

The question for Harpswell is...

If new residential development is to occur (and it will), how can it occur in a way that protects what is important while allowing landowners the economic use of their property?

First, what do Harpswell people want to preserve? According to the Comprehensive Plan and the Open Space Plan such a list would include clean water (ocean and drinking), commercial fishing, large natural areas and connections, significant wildlife habitat, recreation opportunities, rivers, streams, great ponds, coastal waters, access to water, wetlands, viewsheds, and rural character. You may have something you would like to add.

Current ordinances require house lots to be at least two acres (unless the alternative method is used). Unfortunately, two acre zoning does little to preserve what we want to preserve. Two acres is too big to mow and too small to farm. It divides the land into relatively small chunks without regard to what the town values. The alternative method, also known as cluster housing, is not much better. While this does preserve some land, experience has shown that developers use the best land for housing. The land is divided into small lots and a so called conservation area without regard for the conservation of community values.

Conservation subdivision is a tool that might make sense for Harpswell. It could have advantages compared to traditional subdivision development and current alternative lot development to protect what is important to us while still allowing landowners the full economic use of their property.

CPIC is engaging in a process of looking at this as a tool that might make sense, and it may be an improvement over the existing ordinance. There will be opportunity for public input throughout the process. Please come to our public meeting on September 23, at 6:30 pm in the large meeting room at the Town Office to discuss what it is and how we might use it.