

Re: [EXTERNAL] Boston.com update on Pink House

Umholtz, Katelyn <katelyn.umholtz@globe.com>

Wed 11/22/2023 1:57 PM

To: Hillman, Matthew D <matthew_hillman@fws.gov>

Thanks again, Matt! I appreciate your quick responses. Happy Thanksgiving!

On Wed, Nov 22, 2023 at 10:20 AM Hillman, Matthew D <matthew_hillman@fws.gov> wrote:

Of course, please see below:

Matt Hillman

Refuge Manager

[Parker River](#), [Thacher Island](#)

[Great Bay](#) and [Wapack](#) NWRs

6 Plum Island Turnpike

Newburyport, MA 01950

O: 978-572-5613

C: 774-303-9090



**NATIONAL
WILDLIFE
REFUGE SYSTEM**

From: Umholtz, Katelyn <katelyn.umholtz@globe.com>

Sent: Wednesday, November 22, 2023 9:14 AM

To: Hillman, Matthew D <matthew_hillman@fws.gov>

Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL] Boston.com update on Pink House

Hi Matt,

I'm going through this and my other notes, but I appreciate you passing this along. All details are very helpful!

I have just a few more questions:

1. You mention confidentiality — do you mean Fish & Wildlife had to keep potential sales and information about landowners confidential from the public and Support the Pink House? I just want to make sure I understand at what point these conversations had to be confidential.

That is correct -- our work with willing landowners is confidential from all members of the public -- usually at the request of the landowner. Some of this is up to the discretion of the landowner, though, as to what they decide to share and what not to share. Appraisals are also confidential, but we did of

course share the 2021 appraisal with the Support group as it was listed in our agreement -- we managed the scope of work for the appraisal, while the Support group paid the fee.

2. Did you receive a letter from the Town of Newbury Select Board in support of saving the Pink House? It was something Support the Pink House mentioned that I can't find on the city's website.

In their letter, the Town of Newbury Select Board urged all those involved to find a solution. The letter also advocated for restoring the house so it could again be a home and generate tax dollars.

3. Because I want to make sure I explained this correctly to you, I wanted to re-ask this question: Something Support the Pink House is arguing after Monday's meeting is that a land exchange doesn't necessarily have to be of greater ecological value if it is of use or benefit to Fish & Wildlife. The example they gave me was that this could mean Fish & Wildlife agrees to land that is far less than the acreage you're currently looking for if, for example, it allowed for the refuge's boat storage. Does that make sense? I just want to make sure I'm understanding what they're arguing, and if that is at all a factor in the criteria.

The incoming land exchange parcel must satisfy both the law [(16 U.S. Code § 668dd(a)(6) and (b)(3)] *and* the refuge's mission to conserve wildlife and their habitats, especially migratory birds. At Parker River NWR, we have no use for additional infrastructure. In fact, federal agencies have been mandated to "Reduce the Footprint." Acquisition of additional infrastructure is therefore out of step with policy and our mission. That said, our analysis of ecological value is based on the land, not structures. Here is a theoretical example: if a 10-acre parcel valued at \$500,000 and consisting of upland and marsh acreage contiguous to the refuge contained a structure, and that structure could feasibly be removed and the habitat restored, we would closely consider this for an exchange. If our biological team considered the land was of higher ecological value than the 1-acre Pink House property (which in this example is likely), then we would proceed.

Thanks again for your help and clarifying all of this information for me.

On Wed, Nov 22, 2023 at 7:58 AM Hillman, Matthew D <matthew.hillman@fws.gov> wrote:
Good Morning,

In an effort to pre-empt any additional misunderstandings that may arise as you continue interviews, please see below. I answered these based on what I have been seeing on social media pages and from our discussion yesterday.

- Our 2020 nonbinding agreement stated that StPH would pay for the appraisal and surveys for the Pink House, and FWS would pay the same costs for the incoming exchange property. FWS

also paid \$3,500 for the archaeological survey, 2014 contaminants survey, thousands of hours in staff time, and materials and rental equipment for maintenance of the house.

