

Proponents 3-1 Over Opponents

Case Mt. Purchase Debated At Hearing

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Herald Reporter

The Manchester Board of Directors was caught by surprise Tuesday night at the unexpected large turnout for a public hearing on town acquisition of Case Mt., and had to move its meeting out of the Municipal Building and into Woodruff Hall of Center Congregational Church.

About 130 persons showed up for the hearing and over 30 of them spoke — with the count better than 3 to 1 in favor of the acquisition. The hearing took over two hours. The board took no action on the proposal and

conducted no other business.

Board discussion and action on the proposed purchase will come at its Jan. 15 meeting. The same night, the board will conclude most of its unfinished and new business.

Town Manager Robert Weiss, after giving a history of the steps taken toward the acquisition since the Conservation Commission first proposed it, explained the recommended funding as follows:

The total cost for the 229.56-acre parcel is fixed at \$631,622.50. The federal government has set aside \$299,953 and the state government already has delivered a check for its share — \$165,523.50.

The town's \$167,000 share would come from \$96,043 available in the Insurance Refund Account, \$54,000 from 1972-73 General Fund surplus; Weiss said he anticipates the surplus will reach about \$100,000, and \$16,907 available in the Capital Improvement Reserve Fund.

Weiss explained that the fresh-water spring, the pond, the existing access road, the bridge and the falls are not included in the purchase agreement. He said he has a written promise from Wells Case Denison, one of the owners, for providing the town with a new access from Spring St., just west of the spring.

Weiss said a new gravel road and a gravel parking lot (for 30 to 50 cars) would cost about \$50,000, and that he will recommend that sum for that purpose in the 1974-75 budget. He said access to the mountain will be limited to pedestrian traffic only.

Weiss recommended that the existing access road through land owned by Andrew Ansaldo Sr. and Jr. and to a town-owned water tower, be chained off and that it be used only when maintenance work is required at the water tower. He recommended also that the existing access also be chained off — with no access permitted there.

He said it is his understanding the owners of the fresh-water spring will permit public access to it. He predicted the area of Case Mt. not included in the agreement will remain in

its present, rough form and that any proposals for improvements or construction there would require a zone change.

Jules Karp, attorney for the Ansaldis, who constructed developments adjacent to the 229.56-acre parcel, said his clients are in favor of the acquisition. Karp stressed the need for prohibiting access through Lookout Mt. and Tonica Springs Rds. He urged it be written into the deed as a condition for the transfer. He proposed, also, that the Planning and Zoning Commission amend the maps of the Ansaldo subdivisions, to guarantee the existing access will be closed.

Speaking in favor of the acquisition were Theresa Parla, present chairman of the Conservation Commission; and past chairmen Dr. Frank Horton, Dr. Frederick Spaulding and Lemuel Miller; also, former member Carolyn Becker and present member John FitzGerald.

Mrs. Parla, in an eloquent plea that drew great applause, as did most of the talks in favor of the acquisition, traced the history of the proposal and listed the efforts by many organizations and individuals.

Dr. Horton elaborated on the original proposal.

Dr. Spaulding spoke for "the born and unborn silent majority" which is looking to the Board of Directors to preserve natural areas. "In Case Mt.," he said, "we are dealing with life itself."

Miller stressed the "long and tireless efforts" in the past to the present for the acquisition.

He said the town has failed to provide for the passive recreation needs of its residents.

Frank Lupien, the most outspoken of the opponents, drew groans and boos when he warned, the area "would become a haven and jungle for uncontrollable sex orgies and alcoholic and drug binges."

He predicted, "This expenditure is only the beginning. It can run as high as \$500,000."

He, as did the other opponents, asked for a townwide referendum, "as the only way to decide the issue."

Ballila Pagani, another opponent, charged the public hearing was a mockery and that the directors were "making fools of us."

He said, by already accepting the federal grant and the state's check for its share, "you (the directors) actually have already decided to buy the

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Case Mt.

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property." He insisted the proper way would have been a referendum, "before the federal and state grants were promised."

Urging acquisition on behalf of their organizations were Althea Potter, president of the Manchester League of Women Voters; Dr. Stephen Romeo, chairman of the Chamber of Commerce Beautification Committee; Joseph Lawler, chairman of the Save Case Mt. Committee; Lee McCray, president of the Manchester Jaycees; Betty Eigner of the Manchester Junior Women's Club; Charles Spaeth, president of Lutz Museum Board of Trustees; and Richard Gowen, coordinator of the Manchester Youth Council.

Frank Utakis and Betty Sadloski, representing the Manchester Property Owners Association, spoke against the proposal.

Utakis said the MPOA is "unalterably opposed" to the manner the board is following for the acquisition.

"The people should have a say," he insisted. "There's still time for a referendum. If it's a good purchase, you needn't be afraid of a referendum."

Mrs. Sadloski said, "Our main argument is your avoidance of a public referendum. Avoiding it means you're afraid it could lose. What will happen when the people learn they can't trust you?"

She said she isn't sure she does or doesn't want to see the parcel purchased and doesn't blame people for wanting it.

Nicholas Lefas, also against the purchase, asked the board to "consider the concept of a referendum — advisable in a

democratic form of government."

John Eicholtzer, an opponent, cited "the many pressure groups who now show up in force for their pet project, yet never attend board meetings on other agenda items."

Dr. Robert Stanton, speaking for the proposal, said he was speaking also for the residents of Timrod Rd. Dr. Stanley Milewski, also a proponent, warned the population from New York may expand to New England and form one, long metropolitan area. "We must preserve the last beautiful area of land in Manchester," he said.

Dr. Douglas Smith, former chairman of the Chamber's Beautification Committee, urged acquisition. "The advantages far outweigh the trivial disadvantages," he said.

Also for the purchase were Dave Dumaine, Vincent Kelly, Ronald Schlank and Aemon Flanagan.

Flanagan relieved the tension and drew laughs when he said, "If I represent anyone — it's my dog. My dog and I enjoy walking Case Mt. I'm selfish. Save it for me and my dog — if not for future generations."

Also backing the acquisition were Truman Cowles, Roger Lemelin, Edward Dennis and Hayden Griswold Jr.

Mrs. Michael Swetzes, an opponent of the proposal, said, "We have lots of land now we aren't using, including watershed land from here to Bolton and Glastonbury. We have roads that desperately need fixing and lots of other things that need to be done. Please — we don't want our taxes to go up."