

**[EXTERNAL] RE: Pink House**

Tracy Blais &lt;administrator@townofnewbury.org&gt;

Wed 11/1/2023 3:46 PM

To: Hillman, Matthew D &lt;matthew\_hillman@fws.gov&gt;

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Thank you for letting me know. I will pass this information along to the Select Board.

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The Secretary of State's office has determined that most emails to and from municipal offices and officials are public records. Consequently, confidentiality should not be expected.



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**From:** Hillman, Matthew D <matthew\_hillman@fws.gov>

**Sent:** Tuesday, October 31, 2023 2:58 PM

**To:** Tracy Blais <administrator@townofnewbury.org>

**Subject:** Pink House

Hi Tracy,

I wanted to provide you with advanced notice of our *proposal* to demolish the Pink House after a 30-day comment period (Nov 1-30) for the public to review our Environmental Assessment. This will of course be a painful thing for many to hear, but many in the community (Pink House group included) have acknowledged the considerable efforts we have collectively undertaken for over 7 years to exchange the property. The unfortunate reality is that continuing along that path indefinitely is not in the public's best interest. After an exhaustive search, there are no landowners willing/able to complete a viable land exchange as the house continues to deteriorate and our staff must maintain and manage it.

We will publish the document on our website tomorrow as well as initiate the press release with local media outlets. I appreciate you keeping this on close hold until then.

I regret that I don't have better news for you! Please feel free to reach out with any questions.

Be well and Happy Halloween,

Matt

p.s. FYI:

## **FAQs – Pink House Environmental Assessment**

### **Why and when did the Service acquire the Pink House?**

The US Fish and Wildlife Service (hereafter, 'Service') purchased the Pink House — along with more than nine acres of upland, salt marsh and tidal creek habitat — in 2011 to permanently protect the property and its sensitive habitats from development and to evaluate whether the house could be used for seasonal staff housing.

### **Why does the Service propose to remove the Pink House?**

In 2014, a preliminary environmental survey of the building found that it contains asbestos, a serious human health risk. The property was also in a state of disrepair when purchased, and deterioration has continued since. Given these health and safety hazards, the Service determined that the building is not suitable as housing for seasonal staff, nor does it have any other feasible use for the refuge.

Further, the property has become an attractive nuisance, requiring frequent law enforcement patrols and repair work due to vandalism. Service maintenance staff and funds are increasingly required to maintain structural stability and safety. The house has a permanently flooded basement, is within an active flood zone, and recent sea level rise predictions indicate flooding will be even more severe in the years to come. Demolition and removal are therefore in the best interest of public safety, taxpayer money, and the environmental health of the area.

### **Could the Service sell or dispose of the Pink House as surplus property?**

The Service has limited authority to sell or dispose of the land it administers as defined in the [Federal Land Policy and Management Act of 1976](#). Because the surrounding habitat is of high ecological value and supports the refuge's mission, only an equal-value land exchange is applicable in this case.

### **What has the Service done to save the house from demolition?**

In response to community members, the Service has worked diligently with landowners, elected officials, and local advocacy groups for more than seven years to find an equal-value land exchange. While several promising leads were pursued, none were ultimately successful. In the interest of safety, and to ensure the house remained intact to affect an exchange, staff maintained the house to prevent catastrophic damage. For reasons outlined above, this approach is no longer feasible.

### **Is the Pink House listed on the National Register of Historic Places?**

No. In 2011, the Massachusetts Historical Commission determined that the house does not meet the criteria for listing on the National Register of Historic Places and is therefore ineligible.

### **What will happen to the property if the Pink House is removed?**

Removal of the Pink House would create an opportunity to enhance both the future resiliency and public access opportunities of this area. This would include repurposing the existing driveway into a small parking area and constructing an accessible observation platform. An area that has long been closed to public access would afford a unique opportunity for people of all abilities to experience and learn about the Great Marsh ecosystem from a unique vantage point.

**Where and when can I read the draft environmental assessment and submit comments?**

The draft document is linked below on the refuge's website. Several hard copies will also be printed for review at the Refuge Visitor Center (6 Plum Island Turnpike, Newburyport, MA). The proposal will be open for public comment between November 1 through November 30, 2023. Comments must be emailed to [parkerriver@fws.gov](mailto:parkerriver@fws.gov).

**Matt Hillman**

Refuge Manager

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