

River Point Background

As you know from previous discussions, River Point has been identified as a unique, high priority open space property, already in town ownership. A working group has considered various options for the property and has recommended a comprehensive management plan to the open space subcommittee. That subcommittee has endorsed that plan, as has the Conservation Commission. The plan addresses four key priorities: (1) wildlife habitat; (2) recreation; (3) historical significance; and (4) agriculture. We are asking the Council to adopt this plan at its October 14th meeting.

Concomitantly, there are two opportunities to secure state funding for the implementation of key parts of this plan. The first is a Department of Conservation Recreational Grant Program competition that would provide funds for construction of a pedestrian suspension bridge across the West Branch of the Piscataqua River and a wildlife observation platform overlooking a small pond. The bridge will allow an extension of the River Point trails – already constructed by the Falmouth Conservation Corps – with new trails to be constructed on the abutting Adam parcel. The latter trails would be across property protected by Falmouth Land Trust easement that allows for public access. Bridge and observation platform construction will be done by Falmouth Conservation Corps volunteers. The grant will cover the cost of materials and engineering design. Eventually, this trail will extend all the way to the Rines Forest in Cumberland and include several ancillary loop trails.

The second opportunity is more complicated. Maine voters recently approved a \$5 million bond for riverfront development and grants for that purpose are now being awarded by the Department of Economic & Community Development. We have cleared the first hurdle and have been invited to submit a final proposal for a project that would provide \$160,000 toward the replacement of the railroad bridge that accesses the River Point property.

This program has a rigorous match requirement, with each state dollar to be matched by two local dollars. 25% of the local match can be with in-kind dollars, the rest in hard cash. The deadline for proposal submission is October 24th and a firm commitment is required from the applicant regarding the match money. [DECD is aware that this request is entirely out of sync with the normal budgeting process in most towns, but say they are forced by the language of the authorizing legislation to stick to this schedule.]

In our case, we could proposal for a \$494,000 project, as follows:

State grant funds	\$160,000
In-kind funds	\$29,500
Secured or spent funds	27,500
New funds	<u>267,000</u>
	\$494,000

To get the \$160,000 grant, the Council would have to allocate \$267,000 toward this project. Most of this we could reasonably expect to recover through sale of the house to our anticipated farmer and \$29,000 in a Recreation Grant.

The railroad bridge will have to be replaced at some point in the future, at a cost surely greater than the \$260,000 current cost. Drawing on town reserve funds now would allow the town to accomplish a number of different management objectives for the property for less than the future cost of replacing the bridge entirely with town money.

The decisions for Tuesday night boil down to these:

1. Approve the River Point management plan?
2. Go on record to vote a supplementary appropriation for \$267,000 for key elements of that plan, including bridge replacement? (Only to be spent if we get this grant.)