

# Petition Proposes to Name South Park Site for Kupinse

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A Citizens for Easton initiative proposes to designate 11 upland acres of the town-owned South Park Avenue property as open space and name it in memory of former First Selectman William J. Kupinse Jr. The petition will be presented to the Board Of Selectmen for consideration.

Kupinse championed land preservation and conservation in both his capacity as first selectman and CFE board member. He was a familiar face at town meetings long after his 10-year tenure on the board ended. He died on April 7.

Residents who wish to sign the petition may do so in person at Greiser's Coffee & Market or on-line at:

<https://www.facebook.com/citizensforeaston/posts/2835548526699186>

The town of Easton bought 29.5 acres of land bounded by South Park Avenue and the Mill River for \$6,150,000 in 2008 to prevent a high-density development that would have required amending the town's local zoning regulations. Taxpayers voted on the measure on June 17, 2008:

"Shall the town of Easton appropriate \$6,150,000 for the acquisition of approximately 30 acres of land located on South Park Avenue for the preservation, conservation and land

use control purposes and authorize the issuance of bonds and notes of the town in the same amount, or so much thereof as may be necessary after the deduction of grants therefore, to finance such appropriation?" The vote resulted in approval by 75% of the voters.

Recently, a partnership between the Aspetuck Land Trust, the state, and the town of Easton obtained a grant to preserve 19 acres of environmentally sensitive areas of the South Park Avenue property along the Mill River as open space in perpetuity. The deal is expected to close before the end of the year.

The CFE petition seeks to retain the remaining acres as open space so the entire parcel will be protected against commercial or residential development. The future of the upland portion of the property is the subject of debate. Those who want to see the land retained as open space argue that the town bought the property to prevent development.

However, some in town interpret the intent of the purchase differently. They believe that developing the upland portion would not compromise conservation efforts and could potentially provide tax relief and the possibility of senior housing or other revenue-producing development that would both enhance and enrich the town.

The Board of Selectmen appointed the South Park Avenue Advisory Committee to examine alternative uses. Currently, the selectmen are re-evaluating a proposed pilot program to farm hemp on a small part of the land. Going forward, the BOS will consider the CFE-led petition and continue to explore additional opportunities for development that would generate a return on the town's investment.

According to a letter sent to the Board of Selectmen and the South Park Advisory Committee, the Citizens for Easton Board reiterated the significance of keeping the entire South Park property as open space.

"Bill [Kupinse] was such a huge proponent of preservation, and in particular, the South

Park property,” the letter stated. “He did so much for the Town of Easton, it would be a wonderful way to honor him and educate future generations of the value of preservation and conservation.”