

**South Natick Neighborhood Association  
Robert J. Awkward, Ph.D., Convener  
10 Philips Street, Natick, MA 01760  
Precinct 10 Town Meeting Member and Abutter to 22 Pleasant Street**

**Article 17 – Change Authority for Acquisition of 22 Pleasant Street**

Thank you for allowing me as the convener of the South Natick Neighborhood Association (SNNA) to provide you background as to why we filed Article 17 and to request your favorable vote; recognizing that this Article is in direct conflict to your role as Selectmen. Thus, we realize that you may not be able to support this Article. Nonetheless, we still appreciate your due consideration.

Our rationale for submitting this Article to the 2018 Fall Town Meeting is simple. We want the will of the Town of Natick as twice confirmed by its representative legislative body at the 2015 Spring Annual Town Meeting (Article 35) and the 2016 Spring Annual Town Meeting (Article 29).

Each of the major stakeholder organizations involved with park and recreation and open space land uses have voted twice to support the acquisition of 22 Pleasant Street:

- Recreation & Parks Commission
- Conservation Commission
- Planning Board
- Open Space Advisory Committee
- Finance Committee
- Natick Little League Baseball Executive Committee
- Over 1,200 Natick Citizens from all parts of Natick signed a petition
- Town Meeting

Thus, the question is not whether we should do this acquisition. The Town through its representative Town Meeting has clearly stated it wishes this acquisition to be executed. The question is not if there are contaminants on the property. We know there are contaminants on the property. The Letter of Intent to Purchase clearly states that the Town will not purchase this property if it is not cleaned to standards established by the Commonwealth of Massachusetts for land to be used as park and recreation by an independent assessment.

The Town Meeting made clear that they want the property to be purchased to obtain permanent access to the baseball fields; to increase open space for walking trails and nature watching; and space for recreational use such as baseball, boating, picnic areas, and playground space<sup>1</sup>.

This is prime property located next to the Charles River and surrounded by the Town's baseball fields. There is not going to be more riverfront property created or to be acquired. This is an once-in-a-lifetime opportunity. The last owner held this property for over 60 years! This opportunity won't come again in several generations if ever again.

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<sup>1</sup> The only playground space in South Natick is the Memorial Elementary School that is used most of the day by the elementary programs.

However, with all of that said, this process has taken far too long to be executed. There may be legitimate reasons for this, but as citizens, that is unclear to us. As a Town Meeting Member, it is equally unclear to me how the Town Meeting has twice voted for the executive branch to execute a vote of the legislative body and yet it is not been executed nor has there been any communication to the legislative body as to why it has not been executed nor what recommendations you have to get it executed, which may require additional legislative action.

Then, a breakthrough last week. You voted to hire two specialists to assist your efforts to acquire this property. This was commendable. However, why did this action just take place 3 ½ years after Town Meeting authorized this acquisition? The fact that SNNA attended the Board Meeting on August 6<sup>th</sup> and 20<sup>th</sup>, and that SNNA filed this Article and the recent Board actions seem to be more than serendipitous.

Our objective is clear. We want the acquisition of an appropriately cleaned 22 Pleasant Street to be completed. To that end, our request of Town Meeting to create a Moderator-appointed committee to subsume the role and responsibility of the Board of Selectmen was not made lightly. We recognize it is an unorthodox, yet legal approach. Quite frankly, we would be willing to consider No Action if we believed there was genuine commitment by the Board. However, grave questions of concern have yet to be answered.

- Is the Board really committed to acquiring this property? The 3 ½ years it has taken to get to this point does not inspire confidence. Moreover, requests as to whether or not the Town and the owner are even talking, and whether or not the conversation is positive, negative, or neither could easily be provided without divulging the nature of the negotiations one wit.
- Attached to the agenda for the August 6<sup>th</sup> Board meeting was a redacted email apparently requested by Selectmen Hickey from an environmental consultant that suggested why the Town shouldn't acquire the property. There was no new news in the letter. Why would the Board pursue such material 3 ½ years later unless the Board does not wish to fulfill its executive mandate? How many other communiques exist that suggest that the Board does not support the acquisition, and seeks to block its execution by whatever means necessary?
- It was stated at the Board meeting that the owner has accepted the offered terms. Was this acceptance in writing? If so, why wasn't a Purchase & Sale discussed at the meeting? By law, real estate transactions must be written to be valid. Further, was it done with the late Mr. Knott, Sr.? If yes, that is great. If not, does anyone else in the family have legal standing to negotiate with the Town for this property as the deed was listed in Mr. Knott Sr.'s name.

Thus, we have filed Article 17. The Town and the Town Meeting knows what it wants and we want 22 Pleasant Street to be acquired forthwith. If the Board of Selectmen cannot or chooses not, then it seems more than appropriate to create a separate body that can and will fulfill this mission within the parameters given by the Town Meeting. And, if the committee cannot, it is expected that the committee will come back to Town Meeting to so report, and make recommendation(s) for further action.

We hope you understand our motivation and understand that if at some point we believe that the Board is sincerely moving to execute this acquisition, we can request No Action. However, now is not yet that time.