

I am here because I had the opportunity to watch the Advisory Board meeting and I was surprised to see that there was a pseudo Select Board meeting. I was unaware that there were going to be comments beyond the Select Board article and citizen petition sponsor.

I could not have been more surprised when I saw Mr. Graham presenting in his capacity as a Select Board member providing a “dissenting” point of view. Because his plan, his agenda, failed to pass by the “slimmest of margins” 3-2.

It is interesting that Mr. Graham now views a 3-2 vote as the slimmest of margins and that the minority position needs a voice and consideration. Mr. Graham was not so considerate of the 3-2 minority position when the votes to support the voters who had 2/3rds majority were in the minority and he had the 3 votes.

I’m also taken aback by the passion of the Advisory Board chair for two competing articles by the Select Board. She demonstrated zero interest in such an approach when she was one of the chief advocates for the 26 rental apartments (54 bedrooms) 3-story, 3-building complex.

The hypocrisy is rich but not surprising.

Mr. Graham brought up my name again during his remarks at the Advisory Board meeting. My conversations and exchanges with Mr. Graham have led me to determine he is untrustworthy which is why I believe further communication with him would not be productive. By way of example,

- He committed to more than 20 residents that he supported the transfer..until after the vote was secured.
- He said for months that the procurement of the architect complied with the state procurement law which after repeated communications with him, he finally admitted that it did not. Misleading the public for months.
- He had a 20-minute rant violating open meeting law attacking a resident and neighborhood.
- Worked behind the backs of the SB members and abutters when he was working with a developer on a 40B at West End
- Working as a lone wolf on his own plan apparently with an engineer even though the SB voted to advance a different path.

- This was incredibly surprising given that town Attorney Galvin committed in court proceedings that are reflected in the transcripts that the town would do nothing on the Wildcat while the suit was underway.

The recent discussions are being held as if there is no history. The discussion already happened in 2021. The residents turned out in record numbers and they voted. They told the Select Board in no uncertain terms what they wanted to happen with these parcels. And at the time of the Vote Mr. Graham said he supported the transfer. Another fact is that those opposing the transfer don't like to acknowledge that the transfer had widespread support. There were signs all over town. There were 297 votes in favor of the transfer. Almost as many votes FOR the article as there are in total town meeting attendance for article votes that you accept. This was not two people, or one neighborhood as they like to characterize. If every single eligible voter for the "neighborhood" turned out, which doesn't happen, it doesn't get the "neighborhood" to a third of that vote total. So once again the story that is told doesn't align with the facts.

In terms of the intensity of the discussion:

I invite anyone to go back and watch the video of those discussions and see where the vitriol came from. The pro-article 26 supporters were called NIMBY's,

One select board member even cursed at a resident during open meeting, as recently as the last Select Board and the AB meeting it was said "They" were "Bussed in" – were the voters bussed in to support the Town Hall acquisition after it failed during the special town meeting?,

Referred as "these" people,

And as a "Special interest group" I guess every person that shows up to vote for or against something could be considered a special interest group but there is no more of a special interest group than the signatories of the citizen's petition.

Now the argument for why not transfer is financial. :

The agenda for opposing the demonstrated, not hypothetical, will of the voters changes to suit the needs of those who oppose the transfer and advance their personal agenda. So the shift is that the town is in dire need of funds and these parcels are the solution.

The town approved a Public works facility – The price tag from public officials for the voters to consider at the vote was \$5M now its significantly over budget and additional funds had to be approved.

A Town Hall - Commitment from town officials for the voters to consider at the vote was \$5M all in and now seeking a \$1M increase over budget all although in all the discussions on this topic that I have watched a total roll up cost has never been presented or asked for.

And When Mr. Graham was the Chair he had no issue committing \$50K to hold the Town Hall property until the Annual Town meeting vote was held. If the article was voted down as it was during the special meeting vote then that money would have been lost.

The offer on St Helens was made it was for \$250K over the next highest bidder. Not \$5,000 dollars, not 50K, a quarter of a million dollars.

And after listening to some of the presentations for the upcoming budget I could continue the list. And there is no transparency. You cant find any information on what the original approved budget and schedule were and where projects, budgets and spending stands.

This doesn't sound like the fiscal behavior of a town that is going to be in dire straits if these two parcels aren't transferred to conservation like the citizens voted for.

Further, these parcels were going to be given away to the developer for free when they had the plan for a 3 building apartment complex.

Mr. Mauch quoted the SJC and said the neighboring area homes have increased values because of the conservation land. He said it increase home values – so if Mr. Grahams, I mean Mr. Mauchs, petition passes will there be a 20% decrease in the property assessments for the homes in the area?

Ballot question.

Regarding the ballot question, even based on Mr. Mauch reasoning, it is intended to stifle discussion and provide just another avenue for those opposing the transfer to get their desired outcome.

There have been more than 170 articles that have been passed and the Select Board accepted the vote on every single one of them except this one. This feels punitive.

When purchasing a new town hall failed at the special town meeting there was no need for a ballot question. And, in fact, Mr. Graham is quoted in the Patriot Ledger saying he was optimistic that it would pass at the Annual Town meeting which was “more representative” of the sentiment of the voters. So, somehow a meeting that had 344 voters was representative enough for Mr. Graham and for some on the Select Board to accept that vote but a meeting that had almost 550 voters was not representative enough and the Select Board chose not to implement the vote of the residents. And we wonder why trust is low and civic participation is anemic. You are telling the voters they don’t matter, and you will **“work”** the system, spend tax payers money to litigate against their own vote, or wear them out to implement your agenda no matter how they vote.

As an example the goal posts on the transfer have continually been moved:

First it was you need a 2/3rds super majority – that was achieved

Then it was go get a vote to see if ConComm will even accept the land – That was unanimous with one abstaining.

Then it was the Select Board wants to hear directly from the Conservation Commission at a public select board meeting. ConComm appeared. Gave a detailed presentation explaining specifically why these parcels were 1. In complete alignment with their objectives for conservation and the Open Space and Recreation Plan. 2. Specially why these two parcels as opposed to other parcels in town made the most sense for transfer to conservation.

Public trust

Where is the responsibility to the public trust? The voters get commitments from our town officials that are not followed through. Whether that be the cost of projects in articles we are asked to vote on or commitments to support the will of the residents if they successfully get the vote.

The most transparent way to move this forward would have been to have a clean vote on one select board article. And concerning any animosity regarding those that are for the transfer and those that oppose that would have been long behind us if Mr. Graham honored his word and supported the 2/3rds super majority of Annual Town Meeting voters. Unfortunately, like our national politics, it appears that expecting a politician to honor their word, have integrity, and follow through with their commitment is too much to ask.