

PROJECT DESCRIPTION

Property Description

The 17-acre Plaza property is located in the Atkins Watershed, approximately 2.2 miles upstream of the Atkins Reservoir in Shutesbury. Atkins Reservoir supplies approximately one-third of Amherst's drinking water. Several surface water bodies are located on the property. One stream flows westerly through the northern portion of the property and drains into the Baker Reservoir, located approximately 250 feet west/northwest of the property. A second stream flows southwest across the southeast corner of the property, a third flows northwest across the southwest corner of the property, and a pond is located near the southwest corner of the property. These features are shown on the attached Watershed and Drinking Water Supply Protection Areas maps. It should be noted that the MassGIS-defined Zone A does not include all of the tributaries that Amherst has identified in the watershed. As a result, the areas within 200 feet of the surface water bodies on the property are within the Zone A, even though they have not been designated as such in the MassGIS. Field observations and mapping information indicate surface waters on the property comprise parts of tributaries or associated water bodies to the Atkins Reservoir.

The property is surrounded by valuable natural resources. As shown on the attached MassGIS map, one potential vernal pool is located on the property, and numerous certified and potential vernal pools are located within approximately 5,000 feet of the property. In addition, BioMap Core Habitat and Living Waters Critical Supporting Watersheds are located less than 1,500 feet west and 3,000 feet south of the property, respectively. The close proximity of these resource areas indicates a strong likelihood that biodiversity elements of these areas are also located on the Plaza property.

As described below, the current owners are motivated to sell the property, and they have initiated plans for residential development of the parcel. The relatively high water table on the parcel and lack of public infrastructure (municipal water and sewer services) in the area make preserving this parcel a high priority to help maintain the high water quality of Amherst's drinking water supply.

Water Conservation, Resource Planning, and Management Measures

Amherst performs a variety of water conservation, resource planning, and management measures to ensure the long-term availability of safe water in sufficient quantities.

Water conservation work is performed in accordance with Amherst's Water Management Act Permit. This work includes meeting Unaccounted for Water standards, conducting leak-detection surveys, replacing non-water-saving fixtures in Amherst-owned buildings, and performing outreach and education. The goal of this work is to help maintain the long-term sustainability of Amherst's drinking water supply.

Resource planning is performed through land acquisition and careful management of watershed land holdings. Amherst currently owns approximately 21% of the Atkins watershed. Both the Amherst Master Plan and the Open Space and Recreation Plan support the acquisition of land to protect drinking water quality in Amherst. The Master Plan specifies that Amherst should identify and protect lands that buffer significant water resources, including surface waters, through the use of conservation tools such as property acquisition. The Open Space and Recreation Plan stresses the importance of protecting Amherst's drinking water supplies, and indicates land preservation efforts should focus on watershed lands that supply Amherst's drinking water. Copies of the relevant portions of these plans are attached.

The attached USGS topographic map shows land owned by Amherst and W.D. Cowls, Inc. Land Company in the vicinity of the Plaza property. These lands are considered public or quasi-public. As indicated, Amherst owns a

relatively large tract of land located west of the Plaza property, across West Pelham Road, but does not own properties east of West Pelham Road. Acquiring the Plaza property would be the first step to obtaining property ownership in the area east of West Pelham Road. After acquisition of this parcel, Amherst plans to reach out to property owners in the vicinity in order to expand its holdings in this area.

Watershed forests are managed by the Amherst Department of Public Works (DPW) and Conservation Department. The Conservation Department Land Manager works directly with Amherst DPW personnel to perform forest maintenance work in accordance with the Watershed Forest Management Plan (described below).

Threat of Development

The current owners are motivated to sell the property, and they have explored the option of subdividing the property into two house lots. To this end, they have hired consultants to perform wetlands delineation and percolation tests, and they have also had the parcel partially logged in preparation for potential development. Although the water table in this area is relatively high, the owners indicated percolation tests performed on both potential house lots meet Title V requirements. A survey plan of the property prepared by an environmental consultant is attached. As indicated, there is sufficient frontage for two house lots. The plan shows that, although wetlands on the property may present challenges for development, the property is clearly developable for residential use.

According to the Amherst's Public Water Supply Protection Plan, residential development can present multiple threats to the watershed. Identified threats include on-site septic systems; untreated stormwater runoff; uncontained/improper storage/handling of fertilizers, pesticides, and paints; home heating fuels; domestic animals; new construction; and aboveground storage tanks. These threats illustrate the importance of protecting this property from future residential development.

Proposed Uses

The Town of Amherst proposes to use this property in a manner consistent with local and state regulations. Public access will be permitted as allowed by DEP and applicable watershed protection regulations.

Property Management and Vegetative Cover

The property consists of forested woodland and wooded swamp areas. A variety of trees and other vegetative species are located on the property. Types of trees include deciduous trees such as oak, red maple, birch, cherry, and ash; as well as coniferous trees like hemlocks and white pines. Other vegetative species on the property include mountain laurel and ferns.

The property was partially logged in early 2011 in preparation for potential future development. The logging was performed as regeneration cutting, with seed trees left in the logged area to promote regeneration. After acquisition, the property will be incorporated into Amherst's Watershed Forest Management Plan. Tree harvesting will be performed in accordance with the goals of this plan, which are to maintain healthy forests by improving hardwood and softwood regeneration, provide more growing space for valuable species, prevent erosion, and limit the spread of invasive species; the ultimate goal is to protect the high water quality of Amherst's drinking water supply.

Project Schedule

Discussions with Landowner and preparation of Purchase and Sale agreement	March 2011-present
Town Meeting vote authorizing expenditures	November, 2011
Purchase of property (estimated)	February, 2012