

***Town of Weymouth
Massachusetts***

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Press Release

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Town to determine future of the Emery house

Volunteers sought for Advisory Committee to decide fate of structure.

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Weymouth, MA – Mayor Robert Hedlund announced today his intention to appoint a new Advisory Committee to determine the future reuse of the Emery house – a three-story colonial home located atop King Oak Hill in East Weymouth and the principal structure on a 24-acre property known as the Emery Estate. The house and land were acquired in 2011 using \$1.9 million in Community Preservation Act funds. While plans are currently underway to improve the grounds of the estate, the question of how to use the Emery house remains outstanding.

"I have always been an advocate for preservation, and my preference would be to see the house saved," **said Mayor Robert Hedlund.** "However, without a viable reuse plan, the building will continue to be a drain on Town resources; not just from the standpoint of capital improvements but also the operating subsidies needed to maintain it."

The estate was purchased by the Town in 2011 as an investment in protected open space under former Mayor Susan Kay with Town Council approval. The property, located in immediate proximity to several densely populated neighborhoods, would almost certainly have been subdivided had the Town not acquired it. That outcome would have meant the loss of 24 acres or the equivalent of nearly 18 football fields of untouched open space in an already densely developed community.

Since 2011, the estate has remained largely unused by residents with the exception of neighbors who walk the grounds and several local groups who have organized events on

the property, including this year's Weymouth junior class prom. During this time, potential uses for the property were investigated by an Advisory Committee convened under Mayor Kay. The focus of the Committee's work has been to identify preferred public uses for the estate as well as identify potential funding for improving the property. The Committee recently oversaw completion of a PARC grant application to the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs, seeking \$400,000 in financial assistance to improve the grounds of the estate and transform the property into a functional outdoor venue for passive recreation and programmed events. However, improvements to the Emery house are not eligible for reimbursement under the PARC grant program.

Mayor Hedlund acknowledges the need for a decision on the future of the Emery house, though he has been in office less than year. The building has been neglected for the last five years and will soon reach a condition of "demolition by neglect" according to the Mayor's Planning staff.

"We need a business model for the house that promises realistically to work, and promises realistically to work soon. I'm just not sure what the model is," **said Mayor Hedlund**. "I would like to preserve the house, so I'm looking for residents to assist us in quickly analyzing the business and marketing potential of the building and advising on whether they think something can be done and how it can happen."

Mayor Hedlund proposes to convene a new Advisory Committee with a clear and limited mission to decide whether or not the Emery house can be preserved for a sustainable public and/or private use without significant public investment. The Mayor's new committee will have a sunset term of only four months, though an extension may be considered should a promising solution require additional investigation. Residents interested in serving on the committee are invited to mail and/or deliver a statement of interest and qualifications to the Mayor's Office. Experience in business and/or real estate development, management, and marketing is desired. Mayor Hedlund intends to ask Town Council President Patrick O'Connor to appoint a member of the Council to serve on the committee.

For residents unfamiliar with the Emery house, the building is a former single-family home built in approximately 1903 and modeled after George Washington's Mount Vernon Estate in Virginia. The Emery family – prominent Boston-area wool merchants – owned and lived in the house almost 95 years before selling to the Town. The building's second floor commands outstanding views of the downtown Boston skyline as well as the property's sweeping grounds. However, the house is not ADA accessible, contains lead paint, and has an asbestos-contaminated roof.

While the Emery house is closed to the public, the grounds remain open to residents for passive recreation. Access is available through Emery Lane located off Commercial Street.

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