

LET

Taxpayers Don't Buy Land-Deal Explanation

To the Editor:

We attended the Cambridge Town Board meeting on January 12 and are unsatisfied with the explanation Town Attorney Alan Wrigley gave for the Board's decision to give away Town property. In September, the Board voted to provide a quit-claim deed for a land parcel on Brownell Road to a town resident. Immediately afterwards, the resident, Audrey Hall, sold the parcel for \$9,200.

As we see it, there are a number of obvious problems with this deal.

First, contrary to some assertions, the Town owned the land. In September 1939, the Town bought the land from Leo O'Donnell for \$75 and to our knowledge its ownership had never been disputed. The Town Board and the Town Attorney cannot say they did not know this. The very resolution the Board approved to give away the parcel refers to this purchase and to a survey map from 1939 showing the boundaries of the land acquired

back then.

Second, Audrey Hall appears to have had no connection to the property. She and her husband bought the O'Donnell farm in 1969, but not this parcel (her deed "except[ed] and exclud[ed]" land "conveyed to [the town] for highway purposes"). She paid only a small amount of taxes on the parcel for just over one year, and was only listed recently as the owner of this parcel due to an error by County Real Property Services, which apparently was not aware of the 1939 deed.

Third, it is illegal for the Town Board to make private arrangements for the disposal of Town property. If the Town wanted to sell the parcel, it would have to put it out to bid. The only exception we know of is provided under the Highway Law Section 212-a. This only applies when the Town is dealing with an abutting landowner, which does not appear to be the case here.

Finally, the Town Board voted unanimously to give the parcel away with no real discussion. There was no consideration of obvious inconsistencies and contradictions in the

story which should have raised questions. They simply decided to give property worth at least \$9,200 to someone with no apparent rights to it.

In doing so, they harmed not only the abutting landowners, who lost the chance to gain road frontage, but all the taxpayers and residents of Cambridge. We have lost the opportunity to cut over 30% off this year's tax increase.

It is not acceptable to simply take Alan Wrigley's approach and say "Who actually owns what out there? I don't know," as he put it at the January Board meeting. The Town Board and the Town's attorney work for the taxpayers. They were informed the Town had a deed to this property. You don't have to be a lawyer or a real estate professional to understand the issues here. It is simply inexplicable that they could give away Town property without asking what benefit they could obtain for the taxpayers.

Sincerely,

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