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*Office of the Board of Selectmen*

*136 Elm Street*

*North Easton, Massachusetts 02356*

February 8, 2010

Community Preservation Act Committee  
136 Elm Street  
Easton, MA 02356

Re: Ames Shovel Works Project

Dear Members:

The Easton Board of Selectmen is submitting this memorandum in strong support of the Ames Shovel Works project proposed by Beacon Communities. Our support for this proposal is based on our reverence of Easton's past, concern for Easton's present, and hope for Easton's future. We support this proposal because:

- The Ames Shovel Works Complex is a site of national historical significance, which Easton has the opportunity and the means to restore and preserve for future generations;
- A sustained and significant public response to the projects proposed on this site have demonstrated the importance of this place to this community;
- This project proposal offers a chance for economic development of Easton's Main Street as well as public amenities including a new public park;
- Our partner in this project has a demonstrated track record of reliability and competence;
- There are significant risks to the Town in doing nothing

**Shovel Works are Nationally Significant**

The Ames Shovel Works is historically significant for its role in the industrial transformation of 19th century America. The shovels manufactured here by generations of the Ames family helped build America. Ames shovels were used during the California Gold Rush, the Civil War, and the building of the Transcontinental Railroad. The buildings that remain standing today are monuments to that time, but they are threatened with being lost forever without an intervention.

Fortunately, there is national and federal support for this project in the form of Historic Preservation Tax Credits. The Town is also working with the developer to obtain additional state assistance in the form of HOME funds. The proposed federal and state

assistance total more than \$17M, however the project cannot proceed without our support, too.

### **Appropriate Use of CPA Funds**

The Community Preservation Act is a way for communities to take control of their own future, and this project represents a perfect blend of the three core objectives of the Act: affordable housing, open space and historic preservation. Easton is fortunate enough to have accumulated more than \$9M in funds, which are available now to take control of the future of this very important site with enough funds left over to fund the Affordable Housing Trust Action Plan *and* accomplish the land acquisition goals listed in the Open Space and Recreation Plan.

Easton voters have already demonstrated their commitment to protecting historic structures in our community as evidenced through the use of CPA funding to restore the exterior of historic Unity Church and fund repairs to the Rockery in the North Easton Historic District. Under this proposal, the Town of Easton would take control over the future of what are arguably the most historic structures within our community.

In weighing the decision of whether or not to support funding the Shovel Works project, the Board of Selectmen was very concerned with being able to purchase the priority parcels listed in the Open Space and Recreation Plan. Therefore, the Board asked the Town Accountant to develop a scenario using very conservative—but realistic—assumptions. In the ten years that the CPA has been in existence in Easton, none of the priority parcels has become available for purchase. The Board has recommended that an analysis be conducted in which 2 of the parcels are assumed to become available within the first year and an additional large parcel within 3 years. An analysis where 5 or 6 parcels become available at the same time is simply not realistic, especially in an economy where very few landowners are selling at all unless they absolutely *have* to; such an analysis would present the taxpayers with a false choice. The Board is confident in the projections of the Town Accountant that under any realistic scenario, the Town can fund all of its priorities, including preserving its historical heritage, creating new recreational facilities, and preserving open space.

### **Benefits Abound, and Doing Nothing is Risky**

Historical preservation is not the only benefit this project offers the Town. The proposal is also projected to create new public green space in Easton's center, increase *net* tax revenues from the site, and provide much needed wastewater treatment capacity in the downtown. The project will be accomplished with existing CPA resources and not result in any tax increase on our citizens; in fact, it will result in future tax revenues to the town through the sale of the condo units – a fiscally prudent long term consideration that we must acknowledge in these uncertain economic times. Finally, the decreased density that results from the developer NOT building to full capacity will create excess sewage capacity in the new wastewater treatment plant that will enable growth and expansion of

businesses in North Easton – an option that currently does not exist because Easton’s lack of sewer infrastructure.

