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Land Bank Acquires Aquinnah Oceanfront, Scenic Chilmark Field

By IAN FEIN

The Martha's Vineyard Land Bank this week added another 400 feet of Aquinnah white sand beach to its oceanfront holdings, and also acquired a scenic field on South Road in Chilmark. Both up-Island properties are roughly eight acres. The purchase prices were \$2.25 million and \$875,000, respectively.

The new properties cap the 20th anniversary of the public conservation organization, which buys land with a transfer fee collected on most Island real estate transactions. Established by the Massachusetts state legislature in 1986, the land bank this year preserved more than 110 acres of land at a cost of \$20.7 million, bringing its total Islandwide holdings to more than 2,800 acres.

"Two important land bank goals have been served here," land bank executive director James Lengyel said of the purchases this week. "The first is to keep the roadside scenic, and both properties do that. The second is to provide public access to the shoreline whenever feasible."

The Aquinnah purchase doubles the acreage of land bank oceanfront at Moshup Beach - one of the first preserves created by the public conservation organization. The land bank in 1987 bought 7.4 acres and 700 feet of beachfront, and then added another few hundred feet of adjacent beach two years ago.



The land bank considered purchasing the current property from Joan Higbee in 1993, but opted against it. The 2004 addition made the parcel more attractive, however, and the land bank changed its mind when it was approached by Edgartown real estate agent Thomas Wallace earlier this year.

Though the new parcel is separated from the existing Moshup Beach by a few lots, it is strategically located between the existing land bank property and the town-managed Philbin Beach - creating a nearly continuous stretch of public access along the westernmost edge of the Island. Public access to the new beach parcel will likely be provided from a walking path along Moshup Trail. Parking will be at the town-owned lot near the Aquinnah Circle on the Gay Head Cliffs.

The purchase will also protect views along Moshup Trail, as the eight-parcel extends to the eastern side of Moshup Trail and includes an oceanview building site.

The new Chilmark property will also preserve the scenic character of Island roads, though public access will not be allowed.

Land bank officials described the eight-acre parcel as a collar of open land that has long surrounded a historic home. Under the terms of the transaction, the seller of the property, Daniel Leventritt, will maintain ownership of the house, while the land bank will hold all of the surrounding fields. Mr. Leventritt cleared most of the fields earlier this month to create a new open view along the northern side of South Road.

The site was the original homestead of Chilmark whaling captain Stephen Flanders, according to

Gazette archives. The property was long known to Island residents and visitors as the Blue Barque tea room and antique shop, operated by the Cavert sisters, who sold the property to the Leventritt family in 1963.

The home has stood empty and covered with No Trespassing signs for a number of years. The land bank has named its property Blue Barque Preserve to honor the previous name of the house.

Land bank town advisory board member Clarissa Allen of Chilmark said this week she was pleased to see the roadside fields restored and preserved.

"It's a really lovely part of the Island, and it hasn't changed much," Ms. Allen said. "The development that has gone on there has mostly been hidden from view, and this purchase will prevent more from occurring along that stretch."

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