- There is no Preservation Restriction in place; these are a function of the state, not federal wildlife refuges. The PR was pursued by StPH at their sole discretion. We notified the group, in writing, that a PR could not be put in place while under refuge ownership.
- The Massachusetts Historical Commission determined twice – first in May 2011 and again in Nov 2021 – that the house is ineligible for listing under the National Register of Historic Places, as it lacks appropriate historical significance.
- You noted "changing goal posts." While the law certainly has not changed and has been clear from the start, perhaps they are referring to the manner with which we pursued one potential exchange. When it became apparent that there were no more locally viable parcels with willing landowners, our realty team thought outside the box and searched regionally to make this happen, partnering directly with StPH for one potential deal. FWS located a possible seller, however, that individual backed out of the deal at a late stage. Our Washington HQ office informed us that moving forward, any deal must be a direct owner-to-owner exchange (as the initial 2017 attempt w/the local landowner was set up to be). Unfortunately, since that time, both the 2020 agreement, and more importantly, the 2021 appraisal have since expired.

I also want to acknowledge the incredible amount of work that the Support group has put into this process -- just as our staff have. We have enjoyed working with them through the years. The good news is that we all still hope for the same outcome. While the odds may be stacked against us, we have not given up hope.

Finally-- I try hard to be as accurate as possible but I may have mis-spoke on the phone IF I said that I personally have spent "1,000 hours" on this subject. That figure was supposed to be for all refuge managers (myself, my Deputy, and my refuge manager predecessors). It's based on the following reasonable estimate: 2 hr/week x 50 wk/yr x 8 yrs = 800 hrs. Then add other programs -- maintenance workers, law enforcement officers, and especially realty specialists, the result is most definitely in the low thousands of hours (more info than you wanted to know I am sure!).

Happy Thanksgiving,

Matt

Matt Hillman

Refuge Manager

[Parker River](#), [Thacher Island](#)

[Great Bay](#) and [Wapack](#) NWRs

6 Plum Island Turnpike

Newburyport, MA 01950

O: 978-572-5613

C: 774-303-9090



**NATIONAL
WILDLIFE
REFUGE SYSTEM**

From: Hillman, Matthew D <matthew_hillman@fws.gov>
Sent: Tuesday, November 21, 2023 4:15 PM
To: Umholtz, Katelyn <katelyn.umholtz@globe.com>
Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL] Boston.com update on Pink House

I wrote the below after yesterday's meeting and hope it will be published in the local paper. Please use as you see fit.

Best,

Matt

From the refuge: an open letter to our community

Matt Hillman, Refuge Manager, Parker River National Wildlife Refuge

By now, much of the community is aware of Parker River National Wildlife Refuge's draft Environmental Assessment to remove the Pink House (review the proposal here: <https://www.fws.gov/refuge/parker-river>). On Monday, I participated in a public forum to hear the community's concerns and answer questions. I am grateful for the level of interest and involvement in this issue. People have been passionate, but also respectful and understanding. I believe, however, that I have an obligation as a public servant to correct misinformation and help clear up the considerable confusion surrounding this issue.

First, in response to community members who advocated for saving the house, the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service has spent 8 years investing limited resources into finding a win-win solution. That includes well over a thousand hours in staff time, from management and maintenance to law enforcement and realty. Additionally, we have continued to show our high level of commitment by maintaining the structural integrity of the house's exterior, addressing everything from vandalism to roof leaks to broken windows. The proposal to demolish the house is neither sudden nor without an exhaustive effort to identify an alternate solution.

Second, we have been as open and transparent as possible. The refuge works with willing landowners, and any agreements, appraisals, and communications with these individuals must be kept confidential. Confidentiality is not only a matter of policy; it is almost always requested by the landowner. We have always acted in good faith and with the best intentions.

Third, our mission and policy dictate that all decisions – no matter how challenging – must consider our climate future. This includes sea level rise and storm frequency and intensity, all of which are projected to increase rapidly in this area (<https://www.mass.gov/doc/final-report-29/download>). The Pink House property already floods routinely during storm tides, cutting off access, threatening its structural

integrity, and increasing the likelihood that debris and environmental contaminants are released into the salt marsh.

There is no feasible use of the house for the refuge, and continued expenditure of taxpayer dollars is not prudent. Rather, the proposed alternative to restore half the site to upland habitat and construct a low-profile observation platform on the existing footprint will enhance resiliency while offering environmental education and interpretation opportunities. Together, these comprise the core mission and legal mandates of your national wildlife refuge.

