

Southampton selectmen offer \$535,000 for 18-acre Strong Road property

By CATHERINE BAUM Staff Writer

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SOUTHAMPTON – Selectmen last week offered a Gunn Road resident \$535,000 for 18 acres he owns on Strong Road, land that could be used for a town recreation area.

The area, which would be named the "Rheal E. Labrie Memorial Recreation Area" is about 18 acres and is currently owned by James Labrie, of 66 Gunn Road. The purchase must be approved by Town Meeting. If purchased, the land will be developed into ball fields and areas for recreational use for people of all ages, according to selectmen.

"We are very excited about this wonderful opportunity for the Town to own precious open space and for its citizens to enjoy beautiful and much-needed recreational land," Town Administrator Diana M. Schindler wrote in a Feb. 11 letter to Labrie on behalf of the board, which voted to offer \$535,000 for the land on Feb. 6 after discussing real estate prices in executive session.

"The Board is committed to seeing this project through to its fruition," she concluded in the letter.

Meanwhile, the board is open to hearing other proposals for land that could be used for recreational purposes before the March 4 deadline, according to Schindler. No other proposals have been made though, she noted.

"They'll still look depending on what is offered," she said.

The \$535,000 to buy the Labrie property will come from an undesignated account, which currently has \$650,000, in the Community Preservation Act fund.

If the town agrees to buy the Labrie property, there will be about \$115,000 remaining in that account, which can be used for additional land acquisitions, building renovations and projects, according to Virginia Ahart, who is chairwoman of the Community Preservation Committee.

The next Special Town Meeting is March 4, but the acquisition will not be voted on until a later date, according to Schindler, who plans to propose that the board hold a public meeting to discuss the matter before the vote is taken.

"We need to educate people more on the costs of the acquisition, development and ongoing maintenance," Schindler said.

She noted that the board came up with a lot of related questions, of which they're "in the process of gathering information for" so people will have a comprehensive idea before they vote.

"It's not going to be just 'let's buy the land' with no thought," Schindler said.

The land is generally flat and clear, with a few restrictive areas that are wet, Schindler said, noting that this is the board's "assumption."

The town will vote on buying the property using CPA funds either before or at annual Town Meeting, held May 20 at 7 p.m.

"There may be some interest in putting this stuff to annual Town Meeting; You do get a broader audience there," Schindler said.

If the town does not vote to buy the property, the owners will develop it into a road, according to Eugene Labrie, James Labrie's brother. If the town does vote to buy the property, the land will be marked with signage as "Rheal E. Labrie Memorial Recreation Area," in honor of their father, Rheal E. Labrie.

There are horses and hay on the property now, according to Eugene Labrie.

"If the town doesn't purchase it we're just going to proceed in the spring time with the cul de sac," Labrie said. "For the kids in this town I hope the town purchases it."

Catherine Baum can be reached at cbaum@gazettenet.com.