



Andrew Gottlieb
Executive Director

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RE: APCC Comments on MEPA review of The Reserve at Quashnet Valley

Jack Looney
Clerk

Dear Ms. Vaughn:

Robert Ciolek

The Association to Preserve Cape Cod (APCC) has reviewed the Expanded Environmental Notification Form (EENF) for the proposed development project, the Reserve at Quashnet Valley, in Mashpee and submits the following comments.

Thomas A. Cohn

John Cumbler

Founded in 1968, APCC is the Cape region's leading nonprofit environmental advocacy and education organization, working for the adoption of laws, policies and programs that protect, preserve and restore Cape Cod's natural resources. APCC focuses our efforts on the protection of groundwater, surface water, and wetland resources, preservation of open space, the promotion of responsible, planned growth and the achievement of an environmental ethic.

Jamie Demas

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The Reserve at Quashnet Valley is a proposed development consisting of 12.9± acres within the 26-acre Mashpee parcel 59-5 located at 234 Old Barnstable Road, Mashpee MA. The project site is currently undeveloped and is predominantly woodland. The proposed project consists of the subdivision and development of the site into 25 residential lots, along with associated access roads and stormwater management. Each residential lot would contain a detached single-family home with an individual footprint of approximately 2,000± square feet served by its own septic system. The project site is under a special permit (Deed Book 2121, Page 352) approved by the Mashpee Planning Board in 1973.

Steven Koppel

Rick O'Connor

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Dottie Smith

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Marcie Truesdale

In reviewing this proposed project, APCC's paramount concern is to ensure that the project does not adversely impact the fragile wetlands, water quality, and other

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natural resources that exist on the property site, border the property, and are present downstream from the property boundaries. To that end, APCC's comments focus primarily on the protection of natural resources from potential project impacts.

The proposed development sits on a bluff above the Quashnet River, the largest source of cold water to Waquoit Bay. In fact, the Quashnet is recognized as a Coldwater Fishery Resource (CFR) (321 CMR 5), a rare designation on Cape Cod. One of only four remaining spawning areas on the Cape for wild sea run brook trout (Childs, Coonamessett, Mashpee and Quashnet), the Quashnet is the healthiest of the four, with the largest number of spawning brook trout. The current condition of the river reflects years of restoration efforts, begun by Trout Unlimited in the 1970s. More recently, APCC has secured several million dollars through a NOAA Transformational Habitat grant to partner with the Town of Mashpee and others to restore sections of the Upper Quashnet River adjacent to this proposed development—rebuilding function where it has been diminished and protecting what still remains to support coldwater habitat for brook trout, improve fish passage for river herring and restore abandoned cranberry bogs to a natural wetland.

The base of the bluff below the proposed development is the outlet point for a number of coldwater springs which originate under the bluff. This gives rise to two potential concerns regarding the proposed development. First, water withdrawals by homeowners (e.g., for lawn watering and other uses) could impact the amount of cold water flowing from the springs into the river. Second, the 25 septic systems associated with the development will impact the water quality, and particularly the nitrogen concentration, of ground water moving through the bluff, out through the springs, and into the river. Despite its relative health, within the towns of Falmouth and Mashpee, the Quashnet River has shown signs of eutrophication from enhanced nitrogen loads entering groundwater from the increasingly developed watershed (Howes et al., 2017), much of it from the upper reaches of the river. In fact, the Upper Quashnet (from Johns Pond to Highway 28) has been designated as an impaired waterway by the EPA under the Clean Water Act (CWA) Section 303(d).

Based on the context presented above, APCC recommends that a review of the potential impact of the proposed development on the Coldwater Fishery Resource. In addition, APCC recommends that, rather than individual septic systems, the proposed development be required to install a package sewage treatment plant with a discharge limit of no more than 3 mg/l nitrogen. To comply with DEP's own policies governing projects that increase nitrogen discharge in nitrogen impaired watersheds—which the Waquoit watershed is, by DEP's own designation—APCC recommends that the developer be required to connect sufficient existing homes with septic systems to offset the nitrogen from the proposed development. Once the Town has a sewer system in place for this watershed, these new homes should be required to connect to municipal sewer once available and the package plant mothballed. Given the scale of the proposed development and its proximity to a regionally significant, nitrogen-sensitive and Coldwater Fishery Resource waterway, APCC believes this project warrants referral to the Cape Cod Commission for consideration as a discretionary Development of Regional Impact under Section 12(b)(1), 12(b)(3), 12(b)(6), and 12(b)(7).

Finally, APCC acknowledges that this land is the historic land of the Mashpee Wampanoag Tribe. The Quashnet Valley—from the river’s natural source to Waquoit Bay—was included in 10,500 acres set aside by Plimoth Court in 1660 and confirmed in 1674 as being for the exclusive use of the Wampanoag. As a result, we recommend that the project proponent conduct a thorough review of potential impacts to cultural resources as part of the permitting for this project.

Thank you for this opportunity to provide comments.

Sincerely,



Andrew Gottlieb
Executive Director

