



*Conservation, Collaboration, and Community since 1953*

1 May 2020

Anna Hueston, Chair  
Littleton Planning Board  
37 Shattuck Street, PO Box 1305  
Littleton, MA 01460

Re: Healy Corner Open Space, 195 Tahattawan Road

Dear Ms. Hueston and Members of the Planning Board:

I'm writing on behalf of Sudbury Valley Trustees, a member-supported, 501(c)3 nonprofit land trust that works in a 36-community region between Boston and Worcester. As of Spring 2020, SVT cares for more than 5300 acres on 91 reservations and 90 Conservation Restrictions, and we maintain more than 65 miles of trails. Since our inception, we have assisted other organizations and governmental agencies in protecting an additional 3000 acres in the region. In Littleton, SVT holds a Conservation Restriction (CR) on property at 206 Foster Street and manages the relatively new Smith Conservation Area on Whitcomb Avenue.

Sudbury Valley Trustees has been asked to consider holding two conservation restrictions (CR's) as part of the proposed Healy Corner Open Space Subdivision project. I have been following the Planning Board's recent discussions about the project and our staff has had an opportunity to visit the property. Based on our experience and observations, I offer the following comments to the Board.

The Healy Corner property includes some wonderfully diverse woodland, featuring American beech, yellow birch, and spicebush among the more typical white pines and white and red oak. A matrix of wetland and upland throughout the site provides for a variety of habitat types, and the rear of the property appears relatively free of invasive plant species. Its location within a complex of existing conservation land makes it an important ecological link, as well, adding to the nearly 200 acres of adjacent protected property.

The current development proposal offers valuable passive recreation benefits, though we would like to see the location of the trail specifically located on plans. Given the extent of wetlands on the property, boardwalks or bog bridges may be required in certain places, and we understand that the trail will likely cross Lot 15 where it's not feasible to locate it on Parcel A. We recommend a perpetual, recorded trail easement to guarantee public access for passive recreation into the future. This is particularly important because of the potential for this property to be part of a commuter trail connecting residential neighborhoods with the trail station, a vision we applaud.

It is unusual, in our experience, to have the open space in such a subdivision be in private ownership, other than in the case of a Homeowners' Association. It is always our preference to have such open space put

under the care and control of a local Conservation Commission or granted to a land trust. However, if the Board approves the current proposal, with much of the open space contained in Lot 15 and in private ownership, the terms of the Conservation Restriction will be key in preserving the public benefit. The proposed trail will offer a rich and rewarding natural experience for visitors as long as the uses reserved on Lot 15 limit clearing and adequately protect the integrity of the natural setting. We recommend that the terms of the CR be negotiated at least in principal, if not in final form, prior to the issuance of a special permit. SVT stands ready to assist with the CR terms and any other steps that will optimize and enhance the conservation benefits associated with this project.

This is a beautiful property in an ideal location for conservation, and we hope that the Board and the Proponents can reach a compromise that adequately protects the site's natural resources while fulfilling the goals of the Town's Open Space Development bylaw.

Sincerely,



Christa Collins  
Director of Land Protection