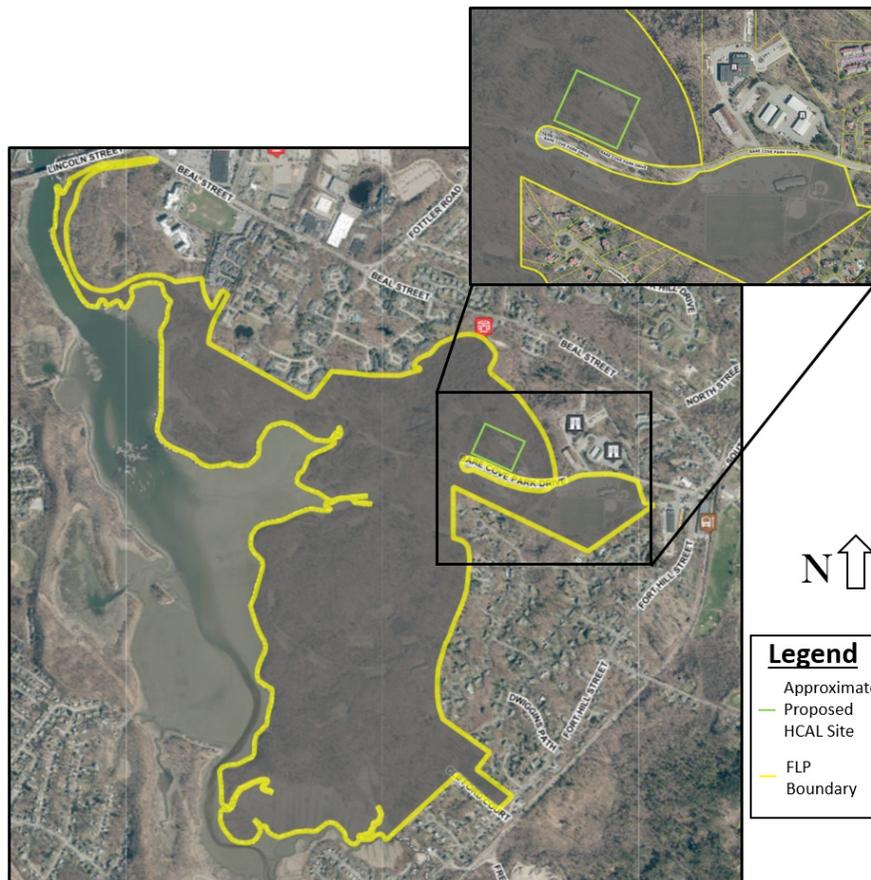


Frequently Asked Questions

Where is the proposed HCAL site?

The HCAL site is approximately 5.387 acres of public recreation land under the care, custody and control of the Select Board and located on Bare Cove Park Drive just past Carlson Fields next to the Bare Cove Fire Museum and before the entrance gate to Bare Cove Park. The site is a portion of 460+ acres of land (“FLP Land”) acquired by the town from the United States over 50 years ago in 1972 under the Federal Lands to Parks Program.





What is FLP Land?

The National Park Service Federal Lands to Parks (NPS-FLP) program helps communities acquire, reuse, and protect surplus federal properties for local parks and recreation. Per the NPS-FLP website: “Since its inception, this program has transferred approximately 190,000 acres of land to state and local governments for public parks and recreation use, enhancing close-to-home recreation opportunities nationwide.” “By participating in the Federal Lands to Parks Program, communities throughout the nation have: Renewed a sense of community among neighbors through community gardens, senior and cultural centers, local parks, and other gathering places” <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1508/index.htm>. Currently there are approximately 1300 active FLP sites in the United States. <https://www.nps.gov/orgs/1508/flp-properties.htm>.

What is the history of Hingham’s FLP land?

The FLP Land is a portion of the former Hingham Naval Ammunition Depot and training station, which operated from 1903 to 1961. The Ammunition Depot included additional land that was conveyed by the United States to the Town for other purposes and to private developers. The full Ammunition Depot included over 200 structures and a system of railroad tracks and roads. Building #14, located at the HCAL site, and the nearby buildings occupied by the Bare Cove Fire Museum and the South Shore Model Railway Club are some of the original buildings. Many other buildings were demolished and environmental contamination remediated by the Town at taxpayer expense during the Town’s ownership for safety purposes and to create Carlson Fields. The Town and the state own an additional 33± acres adjacent to Bare Cove Park near Beal Street bringing the total of contiguous park and recreation land in Hingham to about 500 acres.

