

Town of Hanover, New Hampshire
Selectboard
Athos Rassias, Chair
cc. Whit Spaulding, Chair Hanover Conservation Commission
transmitted via email

Joe Bachman
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+1(603)277-1467

Dear Hanover Selectboard:

I am writing following my letter of June 9, 2023 to express continued concern regarding the Town of Hanover's approach to its responsibilities regarding the Mink Brook Community Forest.

Since my engagement with you on this issue, I have become increasingly disappointed with both the management and governance of this situation. A summary of my concerns are as follows:

- Transparency:
 - It is difficult to understand how this issue is being handled given lack of both timely and material communication. This is in opposition to representations made at the Selectboard meeting held in June which committed to both transparency and "significant opportunities for public input".
 - While a series of frequently asked questions was posted on the Town website, this seemed to be a positioning exercise of which many of the tenets could be challenged.
 - Although a meeting was held in October inviting public comment, this was conducted without reasonable notice (less than one week) and I was unable to attend having specifically asked for such an opportunity.

- Process and Priorities:
 - Many questions can be asked about the process by which the land transaction has progressed including the addition of additional and environmentally sensitive acreage to increase the area of the parcels owned by the town to meet a 5-acre threshold.
 - In a discussion with Athos Rassias on September 27th, he intimated those decisions regarding the density of the proposed housing project, i.e. the number of units – my original concern, are dependent upon and will ultimately be driven by the economic considerations of Twin Pines. Diligence regarding such financial considerations seems insufficient prior to the many gating steps required to facilitate such a project, including not only the selection of Twin Pines but also representations to the public and donors as to the number and character of housing units to be constructed.

- Governance:
 - Throughout this process I have been wondering why the Conservation Commission has not been more actively engaged on the environmental impacts of the planned development including the impact of the increase in number of units. I have copied the chair of this body (Whit Spaulding) in this regard.
 - At the October meeting mentioned above, Rob Housman presented the Mink Brook Forest Management Plan and remains the listed contact in regard to it. I submit that it would be more appropriate for Conservation Commission to represent the Plan as the body that commissioned it, and importantly is charged with both the governance and stewardship of the Community Forest and Hanover's natural resources at large.
 - Moreover, the Selectboard should more actively impart your governance responsibilities over these interactions, particularly in such public forums.
 - At the very least, an environmental impact assessment should be conducted as part of the planning process to guide such decisions before they are ultimately made.

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- Funding:
 - As financial considerations of the project developer now seem to usurp the conservation priorities of the project, and are thus driving greater environmental impact than anticipated, use of the Conservation Fund monies the Town used to acquire the property is inappropriate.
 - In short, using conservation funds to buy land for development is problematic.

While I am a supporter of responsible affordable housing in principle, the above factors all seem to indicate that executing the proposed project in the MBCF is more challenging than expected. I submit that the issue of affordable housing is worthy of a comprehensive plan rather than a small-scale project in a conservation area where the environmental risks have not yet been properly assessed.

Sincerely,

A handwritten signature in blue ink, appearing to read 'Joe Bachman', with a stylized flourish at the end.

02/08/2024