

*Burlington Union*

## **Town Meeting agrees to committee to look at future of 247-acre parcel**

**By Arthur Katz/Correspondent**

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BURLINGTON - Town officials and residents got through 12 of the 54 articles at the annual Town Meeting Monday night, with discussion of the “land-locked parcel” taking nearly half of the three and one-half hour session.

Article 8 called for the “Appointment of Town Meeting Committee and Subcommittee of Board of Selectmen” to have a discussion and “expression of views” about the future of the 247-acre site across Route 3 from Northwest Park and the Sun Microsystems site.

Burlington took the property by eminent domain more than 20 years ago to prevent commercial development. The town has nearly finished paying the bonding of \$8.2 million, plus interest, the price negotiated with the original owners. In approximately two years, the town will have the opportunity to dispose of the land if it so wishes, subject to a two-thirds vote of Town Meeting and a two-thirds vote of the Massachusetts State Legislature.

The latter is necessary because use of the property was restricted, under the terms of the purchase, to open space, despite the current zoning as commercial land.

The right of first refusal on any transaction involving the land-locked parcel currently rests with Patriot Partners. Robert Buckley, attorney for the developers of Wayside Common, said, “We are asking for a committee to meet with us and open a dialogue about the property, and what the town wants to do with it.

“We have an interest in developing the site, and we have some ideas about it,” he added. “However, it is clearly up to the town to decide on a course of action.”

Buckley said Patriot Partners would be willing to underwrite the costs of determining such issues as the extent of the wetlands, which may comprise as much as forty acres of the land, the problems of access, and other costs associated with determining the value of the land and the best use of it.

“This article would not require the town to take any action,” Buckley said, “beyond a series of meetings, but it will provide the town, at no cost, with a better understanding of what is involved with this land.

“Is this an asset that can be utilized,” he asked.

Members of town boards were anything but uniform in their reaction. The Board of Selectmen voted two in favor and three against while the Land Use Committee was unanimously in favor, 7-0, while Ways and Means voted against the article.

The gist of the opposition appeared to center around the inclusion of only Patriot Partners in the proposed committee's discussions. Those against passage asked for a broadening of the group in the committee, which would consist of up to five Town Meeting members, and an appointee from the Board of Selectmen, the Planning Board, the Board of Health, and the Conservation Committee, for a total of nine.

After an extensive discussion, a standing vote gave the measure passage by a vote of 47 in favor to 35 against. Moderator Philip Gallagher called for expressions of interest in serving on the group from Town Meeting members, and pledged to make the selection process open and transparent.