

December 15,2016

P.O. Box 119
401 Middle Road
Chilmark, Massachusetts 02535-0119
Dear Chairman Doty and Members of the Board:

We are writing with regard to our recent meeting with the Board and also in response to some of the coverage that was subsequently provided by the local press. We appreciate the Board's commitment of the time required for our meeting and we also appreciate the years of effort that the Board has dedicated to searching for a public safety site that can serve the residents in the future. Having heard all of the facts and ideas that were shared during our meeting, we understand that the Board has a challenging task but we hope and believe that there is a solution acceptable to all involved. Larry Beals' research and excellent plan were presented as an option that seems to make a lot of sense. The plan was created with the assumption that the Carroll property was available as we had been told only that the fire chief didn't think it was "adequate."

We are grateful to the Board for listening to our concerns regarding the Windy Gates property and for also considering our concept plan for an alternative site that appears to be better suited for a public safety building. At our own significant expense, we engaged a highly reputable land planning firm to examine the suitability of Windy Gates and we learned a lot from that effort. We have discovered that the portion of Windy Gates that is being considered by the Board has some environmental constraints such as wetlands, river zones, rare and endangered species habitat, well-head protection areas for the Town's facilities, and a significant stand of old-growth oak trees that create a unique habitat and ecosystem. In addition, losing our access and frontage along South Road would substantially reduce the value of the entire Windy Gates property.

As part of our planning effort, we also reexamined the Carroll property that the Town had previously considered but concluded that it had functional problems. We asked our land planner to consider that site in combination with the adjacent Town Hall property to determine if there was some way to solve the issues that had been identified as constraints and to also create a site plan that is better suited from a community planning perspective. To communicate our findings, we shared a comprehensive PowerPoint presentation with 17 slides containing facts and illustrations. We were encouraged by the ensuing discussion with Chief Norton regarding various aspects of the site plan that we prepared and presented.

Even though no one from the press attended our meeting, subsequent articles about our meeting were published in the town newspapers. Having read the articles about our meeting, I want to share with you our disappointment on how the meeting was portrayed in the Times. We are hoping that the article does not represent how the Board of Selectmen viewed the meeting. We met with the Board to facilitate better communication and to explore some options that might help protect the resources on my property. Our efforts to that end were productive, the discussion during the meeting was informative, and we left the Town Hall feeling that the face-to-face communication along with our earnest effort to solve some site planning issues was of benefit to everyone seated around the table. We are concerned that the reporting by the press created a different perspective. Perhaps this is because no reporter was present at the meeting and did not have the benefit of viewing all of the plans and information that was presented.

As an example of our disappointment, the headline for the article states; "Property owner Helen Benham discourages use of her property" which is quite negative and it does not accurately describe the purpose of the meeting. A more truthful headline would have stated: "In an effort to protect the natural resources on her property, Helen Benham, presented an alternative site plan that solved a number of issues for a property previously recommended by the Town".

Unfortunately, no one from the press contacted me, my son, or our advisor so the article was drafted without any of our information. We are hoping that the article is nothing more than a reporter trying to sensationalize a meeting that she did not attend. It is clear from her writing that it is not possible to accurately portray a meeting by listening to a tape recording instead of actually attending and viewing the PowerPoint images included in the presentation.

I want to emphasize that we appreciate the opportunity to have an open dialogue with the Board and we hope that opportunity continues in a productive manner. We also hope that you share our perspective of the meeting and not the perspective of what was written in the article.

Thank you very much.

Sincerely,
Helen Benham

cc. Edie Prescott, MV Times