street, is lost. The aerial view also shows how the buildings and parking lot hide the presence of the park.)*

We further believe that buildings should not be over one story. Tall buildings will only add to the already canyon-like feel of the street resulting from the existing buildings along the route, especially the Concordia.

If limited buildings are constructed on the property, the types of businesses that will occupy them need to be controlled in order to preclude more shops such as cleaners and beauty and nail salons, and professional offices as currently located along Humphrey Street. Through various means the Town needs to encourage a diversity of high-quality retail and restaurant uses. However, given the current renovation of the retail and restaurant space at Vinnin Square, we question whether the HRAC's proposals, especially that the property should be made up of at least one restaurant of significant size, is realistic and sustainable.

## Selling vs. Leasing

We strongly oppose selling a portion of the property to a private developer for retail or residential development – *especially for the purpose of creating private residential units*. One of the rationales for the Town to buy the property was to avoid the further condoizing of Humphrey Street and to ensure public, not private use of the property.

The HRAC favors long-term leasing with a developer to build and maintain the space over Town ownership. We believe more information and investigation into the feasibility of long-term leasing is needed. We are interested in knowing what investigations the Town is conducting or plans to conduct as to option.

## Church Parking Lot

We support the Town acquiring the church parking lot at 187 Humphrey Street which is adjacent to the Hawthorne property.

As Bakertilly Advisory Group, the consultant hired by the Town to review possible purchase of this property, noted in its 2024 redevelopment analysis report: If this property were combined with the Hawthorne restaurant property, then the "larger assembled parcel would represent a key anchor on the western end of the Humphrey Street Corridor and reverse a persistent trend in the Town of the privatization of key waterfront parcels for residential use and ensure long-term public access to the waterfront in this key district."

Thus, purchasing this ocean front property not only will be a benefit to the Town but will avoid the potential adverse consequences and diminished value to the Town of leaving the parcel to the private market and having future conflicting or undesirable uses on the parcels such as residential housing and large structures not in keeping with the character of the area.

## Benefits of Open Space

There are many benefits of having the property designed primarily as open space. According to the National Recreation and Parks Association, parks are emerging as important public health solutions. "Nearly 40 years of research evidence confirms that nearby nature, including parks, gardens, the urban forest and green spaces, support human health and wellness."

As for economic concerns, many studies, including one by Trust for Public Land, find that "new parks have invigorated downtown businesses and neighborhood economies." If the goal is to bring people to Swampscott's downtown, solution is a park and public plaza, 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.

Like the money communities spend ensuring that school and town buildings are up to date, investment in open public space has long-term returns that will benefit all of the Town's residents for generations to come.

#### Prior development of town owned property has decreased open space

Swampscott has consistently given up town-owned property, often purchased at great expense and sold at a loss, to developers, or failed to exercise the option to buy property for public use. For example:

- The Town failed to buy the extensive One Salem Street property adjacent to the current Swampscott Middle School and Tedesco Golf Course, despite the vote at Town Meeting urging the town to do so, and for the reasonable price of \$600,000. A campaign was initiated to convince voters that the property was too expensive and, as a result, the property became a private condo development with no public open space.
- The Town purchased the former Temple Israel property on Humphrey Street for \$3.5 million and sold part of it to a developer and part to abutters with no option for public open space.
- The former Swampscott High School on Greenwood Ave. was located on land donated to the Town by the Phillips family specifically for a school. The Town sold it to a developer for \$1.2 million with a credit of \$1.2 million for tearing down the building, in effect giving the property away. No open space resulted on the highest hill in Swampscott with commanding views of the ocean.
- Most recently, the Town failed to purchase the coastal White Court property which was valued at \$6 million and purchased by a developer for \$2 million.

#### Conclusion

It should be borne in mind that once the property is populated with buildings, there is no return to the option of parkland and open space.

A 1970's town document, *Swampscott Environment: Now or Never*, is instructive in this regard. It proposed preserving the character of the community as the town moved toward the distant future of 2010. The report recommended specific proposals to expand and protect the Town's open space – proposals that mostly went unheeded. At the time of the report, developed areas in town constituted roughly 70% of the land, some 1,400 acres, with less than 600 acres remaining open. Today, there remains only 19 acres of land not yet developed.

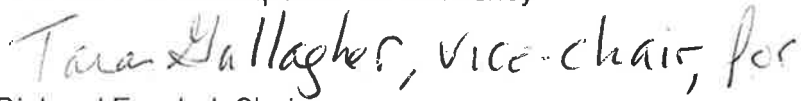
How unfortunate it would be if in the future, residents look back with regret at the decisions that Town representatives made -- or failed to make -- regarding this once in a generation opportunity for waterfront open space.

We are happy to meet with you to discuss this matter further.

Sincerely,



Tonia Bandrowicz,  
Chair of Conservation Commission and  
President of Swampscott Conservancy



Richard Frenkel, Chair  
Tree Committee



Tania Littak, Chair  
Open Space & Recreation Plan Committee



Martha Schmitt, Chair  
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cc:

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Option for the Hawthorne Property Presented at Town Meeting



Options presented at Public Forum

Re-Visioning Hawthorne  
April 20, 2023



Black Wolf's Cliff Park



Beamscott Town Square



King's Beach Pier & Park

- Building
- Building Footprint
- Road Lane
- Tree
- Tree
- Tree
- Tree
- Tree
- Tree







Looking East on Humphrey St.



From Above

Some Examples of Parks & Activities