What uses are allowed on the FLP Land?

The deed to the town designated the use as “public park and public recreation”. Approximately 421 acres (90%) of the FLP Land is the public park known as Bare Cove Park. Approximately 46 acres (10%) of the FLP Land is used for active and passive public recreation, including Lynch Field, Carlson Fields, the Bare Cove Fire Museum and the South Shore Model Railway Club. The HCAL Site constitutes only 1.2% of Hingham’s FLP Land in the public recreation area, and even less when factoring in the other 33± acres of contiguous open space. Approximately 0.5 acre of the HCAL Site is previously disturbed by a pre-existing Naval Ammunition Depot building (Building #14) and its surroundings. Building #14 contains hazardous materials, such as asbestos and lead paint. This project will result in the demolition and clean-up of that site and replacement of the existing building.

There is no official boundary between the public park and public recreation areas of Hingham's FLP Land. The Town, in discussion with the National Park Service about ten years ago, identified the approximate locations of these different use areas. Bare Cove Park is the "public park" use between the gates at Sheltry Path and the end of Bare Cove Park Drive. The "public recreation" area is the land outside the gates, including Lynch Field, Carlson Fields, the Bare Cove Fire Museum and the South Shore Model Railway Club and the land surrounding those uses.

The National Park Service confirmed in discussions with the Town in 2023 that senior centers such as the HCAL are considered public recreation. This is also confirmed on the NPS-FLP website referenced above. The HCAL site is located in the public recreation area next to the Bare Cove Fire Museum and South Shore Model Railway and will replace Building #14.

Are there any other requirements related to the Town's ownership of the FLP Land?

- The Town cannot sell, lease, assign or dispose of the property, however the Town can allow for third-party activities through concession agreements – There are currently 3 concession agreements (Fire Museum, Model Railway & youth sports field house on Beal Street)
- The Town must operate the property in accordance with the Civil Rights Act
- The Town must submit periodic stewardship reports
- If there is a breach of any condition or covenant of the deed, the property shall, at the USA's option, revert back to the USA. – All NPS-FLP deeds contain this language.
- "If at any time the [USA] shall determine that the premises conveyed herein, or any part thereof, are needed for the national defense, all right, title and interest in and to said premises...shall revert and become the property of the [USA]".

Is it typical for NPS-FLP deeds to contain rights for the federal government to take back land and is this a concern for the 1300 NPS-FLP properties in the United States?

All NPS-FLP property deeds contain one or more rights of the federal government to retake FLP land. Does that mean the no FLP land community should invest in the properties? Not at all. In fact, all NPS-FLP properties are conveyed with the intent they will be improved for community purposes as noted on the NPS-FLP webpage linked above, and senior centers are one of those permitted uses. In the Town's communications with the National Park Service over more than the last ten years, no NPS official has every cautioned the Town against investment in the property for this reason. This is a de minimis risk for communities with NPS-FLP properties. To the Town's knowledge, the United States has never exercised its reversionary rights to reclaim NPS-FLP land for national defense.

What is "Article 97"?

Article 97 of the Amendment to the Massachusetts Constitution establishes a right to a clean environment for the citizens of the Commonwealth. Land subject to Article 97 cannot be used for other purposes or disposed of without a two-thirds roll call vote of the Legislature. The Commonwealth has also adopted a statute (MGL c. 3, §5A – the "Act") which codifies the requirements and process for submission to the legislature of petitions to authorize uses on Article 97 land. Under the Act, the Massachusetts Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs (EOEEA) must review alternatives analyses and other environmental information about the project site and any proposed replacement land. Then EOEEA reviews and makes a determination regarding the natural resource value of the Article 97 land and replacement land. The Secretary of EOEEA oversees all of the Commonwealth's environmental and natural resource agencies and departments.

Is the Town complying with Article 97 and the Act for the HCAL site?

