

# *Burlington Union*

## **Letter breathes life into parcel talks**

By Arthur Katz

Thu Dec 11, 2008, 06:52 AM EST

Burlington -

It was standing room only at the Board of Selectmen's meeting Monday night with more than 40 residents in attendance while Selectmen once again grappled with the fate of the Landlocked Parcel, the 247-acre site owned by Burlington, but cut off from the rest of the town near Route 3.

The matter was the result of a letter requesting discussion of the parcel be reopened, and signed by seven Town Meeting members.

Robert Buckley, senior partner in Reimer and Braunstein, the attorneys representing Patriot Partners, addressed the subject first.

Patriot Partners, developers of Wayside Commons and other commercial ventures in the Boston area, holds an option to purchase the parcel until the spring of 2010, should the town decide to sell the land. A lengthy review of the town's options was completed earlier this year, resulting in a decision by Town Meeting not to pursue the matter at the time.

"What we are proposing to build on the property [a senior housing complex and buildings for biotechnology companies] is not available anywhere else in town," said Buckley. "We have looked carefully at the market and these two uses make sense in this market.

"There is no direct access from Burlington to the land, and it is highly unlikely that, given the cost of tunneling under Route 3 or building a bridge across it, anyone is going to provide that access," he added.

Members of the Friends of the Landlocked Forest, however, have repeatedly said access by foot is available from the Lexington side of the site, with limited parking under the power lines.

"Patriot Partners has already indicated their willingness to provide recreational facilities on the site, and they would be willing to contribute to recreational activities on other sites in town, as well," said Buckley. "We strongly favor a referendum on the issue. This is the people's land and they should have a say in what is done with it."

Town Moderator Philip Gallagher, who appointed the now-dissolved Landlocked Parcel Study Committee, said, "The option was never meant to be anything but an inducement to the original

owners of the land to reduce the costs. There is no reason to give anyone a competitive advantage.”

“We collected some time ago 500 signatures of town residents who do not want the property sold to Patriot Partners,” said Martha Simon, speaking on behalf of the Friends of The Landlocked Forest. “In five days, we just got another 78 signatures, urging that the land be left in its natural state. We want a seat at the table to participate in developing the referendum question if there is going to be one.”

Harold Roussell, a resident of Precinct 5, said, “There is a great deal of the town’s history in the parcel. I have walked the land and seen stonewalls, cellar foundations, evidence of farming in the past. We ought to be preserving that part of our history.”

William Beyer and James Paterson, both members of the Land Use Committee, were supportive of a continued dialogue on the land.

“We need to keep moving this forward,” said Boyer. “The property has not been adequately evaluated. We don't know what it is worth.”

Paterson added, “With the economy in the shape it is, we need to keep our options open. I have spoken to a number of citizens who want to see further discussion. I want to see a referendum.”

Larry Cohen, chair of the Conservation Committee, reiterated his opposition to changing the status of the land.

“We need more land set aside for conservation to promote clean air and clean water. Our neighboring towns have much more conservation land than we do,” he noted. “Remember that in order to change the status of this land, we would need approval by the Board of Selectmen, the Conservation Committee, Town Meeting and the state legislature.”

Selectman Gary Gianino said the board was not in a position to do anything with the land because the worth of the land is unknown.

“If we do something it should be done in a very open process,” he added.

Chairman Sonia Rollins Selectmen had requested funds for an appraisal of the property, which was denied at Town Meeting.

“That appraisal is still needed,” she added. “This is an asset of the community and it should be leveraged. And the public should have a chance to speak once we know what the property is worth. There is a subcommittee working on the Landlocked Parcel and they will continue to do so.”