

## Being protective: Town buys half-mile beach on Cape Cod Bay; Plymouth's \$4 million offer will keep land out of developers' hands

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PLYMOUTH -The proud new owners of a half-mile stretch of beach on Cape Cod Bay happen not to be a bunch of rich developers, but a bunch of Plymouth residents. In a

**Community Preservation Committee chairman William Keohan shows off 28 acres of shorefront property in Ellisville to Josh Davis. Plymouth bought it from the Joslin Diabetes Foundation. (GREG DERR/The Patriot Ledger)**

serendipitous chain of events that just doesn't happen every day, town meeting snatched the 28-acre parcel from developers at the 11th hour and authorized spending \$4 million to buy it.

The property, just north of Ellisville Harbor, was owned by the Joslin Diabetes Foundation and used as a summer camp.

The town made an offer after hearing that the nonprofit organization was soliciting bids to sell it.

"In my seven years with Wildlands Trust, it's the nicest, most beautiful, compelling single property our organization has had anything to do with," said land protection specialist Scott MacFaden, who works at the nonprofit conservation organization in Duxbury. "Aesthetically, ecologically, and recreationally, it's a most extraordinary piece of land.

"To get 28 acres with a half mile of beach in this part of the world is unprecedented."

The town is paying about \$143,000 an acre for the property. Jack Phaneuf of Jack Conway Realtors in Plymouth says a house lot at Churchill Landing, about 2 miles north of Center Hill Point, is on the market for \$320,000 - and it's "300 steps" from the beach.

The land was donated to the Joslin Diabetes Foundation by Franklin Trask in 1981 following the death of his wife, Agnes, of complications from diabetes. Trask, who died in 2003, was founder of the Priscilla Beach Theater and a member of one of the oldest families in Plymouth.

The gift required that the land be used as a camp for children with diabetes. Joslin officials built a large house on the property in 1991 and offered camping programs for children with diabetes.

But the foundation didn't use it often enough to warrant keeping it, said Josh Davis, who used to attend the camp as a child and is now the foundation's assistant facilities manager.

Last year, Plymouth paid the Joslin Foundation \$2.1 million for 50 acres across the street from this parcel.

Joslin's Chief Project and Planning Officer Robert Calway said the sale of the latest piece of property is just what the organization hoped for.

The foundation needed money to improve its main camp in Charleton, but wanted to preserve the Plymouth property.

Unfortunately, only developers were bidding on the Plymouth land, until the town entered the bidding at the last moment, Calway said.

"It's exactly what we were hoping for," he said. "We will use the proceeds to improve our Charleton facilities and offer subsidies to children who otherwise would not be able to attend camp."

Officials from Wildlands Trust and the town's Community Preservation Committee have had their sights on the property for years.

MacFaden said his organization contacted Joslin officials every year to check on the status of the land. This year, when they hadn't heard back, they called and found out a bidding process was under way.

MacFaden, Community Preservation Committee chairman William Keohan, and other town officials put together a bid and Keohan made the presentation in person to foundation officials and the real estate company handling the sale.

While the \$4 million bid wasn't the highest, it had few conditions and was in keeping with the foundation's interest in preserving the land, Keohan said.

The property features woodland and cranberry bog trails on the west side of Center Hill Road and the building and beach on the easterly side.

Davis, 25, of Wrentham, spent five years attending the seaside camp, then worked as a counselor. The sale of the property is bittersweet for him, but he's happy it will be preserved.

"I loved it," Davis said. "It was awesome. We'd take the path down to the beach and have a camp fire. We loved the property so much."

The town has begun construction of a gravel parking area

on the west side of Center Hill Road and will build another parking area on the east side of the street this summer and tear down a dilapidated house. The parking areas will accommodate about 12 cars each and should be open before July 4.

Public works employees will build a boardwalk through a marshy area leading to the beach.

The property is open to the public, and not limited to Plymouth residents.

The town will use Community Preservation Act money and state and federal grants to buy the land, Keohan said.

It's likely the town will receive \$750,000 from the state, according to Keohan who expects to close the sale this month.

His committee has applied for a \$2.25 million federal grant and stands a good chance of approval given the uniqueness of the property, Keohan said.

In the end, the property could cost Plymouth about \$500,000 after receiving matching state funds.

Town officials envision using the former camp building for school or recreation programs and perhaps leasing some of the space to private or nonprofit organizations.

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## **TO PRESERVE AND PROTECT: Guardian groups keep watch**

Two nonprofit conservation groups have become major players in the effort to preserve open land on the South Shore.

The Wildlands Trust of Southeastern Massachusetts owns or holds conservation restrictions on more than 140 properties covering 4,500 acres of land in 26 communities from Hull to Rehoboth.

Some of its largest holdings include the Barnes Preserve at Stump Pond and the Striar Conservancy in Halifax; the Leonard conservation area in Lakeville; the Hoyt Hall Preserve in Marshfield; Willow Brook and Fleetwood Farm in Pembroke; the Emery Preserve, Halfway Pond conservation area and Pine Hills conservation reserve in Plymouth; and the Delano forest, Rounseville Preserve and Teal Farm in Rochester.

A statewide organization, The Trustees of Reservations, has acquired 96 properties over the years, including Duxbury Beach; Weir River Farm, World's End and the Whitney and Thayer Woods in Hingham; the Norris Reservation in Norwell; and the Holmes Reservation in Plymouth.

The Weir River property was a 1999 gift from Polly Thayer Starr, a well-known local artist.

World's End was purchased in 1967 from a private owner.

"That was a landscape that people were in the habit of using, so when it was threatened there was a strong

response to it," said Steve Sloan, the southeast regional director for the Trustees.

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## **Major open space buys on the South Shore**

- 1980:** Plymouth buys the 850-acre Briggs Estate in Manomet for \$650,000 - about the cost of two house lots today.
- 1987:** Kingston and Duxbury buy the 66-acre Bay Farm on Kingston Bay for \$575,000.
- 1993:** To protect it from housing development, the Trust for Public Land buys the 632-acre Forges Field property off Jordan Road in Plymouth and sells it to the town for \$1.3 million. It is now used for athletic fields and conservation.
- 2002:** Kingston spends \$200,000 on 25.7 acres of land in the Carter cranberry bogs.
- 2003:** For \$463,000, Plymouth buys 40 acres on Long Pond Road, part of the Eel River Watershed Preserve.
- 2004:** Plymouth buys the 83-acre Talcott Preserve in Manomet for \$1 million in 2004.
- 2003:** Hanover buys 74 acres of privately owned farmland for \$1.38 million after Plymouth Superior Court ruled that owner Frank Cervelli of Rochester could not back out of a 2000 deal to sell.
- 2003:** Plymouth purchases 36 acres of bogs and uplands that head the Eel River along Long Pond Road.
- 2004:** Hingham purchases an 18-acre hay field known as Shultz's Meadow at the junction of the Weir River and Accord Brook.
- 2005:** Wildlands Trust of Southeastern Massachusetts purchases the 142-acre O'Neill Dairy Farm in Duxbury, the last working dairy farm on the South Shore.
- 2006:** A partnership of land protection agencies joins with Plymouth to buy 58 acres of cranberry bog next to the Eel River Preserve.
- 2006:** Scituate spends \$595,000 on 40 acres of forested land in the West End. The land adjoined 180 already-preserved acres.

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