Yes. The 2025 Town Meeting voted by a two-thirds majority to authorize the Select Board to file a petition for Article 97 approval. The Town has submitted to EOEEA and the Massachusetts legislature all information required under the Act. Materials can be found at Article 97 Submission Tracker (File No. A97_017_131). The legislature's Joint Committee on Municipalities and Regional Government reviewed the Town's petition and public comment and voted the petition favorably out of Committee. The petition is now going through the typical process for all pending bills and it awaits votes by the House of Representatives and the Senate.

What is "replacement land"?

When land subject to Article 97 is proposed for a change of use, replacement land must be identified (or a payment in lieu of land made) that is of equal or greater value than the impacted area with respect to: (i) acreage; (ii) monetary value as determined by an appraisal of the fair market value or value in use, whichever is greater; and (iii) natural resource value (the benefit the land provides the public such as clean air and water, healthy food, climate change mitigation, wildlife habitat, or recreation).

After review and approval by the School Committee and the Conservation Commission, the 2025 Town Meeting authorized the designation of approximately 6.847 acres near Plymouth River School directly abutting 53.48 acres of existing conservation land currently held by the Hingham Conservation Commission. This land is currently under the custody of the School Committee and therefore is not protected land. If the HCAL project proceeds, then care, custody and control of this parcel will be transferred to the Conservation Commission and will be protected as Article 97 land.

How does the natural resource value of the replacement land near Plymouth River School compare to the natural resource value of the HCAL site?

The Town has provided EOEEA with documentation that the replacement land is of equal or greater value than the HCAL site as to all three of the Article 97 criteria:

- (i) acreage: the replacement land is 1.4 acres (27%) larger than the HCAL site;
- (ii) monetary value: an independent appraisal has determined that its monetary value is less than the replacement land; and
- (iii) natural resource value: A Natural Resource Site Analysis Report for each site was generated using the EOEEA Natural Resource Site Evaluation Tool. While both the HCAL site and the replacement land contain some similar natural resources, the replacement land lies entirely within medium- and high-yield aquifers and is located in close proximity to a Zone II Aquifer Protection District.

The Secretary of EOEEA, issued a letter, dated October 3, 2025, confirming that the natural resource value of the replacement land is of equal or greater value compared to the HCAL site. The aquifer is Hingham's water supply and by designating this acreage as replacement land it will be protected as Article 97 land. In addition, while the HCAL has difficult terrain and is not easily accessible to the public, the replacement land has existing trails which make the land more accessible. The planned design of the HCAL will create additional walking trails to connect the site to other existing trails in the adjacent park significantly increasing the public accessibility between the HCAL site and the park.

Is the HCAL site in an "area of critical environmental concern" (ACEC)?

The site is located near the outside perimeter, and is less than 0.5%, of a 950 acre ACEC designated in 1982 to recognize the coastal resource area along the Back River.

Construction of the HCAL is permitted in the ACEC. An ACEC designation requires a look at how a project may impact the ACEC, not if it can be constructed.

A professional wetlands scientist reviewed the HCAL's potential impact on the ACEC. The findings include a determination that the proposed HCAL site activity is located along the outside perimeter of the ACEC, the project will impact less than 0.5% of the 950-acre ACEC area, the proposed work area is not located in an area of tidal influence, and the closest tidal mean high-water line is located more than 0.27-miles from the proposed limit of disturbance.

The wetland scientist concluded that the HCAL project "does not demonstrate the potential to

adversely affect” the ACEC. In the EOEEA letter, dated October 3, 2025, referenced above, the Secretary noted that the EEA has reviewed and accepted the wetlands scientist’s analysis. The Town chose the HCAL site with sensitivity toward nearby wetland resources. The HCAL will be constructed outside of wetland resources and their buffer zones. In addition, the HCAL design team is working closely with Town staff and the Building Committee with a focus on incorporating sustainability into every aspect of the design, including:

- Pervious paving in specific locations to reduce stormwater runoff and allow rainwater to filter back into the ground naturally;
- Low-impact design features like rain gardens and bioswales to manage stormwater while adding seasonal color and texture;
- Landscaped corridors between parking areas filled with native flowering trees and pollinator-friendly gardens—spaces that are good for birds and bees;
- Native plantings throughout, chosen to thrive in the local climate with minimal watering and upkeep;
- Balanced earthwork approach that minimizes the need to bring in or haul away soil—efficient, economical, and gentle on the land;
- Bike path connections linking the Center to the riverfront and nearby ball fields, encouraging multi-modal transportation;
- EV-ready parking to future-proof the site and support the growing use of electric vehicles;
- All-electric building that’s net-zero ready, designed with efficiency and renewable energy in mind;
- Vegetable garden that can tie into the Center’s food and nutrition programs;
- Rainwater harvesting system for garden irrigation; and
- Bird-friendly glazing to reduce collisions and support local and migratory bird populations.

