

PROPOSED WATERFRONT ACQUISITION WHAT CITIZENS NEED TO KNOW

The Town of Lyme has made an offer to purchase vacant waterfront property in the Village of Chaumont. This purchase offer is contingent on public support of the acquisition as measured by a referendum vote to be held July 17, 2018. The following addresses many of the questions and concerns raised by our residents.

Why is the Town buying land and for how much?

Over the years, much of the waterfront was subdivided and built upon. Today, nearly all is in private ownership with little waterfront property remaining for the benefit of all residents. The Town has offered to purchase the waterfront portion of the property on East Main Street to protect it for the benefit of current and future town residents. The Town has offered to purchase the property, with two other buyers, for a combined total of \$480,000, the Town's share of which is \$336,000. The Town will acquire approximately 75% of the total acreage, the remainder to be divided between the other parties who own adjacent parcels. All this is subject to an affirmative vote on the referendum. The Town will seek \$100,000 in state legislative assistance for the initial acquisition, however, this money is not guaranteed. If voters approve the acquisition, there will be future development costs for planning and design, site preparation and infrastructure and, later, for construction of those facilities and services selected for the final site plan, such as dockage, boardwalk, rest rooms, gazebo, pavilion and the like. Numerous attendant costs must be considered as well: initial dredging and continued maintenance of the waterfront; environmental permitting and compliance; associated legal requirements and fees. It is impossible to estimate the actual cost of development in the absence of a final plan. However, in order to bring this proposal before its residents and to provide a framework through which the phases, costs and timeline can be visualized, the conceptual plan created by Mike Harris is being relied upon to illustrate how the project might proceed. (see the project photos and estimated yearly phase costs). The Town has researched state and community funding for developing the park and a series of phases and grant opportunities has been identified. State grants for between 50-75% of the cost may be available. Despite positive feedback from grant and state officials, funding is never guaranteed and does not cover operational expenses.

Why is the Town buying land and giving it to a business and a private homeowner?

The Town is not buying land and giving it to a business and private homeowner. The Town has made the purchase offer for the East Main Street property in partnership with adjacent property owners, both of whom will pay for their respective shares. Acquisition of only that portion of the property suitable for a waterfront park will provide the most value to the Town residents.

The Town of Lyme already has a park on Chaumont Bay. Why does the Town need to buy this parcel?

Undeniably, the Village Beach and Town Park between Wilson Lane and Bayview Drive offer access to water, swimming and picnicking. Able-bodied citizens can and do walk from the Village of Chaumont to the Village Beach. However, the beach is disconnected from Village businesses by the Chaumont River. Because it is not visible to travelers on NYS Route 12E, it does little to encourage visitors to patronize the businesses and attractions in the Town. The property being purchased on East Main Street is accessible from both NYS Route 12E and Sawmill Bay. With thoughtful visioning and planning, the property could be developed to attract those who are currently bypassing the Village and Town and provide a benefit to residents. This development of a "sustainable waterfront area" was identified as a goal in the 2015 Chaumont River Corridor Waterfront Revitalization Strategy, as well as in both the Town and Village Comprehensive Plans.

There is already a boat launch in the Town of Lyme. Why does it need another?

The Town Board agrees the best use of the East Main Street property is not as a traditional boat launch and parking lot. Instead, the Town seeks to develop the waterfront with short-term docking, boardwalk access to the water and to downtown businesses. The proposed waterfront has been suggested as a destination for kayakers and canoers, bikers, boaters and walkers; as an open-air market; and a public music venue. The proposed public docks offer an opportunity for boaters to visit the Chaumont area from the bay and river.

How will this land benefit me?

Investment in the Town's waterfront, including acquiring and developing this waterfront property, follows the goals outlined in the Town's Comprehensive Plan and the 2015 Waterfront Revitalization Strategy. Both plans articulate the town residents' desire for enhanced connectivity among residents and visitors to the lake and to each other. The park is also a potential site for a cultural events building and a Heritage Center. An outdoor stage has also been mentioned. Every municipality has its density center, which is where the community gathers. This site, accessible to all Town and Village residents, would provide a venue for many cultural experiences amidst the beauty of beautiful Chaumont Bay. Over the past years, the Town and State have been investing in and encouraging a connection between residents and water-related recreational pursuits such as fishing and boating. The State has focused on improving tourism, and encouraging growth in retail and dining sectors. The potential purchase of the East Main Street waterfront property is one of many efforts by the Town to make Lyme a great place to live for all residents.

