

WALTHAM



Waltham Land Trust, Inc.
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A non-profit organization dedicated to preserving our community's natural resources through open space advocacy, education, acquisition, and protection.

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**Protecting
Waltham's land
...forever.**

December 6, 2016

Waltham Land Trust and the new Waltham High School

The Waltham Land Trust has been quietly observing the discussion of the location of a new high school for the Watch City. Our board and staff members have been attending the public meetings and following the press coverage closely. Now that revised plans are starting to emerge, including the possible use of the Stigmatine Espousal Center -- one of Waltham's highest value open space properties -- it makes sense for us to share our views about the new high school.

The Waltham Land Trust was pleased with the conceptual plans presented to the School Building Committee on November 21st. These show a new high school at the current site, entirely on land north of Jack's Way, preserving the wooded buffer zone between the road and the Storer Conservation Lands. Unfortunately, the path of the Western Greenway trail, on land owned by the School Department north of Jack's Way, might be in jeopardy. We applaud the idea that the school could be built on already developed land, and hope that the Western Greenway trail can be avoided or relocated elsewhere on the property.

More recently we've learned that the Stigmatine Espousal Center could be the location of our new high school. The Waltham Land Trust has advocated for municipal acquisition of this 40-acre campus since our inception in 2000. Combined with the City's abutting 26-acre Sanderson Heights and 6-acre Jericho Hill Summit parcels, these properties comprise one of the largest unprotected open space resources in the City, and form the connection between the Western Greenway and Prospect Hill Park.

We expected that acquisition of the Stigmatine's would bring reuse of the already developed part of the parcel, along with the potential for preservation of the extensive woodlands there. We believe that such reuse is compatible with preservation efforts, if it follows the guidelines we have recommended for open space and development in the city.

These guidelines are laid out in detail in our recently updated "Position on Development" white paper, but the gist of it is easy to summarize here.

Wherever possible, the Waltham Land Trust recommends that new development to address the city's infrastructure needs be sited on parcels that have already been developed and can be re-used. Where highly valuable open space like the Stigmatine Espousal Center is being

considered for development, new construction should be permitted only after alternatives for re-use have been proven infeasible. If permitted, these developments should be concentrated in area, with structured parking to minimize land use, built with the best environmental practices available and strategically located to maximize preservation of the site's natural resources, trail and wildlife corridors, and the connections to contiguous parks and other open space. In addition, a comparable open space parcel elsewhere should be permanently protected to offset the loss due to new municipal development.

With proper planning for the future of Waltham, public appreciation of natural resources will grow, native habitat will be preserved and restored, environmental quality of life improved, pollution reduced, biodiversity increased, and a legacy of conservation perpetuated in our city.

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[The Waltham Land Trust board of directors includes two City Councillors and one School Department employee. None of these three directors attended the discussions or votes on endorsing this policy or our development white paper.]

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