

The Taggart Property (Assessors Map 5.A – 14, Forbush Mill Road)

Significance to the Town of Bolton and Reasons for Acquisition

“think that I cannot preserve my health and spirits, unless I spend four hours a day at least—and it is commonly more than that—sauntering through the woods and over the hills and fields, absolutely free from all worldly engagements.”

– Henry David Thoreau, Walking

In our current emergency state and order of “stay at home” a lot of Bolton’s residents are lucky enough to have an extended “backyard” within walking distance from their home, our Conservation properties. Residents are able to conduct passive recreational activities such as explore, run, walk, horseback ride and mountain bike (non-motorized only). Conservation professionals and land trusts throughout the state have noted dramatic increase in use of open spaces and conservation properties during the current pandemic. Some wildlife refuges and sanctuaries have closed their facilities very recently due to personnel staying at home. However, residents within walking distance and other community members are finding their way to these areas whether it be for exercise, mental well-being or just simply some fresh air and a change of scenery.

Preservation and Use of the Parcel

The acquisition of the 43-acre Taggart Parcel located off of Forbush Mill Road offers a potential for both conservation land and land banking for a municipal structural use to be determined at a later date. The property is currently in the Chapter 61 program with a 10-year, long term forest management plan. This property is unique in that it is an upland parcel contains old logging cart paths, a vernal pool within a kettle pond, unique forest vegetation, the Lancaster railbed, and wetlands along its perimeter. The Bolton Master Plan will inevitably indicate the need for additional municipal facilities. Use of the land for municipal structures would involve engineered plans and assessments of to develop access from Forbush Mill Road which involves a perennial stream/Cold Water Fishery riparian area, bordering vegetated wetlands, adjacent upland resource area and a steep grade into the property adjacent to the road. The majority of the property would be conserved for forested open space and public access.

Watershed Management Asset

It is also important to protect this area to assist in the watershed management when we have high velocity storms and changes in precipitation which we face now more frequently. Drought and floods impact Still River tributaries, flowing along Forbush Mill road. This area has a history of flooding; the more vegetated surfaces, sandy soils (good drainage) we keep intact the more water infiltrates naturally on site prior to reaching the right of way or river itself thereby reducing runoff, erosion damage, and impacts from floodwaters overwhelming older stormwater structures. Forbush Mill Road has not only experienced historical flooding of the roadway but also within recent years has experienced a loss of or damage to stormwater infrastructure. There are four culverts along Still River and Forbush Mill Road, two of which have been impacted and temporarily repaired. This is a cost to the town of an estimated \$300,000 each crossing based on

past culvert repairs over perennial streams utilizing the required box culvert replacements. The preservation of this land may lengthen the life of the culverts still intact by handling stormwater on site in its current forested state. The topography of the land assists in this as well as it is not a level parcel in many areas it allows for temporary pooling (natural retention basins) to occur prior to infiltration during storms of heavy precipitation. The water flows, filters, slows and infiltrates on site. The 43-acre forested landscape absorbs stormwaters before they ever reach the roadway or storm water infrastructure.

Environmental and Ecological Assets

There are protected wetland resource areas on site including a vernal pool within the deepest depths of the Kettle Pond. This vernal pool has been observed to be actively used by Wood Frogs and Spotted Salamanders for breeding. Additionally, beetles, damsel flies and deer utilize this resource area. Water resources are arranged around the perimeter of the property inclusive of two freshwater ponds, feeding the cold-water fishery, freshwater forested/shrub wetlands and in the midst of the property adjacent to the vernal pool and at the base of the kettle pond there is a freshwater emergent wetland.

Healthy continuous forested areas provide vital ecological services to the community. These services are perceived as free benefits to the community equivalent with the term “public goods”. These ecological services include; wildlife habitat and diversity, watershed services, carbon storage, and scenic landscapes, to name a few. It is important to note that these goods and services are not included within a community’s check and balance sheet traditionally. Their contributions are frequently overlooked in decision-making across the broad range of sectors. As forests become undervalued, they are at risk for development pressures and conversion. Reestablishing the fact that forest ecosystems are natural assets with economic and social value can assist in the promotion of conservation and responsible decision-making.

(<https://www.fs.fed.us/ecosystems/services/>)

Historical Aspect

The Lancaster Railroad is an interesting historical moment in history. A section of the single-track railroad that ran southwest from Lancaster to Hudson through Bolton forms a 600 ft. portion of the rear (south) boundary of the property. After being built only one train ever ran over its tracks and it never opened to the public.

“The Lancaster and Hudson railroad was chartered on April 30, 1870. From the start, this railroad was beset with financial and managerial problems. Its purpose was to run from South Lancaster, through Bolton and on to Hudson. It is presumed that at the time of “railroad fever”, the citizens of Bolton were interested in improved transportation. Construction of the 8-3/4 miles of track was completed in 1872. Soon after, one train was run in 1873 to allow officials to look things over. Neither of the connecting railroads would exercise their lease agreement, and a lawsuit eventually lead to bankruptcy in 1874. Because of this, the railroad was to never officially open. In 1889, the rails were taken up (113 years ago).”*

"The Central Mass"

The Boston & Maine Railroad Historical Society, Inc., 2009

Open Space and Recreation Plan Area of Significance

The Taggart Parcel has been identified as a significant and priority parcel for at least the last 15 years. The Town of Bolton Open Space and Recreation Plan Updates from 2005 - Present OSRP 2017 establishes the area between Wilder Road and Forbush Mill Road as an area of significance to the town based on:

- The white pine forests and a larger area of unusual vegetation community within the framework of the mixed deciduous forest specific to the hemlock stands along Forbush Mill Road.
- The cultural and historic significance between Forbush Mill Road and Wilder Road. This was cited in the Shrewsbury Ridge Report as being of prime scenic importance in addition to the two old dam sites existing as remains of water-powered mills of colonial Bolton. This property was listed as a priority in the 2005 OSRP.
- Major scenic interest, prime agricultural soils, historic landmarks and a source of Forbush Mill Brook/Still River tributary.
- The important objective of protecting major wetland buffer acquisitions and protection of land near aquifers are top priorities for protecting water resources. Areas of town that would fit into this priority include aquifer recharge areas on the eastern and western borders of town, and the major hydrologic corridors in town, notably the Great Brook, Mill Brook, and the Forbush Mill systems.

<https://www.townofbolton.com/conservation-commission/pages/open-space-and-recreation-plan>

Municipal Vulnerability Mitigation

The Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness Program put in place by the Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs encourages nature-based solutions. Due to the historic flooding of the adjacent area it would be encouraging to seek ways that will reduce stress on the right of way and stormwater infrastructure. This project would be utilizing natural resources and pervious surfaces to manage inland flooding, erosion, and other storm damage. The Town retaining the property as a forested parcel will reduce ambient temperatures, provide shade, increase evapotranspiration, improve local air quality and otherwise provide cooling services within the municipality. This would be a nature-based storm-damage protection, drought mitigation, water quality and water infiltration technique. This would also address impacts of climate change such as extreme weather, damaging wind and power outages by acting as a barrier. This would achieve a resiliency objective of providing natural flood storage to reduce downstream flooding, in this case it also reduces flooding that would have adverse impacts to resource areas, historical structures and the Area of Critical Environmental Concern at the outlet of the cold-water fishery.