Will the Town benefit financially from this?

According to a 2018 report by the National Recreation and Park Association (NRPA), local parks benefit local economies through increased visitor spending, resulting in increased sales tax collection overall and a larger share of sales tax revenue for the Town. Further, developers look at an area's parks as a measure of the area's quality of life when "choosing a location for a headquarters, factory or other company facility." Investment in parks, like the one proposed for this property, help the Town attract other desired businesses to the area. The NRPA report also points out that "economic research has demonstrated consistently that homes and properties located near park lands have higher values than those farther away." People moving to an area are willing to pay more for "high-quality park and recreation amenities when choosing a place to live." "Higher home values not only benefit the owners of these properties but also add to the tax base of local governments." Potentially, the cost of waterfront homes, because of their proximity to the waterfront park may increase in value, benefiting all Town residents with increased and sustainable property tax revenue.

Is the Conceptual Plan the only plan considered?

The proposed conceptual plan included here is a concept which provides the Town a starting point. However, the options for the waterfront park are infinite. The Town Board will work to collect ideas with a goal of developing the property to provide the most value to its residents.

How will other Town projects be impacted?

Town facilities are in need of significant upgrades and repairs, such as leaking roofs, asbestos removal and mold abatement for the Town office building; utility upgrades in the Town's highway garage and other needed improvements at the Town's other properties and recreational facilities. The Town has discussed replacing its 60-year old highway garage for some time. All these will require the Town to identify funds needed to complete these repairs.

It is rumored the Village of Chaumont will hold a dissolution vote again. How will this land purchase and park project be affected by the potential Village's dissolution?

Village dissolution will not directly impact this project or purchase. However, if the Village of Chaumont votes to dissolve, the Town of Lyme will be required to take on the services provided by the Village, its indebtedness, property, and potentially the Village personnel and equipment. The Town would need to set up districts to provide lighting, water, sewer, and trash pickup in the current municipal boundary of the Village which would be funded by the residents in these districts.

What miscellaneous expenses will be added?

If the full conceptual plan is achieved, there will be additional routine maintenance on the pavilion, docks, sidewalks, grills, picnic tables and concert stage (if one is built). Preliminary estimates for the mowing of the grass and preparation and maintenance of the shoreline are \$3000 annually.

Are grant awards guaranteed?

No. Grants can be applied for, but obtaining a grant is never guaranteed. Without grant awards, the project phases, as proposed in the conceptual plan, could only be completed by imposing a substantial tax increase over the several years of the proposed development phases. Without yearly grants, this could be considered to be an expensive purchase of land that may be only minimally developed.

Will paying more than the Appraised Value affect the grant process?

Yes. It could possibly impact the success and award amounts of any future grant monies.

Will the purchase affect the Village of Chaumont and Lyme Central School?

Yes, minimally. The land will be taken off the tax rolls, thereby resulting in less revenue for the Village of Chaumont and Lyme Central School budgets. Based on the 2018 Village Tax Rate, the loss of revenue to the Village would amount to \$848. The 2018 Lyme Central School tax rate will not be available until late August, however, based on the 2017 rate the loss of revenue to the school would amount to \$1,939.

Could the property be used for other purposes?

There is no doubt this property is in a prime location for commercial development that could provide significant revenue for the Village of Chaumont and the Town of Lyme. If the land were to be used for the private development of a hotel, town houses or condominiums, increased revenue would be realized and job opportunities created

What are the Town's long-term commitments?

The Town has committed funds for the long-term operation of water districts and equipment purchases. Whether this additional long-term financial commitment will be a burden or a benefit, is a matter of opinion. This referendum provides Town residents with the opportunity to decide the prudence of this commitment of Town resources.