



Broadmoor Wildlife Sanctuary

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Remarks on Article 28 Board of Selectmen meeting

I am Gail Yeo, Vice President for Wildlife Sanctuaries and Programs for Mass Audubon and I represent the private landowner of the house and land at 79 South Street referenced in Article 28 which is part of our Broadmoor Wildlife Sanctuary here in Natick.

We urge the selectmen not to support Article 28. The Town, through this Board, the Finance Committee and the town meeting should be aware this warrant article has been filed before management terms and conditions related to the article have been fully addressed and resolved.

I represent staff and board of Mass Audubon in saying that we are disappointed. We requested and expected to work collaboratively with the Town through the Sawin House Committee to identify a viable plan before a Warrant Article was presented at Town Meeting. Unfortunately, we have not yet seen a plan that is responsive to our written terms and conditions.

The 2015 Town Meeting voted to create a study committee to identify mechanisms to preserve the house in its current location in a manner coordinated with and complementary to the on-going program of the private landowner. Over the past year, and for the previous nine years, Mass Audubon, as that private landowner has dedicated staff and volunteer time and resources, communicated with individuals, non-profits, and the Town of Natick toward finding a resolution.

Regional Director, Andrea Lukens and Broadmoor Sanctuary Director Elissa Landre met with Sawin House Committee members Duane Houghton and Mike Marotta to discuss the process of the Committee's work and to discuss the terms and conditions under which Mass Audubon would consider transfer of the house. On November 23, 2016 following the first meeting, we sent a letter to the Committee outlining our requirements. We reiterated our desire to cooperate with the Committee as they worked toward a solution for the protection and management of the house. Our expectations were clearly stated: a plan approved by the Natick Town Meeting by the end of 2017. Then we would work with the Committee for an additional year to implement the agreed upon plan.

The BOS has copies of the detailed letters we sent following those meetings with the very specific goals and conditions.

While our in-person meetings were cordial and respectful, we were surprised and disappointed that the Committee moved ahead with filing a warrant article without adequate time for our participation or review and without adequate time to negotiate and respond to proposed terms and conditions of the transfer. The draft that we received in late August of suggested terms and conditions was not only incompatible with the guidelines and requirements we had previously articulated, but was shared with us after the Town Meeting warrant article for transfer to the Town had already been filed. Even now, seeing what has been presented to the BOS, this material was changed from what we were originally sent.

We continue to feel that it is essential before approval of a warrant article moving to transfer the ownership of the house and parcel of land to the Town of Natick or other entity that an understanding and assurance of acceptable compatible activities, management responsibilities, financial viability, and governance structure of any managing entity be clarified and agreed to by all parties.

Mass Audubon is a land trust dedicated to the important work of conservation and education to protect our environment. We take our land ownership very seriously and will only consider any transfer of land for a use that is compatible with our stewardship.

The Warrant Article and proposed terms and conditions shared with us in late August describe actions and activities that are inconsistent with our organizational mission to protect and steward the property as prime wildlife habitat and to provide environmental education that is compatible and in support of that mission.

We feel that we have not been treated in good faith as a private landowner in the Town of Natick. Therefore, in spite of our ongoing desire to identify a workable solution for the future of the Sawin House, we strongly urge you not to support Town Meeting Warrant Article 28.

Protecting the Nature of Massachusetts