

TOWN GREEN April 2024

Like all Cape Cod communities, Truro must answer this crucial question: what is sustainable growth? From an environmental perspective, there is a clear response: growth must depend on available natural resources, particularly water. To make informed decisions about growth, including housing development, Truro residents need facts about the town's natural resources, especially the sources of water that will sustain the town now and in the future. So far, however, the Water System Demand Assessment delivered to Provincetown and Truro in 2023 has not been made available to the citizens who work tirelessly on town committees or to Truro voters. And in the particular case of the Walsh Property, which protects the pristine water pumped from two North Union Field wells, no updated hydrogeological study was commissioned before recommendations for housing development on the property were made. Without essential information about Truro's water resources, Truro citizens cannot accurately determine a level of sustainable growth.

Nevertheless, on May 4, voters at Truro's [Special Town Meeting](#) (rescheduled from October 21, 2023) will vote on Article 5, "To see if the Town will vote to adopt the recommendations of the Walsh Property Community Planning Committee (WPCPC) for uses of the Walsh Property, as contained in the WPCPC Report and Recommendations dated September 13, 2023..." These recommendations result from WPCPC members devoting long hours and more than two years of meetings to their work. Notably, WPCPC Planning Principle #4, "Protect water supplies for future generations," appears in Article 5 as R15 "Servicing the property with a public water supply" and R16 "Utilizing an advanced wastewater treatment system to limit nitrogen loading." Although these recommendations address water resources, the WPCPC did not have vital information about the water supply it wished to protect: neither the 2023 Water System Demand Assessment carried out by the consultant, Environmental Partners, nor an updated hydrogeological study of the property.

In the northeast corner of the Walsh Property, the two North Union Field (NUF) wells supply pristine water for Provincetown and parts of North Truro, Beach Point, the Truro Public Safety facility, and Truro Central School. In 2010, Truro and Provincetown signed an [Inter-Municipal Water Agreement](#) in which Truro agreed to lease North Union Field to Provincetown for 99 years. According to Massachusetts Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) public water supply regulations, every well must have a [400-foot radius \(800-foot diameter\) Zone I protection area and a larger Zone II protection area](#). As part of the DEP permit process, the Town of Provincetown purchased the Zone I area, approximately 11.5 acres, from the Walsh Trustees, and must maintain it free of all development. The Zone II area encompasses all of the Walsh Property and beyond to the Police/Fire/Rescue station, protecting the well recharge area from pollutants that would contaminate groundwater flowing towards the wells. After the DEP granted the initial permit for Provincetown in 2012, the North Union Field wells began operating in 2013; the [permit](#) was renewed in 2017, and extends to 2030, allowing Provincetown to pump an annual average rate of 850,000 gallons of water a day, with a daily maximum volume of 734,000 gallons. Apparently, though, this volume will not be sufficient in the future.

At the April 10, 2023 Provincetown Select Board meeting, consultant Ryan Paul from Environmental Partners (EP) and Provincetown Water Superintendent, Cody Salisbury, discussed

EP's Water System Demand Assessment.¹ Mr. Salisbury noted that there will be increased demand for water because of managed growth, particularly during every peak season, June-September. Originally, the NUF wells were a "redundant supply," but had to be brought online every peak season. Mr. Paul discussed best case and worst case scenarios as Provincetown attempts to meet both the annual Average Daily Demand (ADD) and the annual Maximum Daily Demand (MDD) from Truro wells at Knowles Crossing, South Hollow, and North Union Field. His conclusions were that NUF is now a primary source, because it must be online almost all the time in peak season, and that a new redundant source should be considered, along with an additional water storage tank in North Truro. Mr. Salisbury clearly stated that they "need to add a new well source" and that they "need to continue discussions with Truro about future water use and needs." Presumably, those discussions have continued, although they have not yet been made public.

Earlier, at a [Provincetown and Truro Select Board joint meeting](#) on October 24, 2022, Mr. Salisbury was even clearer about the location of new wells. During a Water System update from the Provincetown Water Department, he acknowledged that the "Walsh Property is 'the' site for both watershed protection *and* future water supply" and that it would be possible "to site at least two more wells and easily achieve Zone 1 wellhead protection." He provided a drawing of the possible site for new wells, to the southwest of NUF. These plans surely demand an immediate hydrogeological study of the Walsh Property to determine the effects on the water table of pumping from four wells and to establish any danger of groundwater contamination from housing development wastewater.

To date, the only recent hydrogeological study of the Walsh Property is a [two-part report](#), "Groundwater Protection Priorities for the Walsh Property Master Plan to Sustain Long Term Drinking Water Availability and Quality," from expert hydrogeologist, Tom Cambareri.² In Part 1 of the report, his analysis demonstrates that daily pumping from the existing NUF wells creates "drawdowns of the water table of greater than 13 ft," and "if contaminants from wastewater, stormwater, and other sources are released to the ground in and near the Walsh property, they will migrate directly towards the NUF wells" (p.12). In Part 2 of his report, Mr. Cambareri provides aquifer contour maps showing the "deep depressions in the water table" caused by continued pumping from NUF wells and possible future wells. Again, the maps show how "Up to 100% of the wastewater discharged on the Walsh property will be drawn directly into the water supply wells under varying conditions" (p. 14).

Before accepting the WPCPC recommendations for building on the Walsh Property, voters need information from the Water System Demand Assessment, an update on discussions between Provincetown and Truro about water, and a scientific evaluation of water resources on the property.

-Elaine Beilin

¹ See <https://www.provincetowntv.org/watch.html>

² See information about Mr. Cambareri's [impeccable credentials](#).