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Hart's Woods (Perinton) as a Community Asset*

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End Note by H. S. Forest
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Summary:

A natural area adjacent to three public schools near the population center of the Monroe County town of Perinton will be occupied by a housing project unless town citizens vote for its public preservation in a referendum on December 15, 1970. Perinton Town Board members, who favored the housing development, chose both the date and the wording of the question submitted. A citizens' organization, the Perinton Greenlands Association Inc., obtained the referendum through the legal medium of public petition, but its statement for the referendum was not accepted by the board. This case is a pioneering attempt to employ a new mechanism for land preservation when time is critical.

The values at issue are summarized in this bulletin. Evidence is presented that the greatest community benefit would result in preservation of the area for educational and recreational use. The area contains a series of exemplary natural communities, unique vegetation and animals, and is significant in terms of local history. Use as an outdoor classroom has occurred. Cost analysis for purchase of the area with and without a Federal contribution range from a yearly minimum of \$2.38 to a maximum of \$9.17 for each resident household for a period of five years.

The Woods as a Conservation Resource:

Hart's Woods is a vigorous, varied and balanced woodland community close to the population center of Perinton. It has been preserved by the vigilance of its former owners and its own protective setting. The eastern approach from Moseley Road is guarded by wetlands and thick underbrush in adjoining stream and meadowland. The northern and western approaches are bounded by three school properties and private homes which buffer the wild area from public roads. The southern boundary is at the Niagara-Mohawk power line right-of-way, which prevents encroachment.

Hart's Woods extends over 50 acres in the southeast corner of Moseley and Hulburt Roads, bordering the Village of Fairport.

- 15 acres are held by schools and private owners
- 11.2 acres containing greenhouses and facilities are owned by the developers, Richard P. Crecco of 25 Imperial Circle, Rochester, and Anthony Audino, 91 Barry Road, Rochester
- 24.4 acres of wild area are also owned by the developers

The wild area in hands of the developers contains marsh, meadow, and woodland. The property is hilly and has an upland marsh in addition to the larger wetlands in the lower portion. A stream with two branches passes through the property and empties into the New York State Barge Canal at the point known as the Oxbow.

The land supports a rich variety of plant and animal life. Inventories have catalogued over 40 notable wild flowers and ferns some of which exist only in this location of the Town. Many of the hardwood trees are 150-175 years old. The plants support many song birds as well as larger wild fowl: grouse, owls, pheasant, woodcock, and ducks. In addition there are numerous small mammals, reptiles and amphibians. Foliage and cover attract deer which were observed in the summer of 1970.

The marsh contains emergent vegetation blending into the meadow or temporary prairie stage of development. In succession, stands of cottonwoods give way to pine and beech which yield to the mature hardwoods on the higher ground. Thus Hart's Woods presents a complete section of pioneer and climax stages of the temperate forest biome (community type).

Ray Bantle, biology teacher of the Fairport School system authenticated the information that Hart's Woods has been used by classes in conservation and survival training. The woods is potentially an excellent community conservation and natural history education area according to D. A. Stockbridge, Soil Conservationist, U.S.D.A. and Alvan R. Grant, Director of Parks, Monroe County.

Unique Features of the Woods:

Dr. James W. Welch, Curator of the Perinton Historical Association Museum, places the Hart's Woods area in the original holdings of Jesse Perrin who settled in the region in 1791 along with his brother, Glover. Thus it is the only undeveloped part of the early settlers' land. Preservation would constitute an enrichment of the public cultural heritage.

Since Hart's Woods is near the population center of perinton, it can be an extraordinary recreational asset which is entirely distinct from playgrounds. As a green island among developed areas, it now reduces pollution of all kinds, air, dust, noise, overcrowding. In balance, the rare natural area has a greater social value if preserved than if developed as a dwelling place for man.

