



# TAUNTON RIVER WATERSHED ALLIANCE

A VOICE FOR THE RIVER SINCE 1988

March 14, 2020

Patrick Driscoll, Chair  
Planning Board  
Town of Bridgewater  
66 Central Square  
Bridgewater MA 02324

Dear Mr. Driscoll,

On behalf of the Taunton River Watershed Alliance (TRWA) and the membership we represent including many who reside within the Town of Bridgewater, I am writing to urge the Bridgewater Planning Board to deny the request from the Claremont Corporation to amend zoning bylaws and waive resource area protections on a parcel of land located on the shoreline of Lake Nippenicket. If approved, the current zoning of "Residential A and B" would be changed to "Planned Development District", allowing the unprecedented construction of a restaurant within the sensitive Hockomock Swamp Area of Critical Environmental Concern (ACEC). This affects not only our members who are residents of Bridgewater, but the mission of TRWA, which is to protect and restore the watershed's natural resources for current and future generations, to build and support responsible stewardship of our fragile ecosystems, water quality, forests, farmland, and wetlands; provide opportunities for people to enjoy the river and the watershed's open space; and be a voice for threatened land and water resources.

TRWA opposes this request because the proposed construction would harm the water quality in Lake Nippenicket and the ecological communities that inhabit the site and surrounding area. These impacts would occur as a result of earth removal and other work during construction, the rendering of a large portion of the property to impermeable surface, and the discharge of polluted stormwater runoff after the project is completed. Not to mention, this project sets a dangerous precedent for other future potential developments that may be planned within sensitive areas within the Town.

Lake Nippenicket is the largest body of water in Bridgewater. Almost 500-acres in area, the lake serves as a regional recreational resource for fishing and boating. The nearly 500-acre great pond attracts a diversity of waterfowl, amphibians, and mammals indigenous to the Hockomock Swamp. It also serves as a natural drainage collection area for several square miles of land within its vicinity. As noted, in the Town of Bridgewater's 2002 Master Plan, it is recommended the Town "continue permanent protection" for lands surrounding Lake Nippenicket. The Lake is also the headwaters of the Town River, which joins the Matfield River to form the Taunton River. The Taunton River was designated as a National Wild and Scenic River in 2009 by the United States Congress. As part of the Wild and Scenic Designation Process, eight tributaries to the Taunton River, including the Town River were studied. The 2009, Taunton River Wild and Scenic Stewardship Plan states (p. 17) that these tributaries are "considered essential to the Plan and the achievement of river protection and restoration goals."

(continued)

**Our Mission:** ...to protect and restore the watershed's natural resources for current and future generations.

**Taunton River Watershed Alliance**, at Sweets Knoll State Park, 1387 Somerset Ave., (Rt. 138), Dighton  
Mailing address: P.O. Box 1116, Taunton, MA 02780 • 508 -828-1101 • [www.savethetaunton.org](http://www.savethetaunton.org)

The land proposed for rezoning lies within the Hockomock Swamp ACEC. ACECs are “areas with unique natural resources that are designated by the Commonwealth for the protection of marine and aquatic productivity, surface and groundwater quality, habitat values, storm damage and flood control, scenic and recreational resources and other values” and as such deserve extra protection. The Hockomock Swamp is the largest freshwater wetland in Massachusetts, encompassing 16,950 acres. It is home to at least 13 species listed as endangered, threatened or of special concern by the Massachusetts Natural Heritage Program, including the blue spotted salamander, (*Ambystoma laterale*), listed as "threatened." Municipal boards and Conservation Commissions are encouraged to implement local regulations and actions to protect and sustain ACECs.

In 2013, as part of the environmental review process for construction of the proposed South Coast Rail, thirty-one communities in southeastern Massachusetts, including Bridgewater identified Community Priority Areas and Priority Development Areas within the rail corridor. In Bridgewater, a Priority Protection Area was identified that includes Lake Nippenicket including the land where the proposed restaurant would be constructed.

Additionally, the project intends to change minimum lot size (from 5 acres to 2) in a Planned Development District thus decreasing available open space and to obtain right of use of land which lies across a state highway to obtain necessary land that is 10 acres or more by bylaws thus changing the definition of land that is “contiguous” to suit a purpose that does more harm to the Town of Bridgewater than good. Making an unjustified exception for a parcel or parcels within a district when the change in zoning does not advance a general public purpose in land use, may be ruled illegal in certain instances.

For the reasons stated above, we urge the Planning Board to retain the current zoning of this parcel of land and to encourage the Town of Bridgewater to explore options with state agencies and land conservation groups that would protect this environmentally sensitive parcel of land as open space.

Thank you for considering these comments.

Truly yours,

A handwritten signature in cursive script that reads "Priscilla A. Chapman".

Priscilla A. Chapman  
President