

Sipson Island Buyer-Backer Goes Public, Shares Rationale For Purchase

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ED MARONEY PHOTO

The Nadler family of Orleans has stepped forward as the private buyer-backers helping the Friends of Pleasant Bay purchase Sipson Island through a new trust.

ORLEANS — The mystery buyer-backer helping the Friends of Pleasant Bay preserve Sipson Island isn't a stranger.

Rich Nadler and his wife Cheryl have lived year-round in Orleans since 2010. He's visited Sipson as a member of the town's conservation commission.

“We had hoped to remain anonymous,” he wrote to The Chronicle last week, “but with the evolving role of the town in funding the conservation restriction we realize that this is probably not possible.”

The Nadlers have written an open letter to the community that they've posted on sipsonisland.org. In the letter, and in an interview Monday, Nadler spoke of the family's decision to sign a purchase and sales agreement with the seller to take the island off the market while the Friends raises funds to buy most of the land for open space through the new Sipson Island Trust. The town is being asked to contribute \$1.5 million in community preservation funds for a conservation restriction on 18 acres to ensure preservation of and public access to most of the island, plus \$400,000 that could be paid back through a state grant program.

The trust would keep some of the rest of the land for an education and research center, and the Nadlers would retain a seasonal home on the shore as private property. Development on both properties would be limited by conservation restrictions.

“It's kind of a summer home on cinder blocks up off the ground,” Nadler said. “It's something we would just use occasionally. We don't live on the water; we live inland in a very wooded area. We would kind of like the privacy of that.” He said the family has no plans to rent the house, which at most is habitable in two seasons.

In the letter on the website, Nadler says he first heard about current efforts to preserve the island at a Friends of Pleasant Bay board meeting a year and a half ago. After learning that the price had dropped from \$12 million to \$8 million and that options to purchase were being discussed with the Compact of Cape Cod Conservation Trusts, Nadler talked with his wife that night about becoming the private buyer-backers.

The plan “was not exactly met with a lot of enthusiasm,” Nadler wrote. “It meant selling our family home in the Boston suburbs that we had been renting for many years and using that money to help finance the purchase and conservation of the island. The proceeds from the sale of the house were always intended to be used for our retirement, but as I explained to my wife, 'we don't travel, I still work, it would be a great thing to do, and it could actually be fun.' I know it doesn't sound like a very sound or convincing plan, but that was it, she agreed and it's why we are where we are now.”

Now it's the voters who must be convinced, at town meeting on May 13.

“We realize that there are always competing priorities for funds and certainly understand that the island may not offer immediate benefits to everyone,” Nadler wrote. “However this is a one-time opportunity to preserve the island for generations to come and one we shouldn't let pass by. That's why my wife and I are involved and why we hope you join us with this effort to preserve Sipson Island.”

The goal, Nadler said in the interview, “is to conserve the land and preserve as much in a natural state as possible, and in addition to that have it open to the public for passive recreation. It's really a beautiful spot. A large part of the community will enjoy it. Like any recreational spaces in town, not everybody participates in all of them. Orleans has lots of them: Bakers Pond, Crystal Lake, Pilgrim Lake, conservation lands.” He also noted the education programs for students the Sipson Island Trust intends to operate on the island with Pleasant Bay Community Boating.

The Friends of Pleasant Bay is working to raise more than \$3 for every \$1 being asked of the town, and that includes a donation from the Nadlers. Paying for everything with private funding only “would be very challenging,” he said.

“We're from the town,” said Nadler. “We love the town. We're trying to support the effort, and we think a lot of people are.”