The issue has been raised that the proposed investment of CPA funds presents some risk to the Town that the funds will not be repaid; but the risks of doing nothing must also be considered. Not allowing the Beacon Communities proposal to go before the voters could result in a much less desirable project, or, in a worst case scenario, the demolition of the Ames Shovel Works. Allowing the Turners to proceed with their plans also represents significant financial risks to the town. First, we would be forced to fight this at Housing Appeals Committee, with protracted litigation costs. If the Town is unsuccessful, which is likely, and the currently permitted project goes forward, the Town is projected to lose millions in new services to the project that will not be supported with taxes on a rental project. These costs would be avoided by taking control of the property in partnership with Beacon Communities.

### **Proven and Reliable Partner**

Beacon Communities has a stellar reputation in the field of adaptive reuse and preservation of historic structures. They are highly regarded at the state and local level and have a 40-year track record of successfully working with communities to achieve their goals. They also have access to capital for this project – an impressive fact that demonstrates the strength and confidence of their reputation among lending institutions. With financial “skin in the game”, Beacon Communities has the integrity, reputation, values and ability to make this project work. They are also demonstrating a willingness to accept risk: their profit will be tied to the success of this project and they must have all funding in place before a shovel hits the ground. Finally, the developer must post a bond to ensure that the construction is completed. Thus, a worst case scenario would be that, in the unlikely event Beacon Communities withdraws, the Town of Easton would have a fully completed project, including a new public park and wastewater treatment plan, with a historic preservation restriction permanently attached to the buildings.

### **Heart and Soul of Our Community Is At Stake**

We should not for a moment diminish the importance or magnitude of what is at stake here –the very foundation of our town’s history and character is threatened. The Board of Selectmen has seen an overwhelming public response in favor of preserving the Shovel Works complex over the past several months. The Ames Shovel Works Complex represents the heart and soul of this community, and is central to the architectural and historic fabric of Easton. There are simply no relevant comparisons to be made with proposed developments in any other part of town.

### **The Taxpayers Should Decide**

The Community Preservation Committee has time and again proven itself to be an invaluable resource to the people of this community. Most of you have spent many years of your lives dedicated to the well being and preservation of Easton’s unique character.

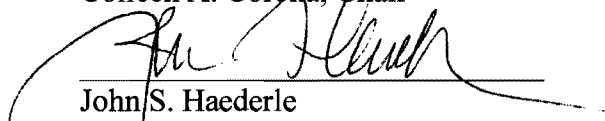
We all appreciate the wonderful job you've done over the years and hope that you will continue to be conscientious stewards of the Community Preservation fund. In this case we hope you will help vet this proposal, but ultimately leave it to your fellow citizens to decide.

So much hinges on a decision of this magnitude that the taxpayers deserve a chance to weigh in. No matter the outcome, we would at least know that we took all available steps to try and save the Ames Shovel Works. The residents of Easton have consistently shown a willingness to support historic and open space preservation, and we feel they should be given the opportunity on this proposal. In the end, the project will rise or fall on its own merits – but it must be the town that decides the fate of those buildings. By not allowing this to be decided by our fellow townspeople, we will be remembered for our failure to act when we had the opportunity and the resources to save those buildings. We simply will not get this opportunity again.

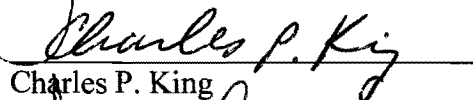
Sincerely,



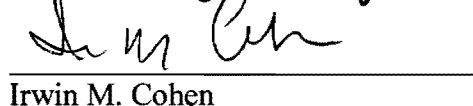
Colleen A. Corona, Chair




John S. Haederle



Charles P. King



Irwin M. Cohen



Ellen Barlow

Easton Board of Selectmen

cc    Planning Board  
      Historical Commission  
      Recreation Commission  
      Conservation Commission  
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      Donna Abelli, Finance Committee Chair  
      Alice Savage, Planning Director  
      Stephanie Danielson, Land Use Agent  
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      The Enterprise  
      The Easton Journal  
      The Boston Globe  
      The Buzz