

McLean Parcel Background

The Council is being asked by the Land Management & Acquisitions Committee to consider the purchase of a ±37-acre parcel of undeveloped land off of Babbidge Road owned by the McLean family. The parcel is adjacent to the town's existing 375-acre North Falmouth Community Forest. [See attached maps.]

This parcel was once part of the historic Babbidge Farm. Stonewalls on the property bear witness to the land's past agricultural use and approximately 2-acres of the property have been maintained as grassland. The remaining acreage consists of early successional forest, a forest type that is increasingly rare in southern Maine. As such it represents a valuable habitat type for a wide variety of wildlife, including a number of species of concern and the endangered New England cottontail rabbit (NEC).

A ±0.5-acre, spring-fed farm pond, 10-12 feet deep and probably constructed in the 1950s, is located in the southeast corner of the property. A second, much smaller spring-fed pond can be found in the northwest corner. Other patches of forested wetlands can be found on the western and northeastern edge of the parcel. All of these wetlands contribute significantly to the habitat value of the property. Some invasive species, mostly bittersweet and multi-flora rose, can be found on the property, but their population levels are low enough that they can be easily controlled.

The acquisition includes a 60 ft. wide strip of land leading from Babbidge Road into the main portion of the property. A woods road continues from the end of this strip across the parcel and into the North Falmouth Community Forest. The town already has a right-of-way over this road; the acquisition would secure that right-of-way and give unfettered access into NFCF from Babbidge Road. This road also serves as a snowmobile trail, replacing a trail that was severed by the Spoodrift subdivision to the east.

A sale price of \$250,000 is being proposed, pending an appraisal. An option agreement has been drafted to limit the price to no more than \$290,000 (town would have an option to terminate the agreement if the appraisal is higher than \$290,000). The owner also has indicated that they want an option to terminate the agreement if the appraisal comes in less than \$250,000.

The property meets two primary goals the town has established in both its Comprehensive Plan and openspace plan:

1. It will help limit growth in the Rural Area and especially in this specific part of town, where any houses and streets built will be a great distance from existing town infrastructure (schools, public safety, public works, etc.) and thus be costly to serve.
2. It adds significant acreage to an existing large parcel of conservation land, preserving valuable habitat, enhancing recreational opportunities, and ameliorating the impact of development on the existing Forest that would otherwise result if this parcel were not acquired.

LMAC members have scored the property using their rating criteria. The result was among one of the highest rating scores any property in town has ever received. [Attached]

The cost of acquiring this property is *estimated* to be:

Land cost	\$250,000
Appraisals	3,000
Title Search	500
Title Insurance	1,000
Closing Costs	3,000
Survey	3,000
TOTAL =	\$260,500

50% of these cost might be recouped through a U.S. Forest Service Community Forest Grant. Proposal for the current funding cycle are due January 2017. [A similar grant was received to fund the four abutting NCF parcels.]

The owners are willing to condition the sale with the understanding that it will be premised on the ability of the town to raise at least 50% of the funding required through a grant. The Purchase & Sale agreement would include this condition, and the condition that the Council authorizes its acquisition once we know the status of the grant. A copy of a draft P&S agreement is included with this packet.

If interested in pursuing this acquisition, the Council will be asked to make three decisions:

1. Authorize staff to sign an option agreement with the before mentioned conditions.
2. Authorize submission of the U.S. Forest Service Community Forest Program grant, due on January 2017.
3. Authorize funds to pay for three due diligence activities prior to submission the grant submission: an appraisal, a metes & bounds survey, and a title search. Estimated cost is \$7,000. Proposals for acquisitions that have completed these steps score higher than those that don't, hence the desire to do these things before January.