

DATE: March 9, 2005  
TO: Land Use Study Committee  
FROM: Elaine Lazarus, Planning Director  
RE: **Weston Nurseries Land**

The Committee has asked me for my professional opinion regarding the developability of the portions of land for sale by Weston Nurseries, the various uses to which the land might be put, and commentary as to desirable and undesirable outcomes. Please note that this memo is written without detailed knowledge of the parcels and without visiting the land. My information has been obtained from materials and maps available to me at Town Hall. This is also a preliminary assessment based on what I know now – my ideas may change as things progress.

As you know, there are three areas of the land for sale, totaling about 615 acres. In looking at the areas again and trying to match them with Assessors Map parcels, it seems as though the offering also indicates some of the land currently owned by Carol Dodson Spengler at 43 East Main St. This parcel is indicated on the map showing the land for sale as “B”.

#### North Parcels

Parcels A and B are located on the north side of East Main St. and two sections of A are connected via a potential roadway around the edge of the natural gas facility. These parcels have frontage on Wilson St. and East Main St. in Hopkinton. The land extends into Ashland. The surrounding land is in a variety of uses, including undeveloped, residential, the natural gas facility, the new Ashland town well located directly north of the parcels, and Hopkinton State Park. Wilson Street is a designated scenic road from East Main St. to Rafferty Rd. only. The parcels would also presumably have access to Frankland Rd. and East Main St. via a potential roadway shown on the plan which would enter East Main St. at or near the Clinton St. intersection. Two small areas of permanent open space abut the parcel to the east and to the southwest, owned by the Hopkinton Area Land Trust. The natural gas pipeline runs through the property.

This area seems to have some surface water, much of which has probably been channeled over the years into man-made areas. Most of the land appears to be upland, although the presence of some water indicates that care should be taken relative to development of those areas. While much of the land for sale is open field, there are wooded areas near Wilson St. and on the north near the Ashland line.

Other potential development in the immediate area at the present time is limited to a multi-family development on land between Wilson St. and Cedar St., where a developer is working on plans for 16 to 30 condominiums.

If the land is suitable and large enough, this area might be best suited for a golf course, a mixed use (commercial/residential) development, or non-residential development. Because of the proximity of the natural gas facility, this area is less desirable for residential use. Wilson Street,

between Rafferty Rd. and East Main St., is a designated scenic road and should not be considered for widening, and traffic in and out of the development site should be oriented to the north (to Ashland), to Rafferty Rd., or to East Main St. Because this area is physically separate from neighboring areas and is less visible, it would lend itself better to a more self-contained type of development (i.e. office park, golf course, conference center, etc.). It would not be easy to visually or physically tie this area to a surrounding area or to downtown.

This area should contain the following along with any development:

- A trail system that links nearby trails to complete a loop, in accordance with the “Green Necklace” plan prepared by the Hopkinton Area Land Trust.
- Permanent open space which is oriented to connect to existing open space if possible and/or to preserve views into the site and protect significant features.
- Protection to the Ashland town well and Hopkinton Reservoir.

### South Parcels

This area of the property is more flat and appears to contain more potential wetland. The old railroad bed runs through the property, and the Assessors records indicate that some of it is owned by a third party. The property offered would have access to East Main St. near the Frankland Rd. intersection and Clinton St. There is a potential municipal well behind Alprilla Farm Rd. and Wyman Lane, and the Town owns land in this area. Most of the abutting land is in residential use, with some town-owned land and permanent open space.

There is no other proposed residential development in this area at the present time, with the exception of new single family lots on the Braim property off Front St. and South Mill St., and the swimming pool facility at the YMCA.

This area would be more suited to a small-scale mixed-use commercial and residential development, as long as the density and design is consistent with the surrounding neighborhoods. Buildings should be of a residential scale and the commercial component should be geared to providing an amenity for residents and enhancing, not detracting from downtown. Since this area is relatively flat, it is also probably the best place for a school and athletic fields (as opposed to the north side), and Clinton St. and East Main St. are better roads than Wilson St. for this purpose. Curtis Road should not be extended to serve the new development. A new road for this purpose should be constructed to serve new development that meets the necessary design standards.

The area should contain the following along with any development:

- A trail system that links to nearby open space areas.
- Permanent open space that connects to existing open space.
- Protection to the potential municipal well.
- Buffers to existing residential neighborhoods. Most vulnerable is the Curtis Rd./Linden St. neighborhood and homes on Clinton St.

### Residential Development

There is currently significant interest in constructing multi-family development in Hopkinton, both age-restricted and non-restricted. Any proposed residential construction on the Weston

Nurseries property will likely contain a multi-family component, because of the current market. However, if the Town wants to remain a predominantly single family community, only a portion of the Weston Nurseries property should be developed in that manner, and it should be carefully designed and screened from surrounding single family neighborhoods. There are 164 units (including 96 age-restricted) on plans currently approved but not constructed yet. Some of these will be coming on line in 2005 and 2006 as construction begins in 2005. The Planning Board has received two applications for an additional 64 units, and there are three other locations of which I am aware where people are actively working on preparing plans for submission. Multi-family housing will also be developed on the Town's Fruit Street property. Therefore, any residential development at Weston Nurseries needs to be looked at in context with other existing and proposed residential development.

Any residential development on the property should also contain an affordable housing component, meeting the requirements of MGL c.40B with regard to income levels. If it doesn't, then the Town's percentage of affordable housing will not progress toward the 10% goal (the Town's percentage recently increased from 2.9% to 3.65%). The Town also has a Planned Production Plan approved by the Mass. Dept. of Housing and Community Development, and must try to produce at least 50 units of affordable housing a year in order to keep pace with that plan. The Town should include some affordable housing in any list of desirable uses on the property, both to meet that goal and existing housing needs. The Town's housing needs were outlined in the Housing Plan, completed in 2004.

#### Commercial Development

I don't believe the Town has desired large retail or "big box" retail centers in the past, and I am assuming this hasn't changed. Any commercial development proposed for the Weston Nurseries site should be planned so as not to detract from the revitalization of downtown, which should remain as a key goal for the Town. Perhaps a developer could be asked to invest in downtown as part of any proposal. Commercial development on Weston Nurseries could consist of convenience-type small shops and amenities for new and existing residents of Hopkinton and Ashland. Locating it on Wilson St. would be too out-of-the-way, so it would be best off East Main St. It could also have a Boston Marathon tie-in as well. If there is a market for office park development in the area, it would be best suited for the parcel off Wilson St. and the Ashland line, as it would impact fewer residential areas.

#### Open Space

Any new zoning bylaws drafted to allow new types of development in this area should contain an open space requirement. The new open space should be linked to existing open space and create greenbelts where possible. One of the major goals of the Open Space and Recreation Plan is to create a bike path in Town, and if one can be provided along with development here, that would be highly beneficial. It is conceivable that an off-road trail could be provided through the south parcels to the center of Town via new open space and existing town-owned land. This would be an asset to residents.

#### Goals/Summary

- No sprawl – compact, neighborhood designs with open space component.
- Trails that connect to other trails.

- School and athletic fields off Clinton St. or East Main St.
- Mixed use development – not all one type of development on the whole property.
- Affordable housing component.
- Enhance downtown/contribute to downtown revitalization.
- Amenities for residents.
- Buffers to residential neighborhoods.