Alternate Sites for a Natural-Historical Park:

The Town Board has stated that there are 493 acres of publicly owned land in Perinton, and that other lands are available for park development which are comparable to Hart's Woods. The Association has surveyed the public lands and finds only 19 acres of beech woods which could be compared in any sense. This area lacks the size, variety, and maturity of Hart's Woods. The town board has furnished no information on either the location of "comparable" areas or evaluation of them by conservation specialists. The Association has been quite unable to find evidence of such areas after a critical study of aerial maps and on-ground reconnaissance. Inasmuch as it would be difficult to conceal some acres of 100-foot trees in the middle of Perinton, the authors conclude that the existance of alternatives is fictitious.

Plan of the Housing Development:

Development will result in over 9.5 acres being covered by buildings or pavement. Additional land will be stripped for sewers, drainage, or construction access.

The developer and his architect claim that the project will leave most of the trees intact. The Association asserts that the integrity of the woods is destroyed when trees become edge plantings for houses. Further, destruction is certain when a number of people are placed adjacent to an unprotected area.

Alternate plans by the same architect have been viewed by members of the Association. These would preserve blocks of natural areas and require Town participation. However, these plans have not been released to the public.

Cost Analysis of Preserving Hart's Woods:

Perinton contains over 10,000 acres of undeveloped land, therefore there are many alternate locations for housing. Since the Woods have no alternate, the contrast in "supply" must weigh heavily in a realistic appraisal of the preservation cost.

Table I shows projections which assume 50% assistance from the United States Department of Interior's Land and Water Conservation Fund. Preservation also qualifies for assistance from other federal and state sources. The tax estimates are based on funding of a 5-year bond issue. The estimates assume an average assessment of \$10,000.00 on each home, which is probably high. Also assumed is a combined income tax rate of 30%, to be taken as deductions on property owners' federal and state income taxes. This tax deduction reduces the home owner's out-of-pocket cost.

TABLE I

| <u>acre purchase price</u> | <u>cost/1000</u> | | <u>yearly family cost gross</u> | <u>(for 5 years) net (30% income tax)</u> |
|----------------------------|--------------------|---------------------|---------------------------------|---|
| | <u>without aid</u> | <u>50% fed. aid</u> | | |
| \$8500 * | .68 | .34 | \$6.80 or 3.40 | \$4.76 or 2.38 |
| \$11,000 ** | .98 | .49 | 9.80 or 4.90 | 6.86 or 3.43 |
| \$16,393 *** | 1.31 | .65 | 13.10 or 6.50 | 9.17 or 4.58 |

* expected offering by Town

** a fair price estimate based on cost of land to its owner, its proposed use, its allowed use, and history of similar land sales

*** maximum to be permitted under terms of referendum

In December, 1969, 24.414 acres were sold for \$6,373 an acre.

A majority of favorable votes for the proposal to be considered on December 15th would enable purchase by the Town. Then conservation and education areas could be established which would return these benefits to the taxpayers:

1. A rare wild wood and green space in the center of the Town.
2. An outdoor classroom for public schools.
3. A natural wetland preserve.

Comparative Benefits of Development and of Preservation:

The basic argument favoring development over preservation is to increase the tax base of the Town. Logically, a series of such decisions will result in profound changes in the character of Perinton. It would not be able to retain its present unique character as a suburban community. Consistently, other communities which have made decisions simply to increase the tax base have lost much more indirectly and in the long run than they have gained in immediate revenue. The result has been the shift to an unplanned urban community with lowering quality of life.

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End Notes: The preparation and distribution of this bulletin was unavoidable delayed. At time of issue, the referendum has already occurred, and the proposal to support purchase through bonds lost by 4637 to 1554. These writings in Rochester newspapers provide supplementary information:

"A Question of Money - Hart's Woods Defeated"
Democrat and Chronicle, December 16, 1970

"Loser but Winner"
Times-Union, December 17, 1970

R.C.S.I. member Donald Yeager, who is a professional naturalist, has verified the unique or rare quality of Hart's Woods forest area and marsh.

H.S.F.