That said, the comment period exists in part to identify possible solutions that have not yet been explored. What could change the trajectory of the proposed demolition? A direct exchange with a willing landowner is the most likely path, but only if it meets requirements under federal law and is compatible with the refuge's mission. For this to occur, the following conditions must be satisfied: (1) a landowner within 1-mile of refuge boundaries directly exchanges their lands for the Pink House (OR sells their lands to an already identified restoration partner, who would then exchange for the Pink House), (2) the exchange lands must be of approximately equal monetary value to the 1-acre Pink House parcel (\$400,000-\$500,000), and (3) the exchange parcel must be of greater ecological value than the upland and marsh habitat on which the Pink House sits.

Another path would be to relocate the house, which has been on the table since day one. However, our partners value the house in its present location and have decided not to pursue this. We remain open to this alternative should a solid opportunity present itself, particularly as a final means by which to save the structure.

The Service has worked diligently for 3 years beyond the established November 2020 deadline to affect a land exchange. We continued even after our signed agreement with the 'Support the Pink House' group expired last December. If a viable exchange parcel exists, now is the time to act. Continuing to extend or delay the process is no longer an option.

While ineligible for a National Register of Historic Places designation, we acknowledge the local and cultural significance of the Pink House. Our preference is unchanged: we would like nothing more than to complete an exchange, where lands of greater ecological value are permanently protected while the house remains a cultural icon – for as long as mother nature allows it. Failing that, we must be prepared to face a difficult reality, but take some solace knowing that, collectively, we did everything within our means to achieve a different outcome.

We urge everyone to review the [draft Environmental Assessment](#) and submit your comment to parkerriver@fws.gov through November 30th.

Matt Hillman

Refuge Manager

[Parker River](#), [Thacher Island](#)

[Great Bay](#) and [Wapack](#) NWRs

6 Plum Island Turnpike
Newburyport, MA 01950
O: 978-572-5613
C: 774-303-9090



From: Umholtz, Katelyn <katelyn.umholtz@globe.com>
Sent: Tuesday, November 21, 2023 3:36 PM
To: Hillman, Matthew D <matthew_hillman@fws.gov>
Subject: Re: [EXTERNAL] Boston.com update on Pink House

Hi Matt,

I just tried calling you. Call me back at 912-271-3968 when you get a chance.

Thanks, and looking forward to chatting!

On Tue, Nov 21, 2023 at 2:02 PM Umholtz, Katelyn <katelyn.umholtz@globe.com> wrote:
Hi Matt,

That works for me! I'll call you then.

On Tue, Nov 21, 2023 at 1:51 PM Hillman, Matthew D <matthew_hillman@fws.gov> wrote:
Hi Katelyn -- I could do 3:30 today, if that works for you. If so please see below for my office line. If not, email will be best.

Matt Hillman

Refuge Manager

[Parker River](#), [Thacher Island](#)

[Great Bay](#) and [Wapack](#) NWRs

6 Plum Island Turnpike

Newburyport, MA 01950

O: 978-572-5613

C: 774-303-9090



From: Umholtz, Katelyn <katelyn.umholtz@globe.com>
Sent: Tuesday, November 21, 2023 1:38 PM
To: Hillman, Matthew D <matthew_hillman@fws.gov>
Subject: [EXTERNAL] Boston.com update on Pink House

This email has been received from outside of DOI - Use caution before clicking on links, opening attachments, or responding.

Hey Matt,

I'm hoping to put together an update on the Pink House — from what I've heard, that public comment deadline is still in place, but you all may be giving it more time to consider next steps.

Would you have time for a phone call, either today or tomorrow? I know it's a holiday week, and you're busy. So if it's easiest to email questions over to you, I can do that, though I would prefer a quick call.

Let me know what works best for you, and thanks again!

--

Katelyn Umholtz (she, her, hers)
Staff Writer
M: 912-271-3968
katelyn.umholtz@globe.com
@KatelynUmholtz



--

Katelyn Umholtz (she, her, hers)
Staff Writer
M: 912-271-3968
katelyn.umholtz@globe.com
@KatelynUmholtz



--

Katelyn Umholtz (she, her, hers)

Staff Writer

M: 912-271-3968

katelyn.umholtz@globe.com

@KatelynUmholtz



--

Katelyn Umholtz (she, her, hers)

Staff Writer

M: 912-271-3968

katelyn.umholtz@globe.com

@KatelynUmholtz



--

Katelyn Umholtz (she, her, hers)

Staff Writer

M: 912-271-3968

katelyn.umholtz@globe.com

@KatelynUmholtz

