

# Kolnaski/Merritt Swap Public Hearing

## Alert 8.29.18

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*The 38-acre section of the King property is outlined in red.*

Dear Friends of Groton's Environment,

We need your help once again to get final approval for conservation protections on the beautiful King property surrounding the Kolnaski school, which we wrote to you about last spring. This property, combined with the Boulder Heights property, will replace the Merritt property on Fort Hill Rd. now that the court ruled to release protective state restrictions on use of the property, clearing the way for the swap and construction of a new middle school. The Town Council (TC) public hearing on the swap is the final step!

Come to a  
**Town Council Public Hearing Tuesday, Sept. 4**

6:00 pm Community Room 1  
Town Hall Annex  
134 Groton Long Point Rd.

## Make a short statement in support of the King/Kolnaski property swap

...or email your statement to the TC **now** until 5 pm Tuesday, Sept. 4

Below are some talking points you may want to consider...

- **Express appreciation for the Town Council and Town staff's hard, collaborative work** to find a much better replacement for the protected Merritt property, which is needed for a school. The original and sole Town-proposed swap—the 20-acre Boulder Heights property, of far less ecological value than the 35-acre Merritt property—would have diminished Groton's open space acreage and set a bad precedent.
- The King/Kolnaski property offers **excellent recreational value** and preferred location on the west side of town (an area of Groton in need of more open space). The property features beautiful forested woodlands with stunning ridges suitable for hiking trails.
- **Significant conservation values:** It includes a large wetland area and very rare white cedar grove. Birch Plain Creek runs through it and beyond to Baker Cove and Long Island Sound. This property has been on town lists for conservation for decades.
- The **court-approved swap is of equal or greater value as required by Connecticut law**. The exchange now includes both the King/Kolnaski property (38 acres valued at \$155K) *and* the Boulder Heights property (20+ acres valued at \$540K) for the 35-acre Merritt property valued at \$458K.
- All of **Groton's environmental organizations support this plan** (Groton Conservation Advocates, Groton Open Space Association, and Avalonia Land Conservancy).

To send your email to the Town Council in support of the King property, address your letter to Mayor Patrice Granatosky and Members of the Town Council. The following addresses include TC members and the town manager.

[pgranatosky@groton-ct.gov](mailto:pgranatosky@groton-ct.gov), [abumgardner@groton-ct.gov](mailto:abumgardner@groton-ct.gov), [datwater@groton-ct.gov](mailto:datwater@groton-ct.gov), [rfranco@groton-ct.gov](mailto:rfranco@groton-ct.gov), [lobrey@groton-ct.gov](mailto:lobrey@groton-ct.gov), [jparker@groton-ct.gov](mailto:jparker@groton-ct.gov), [rschmidt@groton-ct.gov](mailto:rschmidt@groton-ct.gov), [jzeppieri@groton-ct.gov](mailto:jzeppieri@groton-ct.gov), [cheede@groton-ct.gov](mailto:cheede@groton-ct.gov), [jburt@groton-ct.gov](mailto:jburt@groton-ct.gov)

### Background info to refresh your memory:

In **mid-February 2018**, The Day published a letter to the editor critical of the Town of Groton's plan to swap the Merritt property for Boulder Heights as part of the Groton 2020 (school) Plan on two grounds: that a **public hearing on the swap was never held as required by law** and the swap ignored protective restrictions placed on the Merritt property purchased by the town shortly after the 1988 open-space referendum. The new Town Council scheduled the long-overdue hearing on Feb. 27.

Alarmed that this land conveyance established a **dangerous precedent**, GCA sent out an [Action Alert](#) encouraging our supporters to attend the hearing. More than 70 people packed the [Town Council public hearing](#) to express their opinions about whether the swap should go forward or not. GCA and other **conservationists questioned whether the**

**town followed the law** governing this conveyance and warned that building on the Merritt property without offering an alternative of equal value (Boulder Heights alone did not offer equal value) violated the public trust. The Attorney General's office, when consulted by the Town about the swap, told Groton that "...**a court — mostly likely the Superior Court — would have to rule** on whether the town is allowed to change use of the land." Click here for full [article](#) in The Day.

Although GCA opposed the unequal swap, it did not oppose building the school on the Merritt property provided that an equitable swap was found. **GCA researched several possible properties and recommended that the King property surrounding the Catherine Kolnaski Magnet School be considered as an alternative** because of its excellent conservation values and potential recreational opportunities. See our [Action Alert](#).

On Tuesday, March 27, the Town Council Committee-of-the-Whole met at 6:30 pm at the Town Hall Annex. The Council unanimously passed a resolution "that the town attorney take the legal steps needed to effectuate the town's rights and interests related to the Merritt property and for the town manager to explore additional properties including the King property to place the conservation easement upon it."

Click [here](#) to read an article in The Day about GCA's position on the swap.

**On August 8, the New London Superior Court ruled in favor of releasing state protective restrictions on the Merritt property, clearing the way for the swap. The Town Council is holding a public hearing on the proposed Merritt property swap on September 4.**

**Thank you so much for standing up on behalf of Groton's environment!**

Sincerely,

Liz Raisbeck and Eugenia Villagra, Co-Chairs, Groton Conservation Advocates

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