

Friends Of Pleasant Bay Finds A Partner For Sipson Island Purchase

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The purchase of Sipson's Island, center, under the auspices of the Friends of Pleasant Bay, will ensure preservation of 18 of the island's 24 acres as open space.

SPENCER KENNARD PHOTO

ORLEANS — The Friends of Pleasant Bay says it has identified a private backer/buyer to purchase Sipson Island.

By January 2020, the group hopes to buy most of the 24-acre island from that backer for public open space and recreation, tapping \$1.25 million to \$1.75 million from the town's community preservation funds. It intends to bolster the CPC money with private fund-raising that will include a major contribution from the backer. A state grant could provide \$400,000 more.

"This project would be a private-public partnership between the town of Orleans and the Friends of Pleasant Bay for the purchase and conservation of Sipson's Island," according to a statement in an application for community preservation funds filed by Friends President Moncrieff Cochran. "In this arrangement the Friends would raise at least two private dollars from its membership for every dollar requested from Orleans CPC funds.

The name of the potential buyer/backer was not included in the CPC application.

The island has been for sale since 2016, when it was listed for \$12.5 million. The price has fallen to \$7,985,000, but according to the Friends application, the private backer will not participate at that amount. The application offers two purchase scenarios, one for \$4.5 million and another for \$5 million, and notes that the selectmen commissioned and received an appraisal of the property. The application credits the basis for the estimates as "consultation with high-end realtors, analysis of prior sales records re: Sipson's Island."

The listing with Robert Paul Properties underscores the accessibility of the island: "A three-minute, calm boat ride from a private dockage on the South Orleans mainland across a channel known as The Narrows, the property includes nine island parcels and private mainland dock and parking."

Some of the parcels are owned by the Deitrich family and others by Applewood Realty Trust. A Sipson's Island Trust would be created to determine the fate of the buildings on the island, maintain trails and a dock at the north end in coordination with the town, and then complete the purchase of parcels from the backer/buyer, according to the applications. One two-acre property will be purchased by the buyer/backer and retained as a private home under a conservation restriction allowing one house and no additional development. There would be no public access to this parcel.

The Friends' CPC application calls Sipson "one of the three largest unprotected tracts of land in the town of Orleans. The island represents a conservation opportunity that is unlikely to occur again for many years if kept in private hands." According to the application, the island is named after John Sipson, "the last Wampanoag (Monomoyic) sachem...(and) has a substantial shell midden."

Citing access from town landings off Portaminicut and Quanset roads, the application notes that Pleasant Bay Community Boating would continue to bring its solar-powered floating classroom to the island.

The application calls the purchase "a bargain" for the town, which would own half the island and have access to all but the two acres controlled by the private buyer. A dock on the north end could be used by a harbormaster boat to monitor traffic to The Narrows, a boathouse to the west could be used to store navigational aids, and open fields in the south "could provide locations for fee-based overnight camping."

According to the application, "Once the purchase is complete, conservation restrictions held by the Compact of Cape Cod Conservation Trusts would be placed on the entire island. Public access would be provided on mown trails. No new structures would be built on the island, and several structures removed. Eighteen or more of the 24 acres would be maintained as open space in their natural state. Recreational opportunities would include walking trails, use of the Island's beaches and possibly a small camping area." An existing residence may be retained for use as a "Sustainability Center" for research and education.

The purchase was discussed in executive session by the selectmen last month and was listed on the conservation commission's public agenda for its Dec. 4 meeting. The community preservation committee will review the request for funds and make a recommendation to the selectmen, who in turn will make a recommendation to town meeting.

According to the application, the private buyer/backer is negotiating a price with the seller in coordination with the Friends and the Compact of Cape Cod Conservation Trusts. When the price is agreed upon and the Friends board approves the project, private fund-raising over and above the money pledged by the buyer/backer will begin. Application for a state Local Acquisitions for Natural Development (LAND) grant will be made in the summer of 2019, with completion of sale of the parcels from the buyer/backer targeted for January 2020.

Founded in 1985, Friends of Pleasant Bay helped achieve an Area of Critical Environmental Concern designation for the bay and has supported implementation of the related Resource Management Plan for the bay. In addition to public education and funding of technical studies, the group works to preserve "critical" open space land.

According to the organization's website, it grew out of Orleans Planning Board Chairman Kathryn Manson's dissatisfaction with a 10-acre Pleasant Bay shoreline subdivision. It met all local zoning and was approved, but Manson said the human and natural resources to be affected could have been scrutinized more thoroughly had the development's frontage been in an ACEC. She shared her concern with the county's Coastal Zone Management Advisory Committee, which suggested she form a Friends group and seek ACEC status from the state Department of Environmental Protection.