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Somers rebuts land values used in Highlands editorial

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EDITOR:

In your editorial of Sept. 3, you raise a couple of issues about the Highlands Act's impact on Tewksbury farmer, Hank Klumpp.

First, you make an unsupportable assumption that Mr. Klumpp, who you say owns 150 acres in an area zoned 3-acres per residential lot, would have the right to build 50 new houses.

You further assume a value of \$250,000 per lot, and state his land therefore was worth \$12.5 million. However, before passage of the Highlands Act, in 2004, Tewksbury Township rezoned this area for 12-acres per lot.

Until a Planning Board has permitted a landowner to subdivide his property, the owner does not know how many lots the tract will yield. Certainly it would be fewer than his 150 acres divided by 12 acres per lot.

The yield would be even lower for Mr. Klumpp, whose land is severely constrained by steep slopes which are regulated by municipal ordinance, a high quality trout-production stream and associated 300-foot riparian buffers, regulated by the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP), separate from Highlands rules, and high-tension electric power lines that cross it.

Almost the entirety of this property is considered to be habitat for state-designated threatened and endangered species, regulated by DEP, separate from Highlands rules, and at least 20 acres are mapped by DEP as high value wetlands, which must also have 150 buffers.

Second, Mr. Klumpp has often repeated his wish to continue to make a living farming hay in the spring and harvesting wood in the cold months with two of his sons. He says he doesn't want to sell, which may be as well because, Highlands Act aside, the recession that grips the country has certainly caused his property to drop in value, markedly, something we have all experienced.

But it would appear that Mr. Klumpp told you he would agree to sell his development rights to the state. The state does have the money to buy his land, and will pay what his property is worth, appraising it using pre-act zoning value – they just won't pay what he wants you to believe it's worth. Two very different numbers.

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