Is the HCAL site part of a wildlife sanctuary?

No. In the 1980s Town Meeting voted to authorize the selectmen to seek wildlife sanctuary designation for the FLP Land. This must be established pursuant to a state statute. However, the land never received that designation from the state. This was confirmed in 2016 by the Massachusetts Department of Fish and Game (which includes the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife who oversees such designations). The FLP Land has been referred to in recent years with this designation (including a sign installed in 2004) based on the misbelief that it had been designated when in fact it had not.

Notably, while all forested areas support some wildlife, the Natural Resource Site Analysis Report for the HCAL site generated through EOEEA reports that none of the HCAL site acreage includes Aquatic Core Habitat, Wetland Core Habitat, Forest Core Habitat, or Vernal Pool Core Habitat. In addition, the United States Fish and Wildlife Service Information for Planning and Consultation Service issued a determination that the project site would have no effect on endangered species or any threatened species.

Do any state environmental agencies have oversight of the HCAL site?

No. The HCAL site is being designed so that the project will not affect any wetland resources or their buffer zones. There are no state permits required for the project. Therefore, no state environmental agencies, such as DEP, CZM, or DCR (which includes state foresters), have jurisdiction or permitting oversight of the HCAL site.

Would an alternative site like the driving range parcel on Union Street have less impacts?

No – siting the HCAL on Union Street would have significantly more impacts. The Union Street parcel was considered by the Town in a public process, including a Select Board meeting on August 15, 2023. It was discussed that siting the HCAL on Union Street would adversely impact traffic at the high school and adjacent fields, and it would be built very close to the adjacent single family home. In addition, the site has limited development capacity. The parcel is in the Town’s aquifer and the wellhead protection district for the Town’s water supply. It abuts the Weir River, is in a floodplain, and the EOEEA Natural

Resource Site Evaluation Tool has identified a significant Aquatic Core Habitat area on the site. While a small scale structure may be possible it would also require tree removal. As to the availability of utilities, the site is not within the North Hingham Sewer District. The high school was connected to sewer in 1969 but no other properties along Union Street are permitted to tie into the sewer main without undertaking a comprehensive regulatory approval process. A septic system on this site would take up a significant portion of the buildable area and the size of the system would be limited by the location in the aquifer and next to the Weir River. Also, due to the location of the Weir River resources and floodplain, an appropriately-sized HCAL with parking would be challenging to site on the parcel and would have to be sited very close to the directly adjacent single family home.

You can find more information at the HCAL Building Project Webpage.

Please Join the Conversation

The CAL project is the product of thoughtful community conversations and shared goals. As we move forward, your voice matters. We will be engaging you throughout the process and look forward to your questions and feedback. Visit the project website for up-to-date information—and sign up below to get these newsletters sent to your inbox.

**Sign Up for Project
Newsletters**

**HCAL Building Project
Website**

Center for Active Living Building Committee: Tom Carey (Chair), Beth Rouleau (Vice-Chair), Vicki Donlan, Joseph Kelly, Sally O'Hare, Jean Silverio, Steve Young, Jennifer Young (CAL Director, ex officio, non-voting member)

Council on Aging (COA): Joe Nevins (Chair), Sara Smithson (Vice-Chair), Rory Earley, Ethel Franks, Karen Johnson, Lucinda King-Frode, Leon Merian, Joshua Ross, Jean Silverio, Elaine Ward

Friends of the Center for Active Living (FOCAL): John Slater (President), Nick Amdur, David Anderson, Betty Foley, Dorothy Galo, Yvette Kanter, Donna Linskey, Eileen McCracken