

October 12, 2010

To: The Yorktown Town Board
From: Advisory Committee on Open Space, (ACOS)
Re: Croton Heights Rd. Auction Parcels

This report has been prepared for the Yorktown Town Board by the Town of Yorktown's Advisory Committee on Open Space, (ACOS). It has been issued in response to a request from the Town Board to review 2 town owned parcels of land on Croton Heights Road that were part of a land auction conducted by the Town on September 29, 2010. Five members of ACOS, John Settembrino, Walt Daniels, Phyllis Bock, Paul Moskowitz, and John Schroeder conducted a site visit along with members of the Town's Conservation Advisory Board and Councilman Nick Bianco, the ACOS liaison to the Town Board on October 10, 2010 at 9am. For the purposes of clarity the lots in question shall be identified as follows:

- Auction lot 8 is located at 586 Croton Heights Road and its town parcel id number is 48.18-2-37.
- Auction lot 9 is located at 566 Croton Heights Road and its town parcel id number is 48.18-2-39.
- The privately owned lot between the 2 auction lots is located at 576 Croton Heights Road and its town parcel id number is 48.18-2-38.

We will refer to each lot by its town auction lot number or as privately owned.

ACOS evaluated auction lots 8 and 9 as well as the privately owned parcel located between the 2 town owned lots. We used the Town's Natural Resources Inventory maps, the "Biodiversity Conservation Study" (by Stearns and Wheler) and "The Croton-to Highlands Biodiversity Study" (by the Metropolitan Conservation Alliance) in preparing this report. The ACOS report includes photographs and a copy of the completed Open Space Evaluation Survey. The following includes our comments and conclusions.

- The 3 lots are part of a larger wetland system that extends beyond the lot's boundaries. The wetlands are mapped on the Town's Natural Resources Inventory. They indicate that auction lot 9 is 95% wetlands, auction lot 8 is 35% wetlands and the private lot is 80% wetlands. Our site visit confirmed these percentages.
- Auction lot 8 and the private lot contain considerable expanses of exposed ledge rock consisting of a Manhattan formation of Shistose Gneiss as mapped by the Natural Resources Inventory.
- Portions of auction lot 8 exceed a grade of 15% as mapped by the Natural Resources Inventory.
- All 3 lots consist of Charlton/Chadfield soils which are upland soils shallow in depth (less than 6 feet) to bedrock and water tables. They are highly erodible top soils.
- The Natural Resources Inventory categorizes these 3 lots as having very severe environmental constraints.

- The 3 lots are known to support box turtles and nesting cooper hawks as well as a healthy complete habitat for amphibians.
- This area is also part of a larger wildlife corridor that supports healthy biodiversity.
- Auction lot 8 and the private lot contain a mature Norway Spruce Forest that would be decimated or eliminated by development.

Based on our observations and subsequent evaluations we offer the following conclusions and recommendations. There is justification to preserve these parcels of land as open space. Their wetland functions, wildlife habitat and environmental constraints demand as much. Our evaluations indicated a high rating for a high density area (1 acre zoning or less). It is in fact one of the highest ratings we have given to high density area properties. (See the Land Evaluation Survey.) The value of preserving the 2 auction lots alone would be diminished by allowing the private lot to be developed due to the effects of fragmentation. We also see the potential for exacerbating already existing road and residential property flooding problems if the wetlands are compromised.

Therefore, we propose that the Town of Yorktown reject the bids and retain ownership of the 2 auction properties. They should then proceed with efforts to acquire the privately owned lot. This can be accomplished by way of donation or by purchase through the Open Space fund or Open Space bond. The acquisition and retention of the 3 lots should then be dedicated as parkland.

Additionally, the Town should explore whether the Verizon Telephone equipment located along Spring Drive on auction lot 9 should generate revenue for the Town. Any potential revenue would be lost if the lot were to be privately held. Revenue from Verizon could offset any loss of tax revenue.

Finally, we are of the opinion that the Town of Yorktown should not be in the business of selling wetland properties. Their functions are too important to be left to the whims of private development. Their only true protection comes by way of Town ownership.

Respectfully submitted,

Advisory Committee on Open Space
John Settembrino, Co-chair
Walt Daniels, Co-chair

