



Town of Needham, Massachusetts Media Release

Office of the Town Manager
Town Hall, 1471 Highland Ave, Needham, MA 02492

FOR IMMEDIATE RELEASE

Wednesday, November 8, 2023

CONTACT

Amy Haelsen

ahaelsen@needhamma.gov

(781) 514-0498

Plans to Rezone Portion of Foster Property Put on Hold

Town is Notified Property is Under Contract with New Buyer

NEEDHAM – Wednesday, November 8, 2023 – The Town of Needham has released the following statement:

Choate Hall & Stewart LLP, counsel to the Foster Trust, notified Town Counsel and Northland Residential by separate emails dated November 7, 2023, that the Foster property is no longer on the market. It appears that the Foster property has been placed under contract with a new buyer, whose identity has not been disclosed to the Town yet.

Until such time as the new buyer's plans for the property are better understood, the Select Board's efforts to advance the zoning amendment outlined in Article 16 of the October 30, 2023, Special Town Meeting will be placed on hold.

The Select Board remains committed to working with the eventual buyer of this property to preserve as much of the land as is possible and will engage the new buyer in discussion to that effect at the earliest opportunity.

A vote at the October 2022 Special Town Meeting authorized the Select Board to purchase approximately 34 acres of the privately owned property known as Castle Farm from the Foster Estate for \$2.5 million. The land purchase was part of an agreement with Northland Residential that would have provided public access to the Charles River, walking trails, and recreational opportunities.

The proposal was for a developer to build a 70-unit cluster of townhouses on approximately 14 acres of the site, with four units (5%) affordable. A key component of the plan was to cluster residential development within a limited footprint to maintain an additional 14 acres of buffer around the

residential construction and to preserve the remaining 34 acres untouched by development or construction.

Before presenting the project to Town Meeting in October 2022, both the Town and the developer received confirmation from the state's Executive Office of Housing and Livable Communities (EOHLC) that its Local Initiative Program (LIP) application with 5% affordability would be eligible for approval. In the Spring of 2023, EOHLC informed the Town that it will not issue a project eligibility letter for a LIP project containing fewer than 25% of the units as affordable. In response, Northland Residential stated that a project containing 25% affordability (from 4 to 18 units) without a reduction in the purchase price or an increase in the number of market rate units renders the project economically infeasible.

At the October 30, 2023 Special Town Meeting, Town Meeting members voted in favor of a non-binding resolution proposed by the Select Board to support the concept of amending the Town's Zoning By-Laws to allow for clustered development of a portion of the Foster Property permitting 70 townhome housing units, of which at least 5% would be affordable. As a result, the Select Board had begun the process to request that the Planning Board move forward with proposing a Zoning By-Law change for the May 2024 Annual Town Meeting.

"This is disappointing news for the Town," said Marianne Cooley, Chair of the Select Board. "The purchase of the Foster property presented a unique opportunity for the Town to preserve more open space for our residents and to protect this land now and for generations to come through Town ownership. We remain hopeful that we can engage with the new buyer to acquire a portion of the property for the Town," said Cooley.

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