

Archeological Synopsis In Relation to Milton Mews Development Site

“The Town of Milton and Mass Housing should require that a thorough archaeological site review take place before any approvals are given to Milton Mews. Once the ground is broken, the concrete is poured, you can never get it back. This is our ancestors’ land, the peoples’ land, that is being disturbed. We are living with the earth not on it.”

• Gil Solomon, Massachusetts Tribal Council Sachem (by phone, April 10, 2013)

Background

Archaeologists are necessarily secretive about the exact location of important archeological sites because they don't want the general public disturbing and pilfering them. Archaeologists are also secretive about telling the public the triggers that cause interest among archaeologists in a particular location.

Despite this secretiveness, I have been able to learn the following in relation to the location of the proposed Milton Mews.

Regional Context

I have been able to substantiate that there have been important Native American artifacts found near the proposed development land:

- Numerous findings in the Blue Hills area have been registered with the state.
- The Ponkapoag area has known important sites such as Wamsutta.
- The Mass Historic Commission substantiated on the phone that the Brush Hill Road area has had some archaeological finds.
- The Green Hill archeological site in Fowl Meadow (which is adjacent to the proposed development site) is regarded as especially significant, as explained below.

Native Americans tended to follow deer, water-fowl and other wildlife along streams. At the Green Hill site they seem to have set up seasonal camps with deer harvesting areas. Hundreds of pre-historic tools were found, including arrowheads and scraping tools, used for hunting and harvesting. Fire pits and shelter structures were also found in this 78 acre site area.

The Green Hill site reports are under notebook tab 5, and can also be found online at these links:

<http://library.bridgew.edu/exhibits/BMAS/pdf/MAS-v41n01.pdf>

<http://library.bridgew.edu/exhibits/BMAS/pdf/MAS-v41n02.pdf>

I spoke to one of the archaeologists who worked on the Green Hill site for years. He described the site as from “the crest of the Green Hill all the way to Neponset River in Milton.”

If one looks at the DCR map (notebook tab 3), this puts the 78 acre archaeological site on Fowl Meadows land, abutting the proposed Milton Mews development.

For a broader regional context, see (at tab 2) the two maps within the document “Historical and Archaeological Resources of the Boston Area: A Framework for Preservation Decisions” put out by the Mass Historical Commission.

- Map 1 shows the topography of fault trends, glacial trends, and the upland relationship between Neponset River and Blue Hills.
- Map 2 shows the Archaeological sites and surviving Native Places Names.

More Triggers

This section is based on notes from a recent phone call with:
Ellen Berkland, DCR Archaeologist, Department of Conservation and Recreation
251 Causeway Street, Boston, MA 02114
617-626-1250
Ellen.Berkland@state.ma.us

There were many villages along the Neponset. The Native Americans tended to head back to Blue Hills for spiritual activities. The Blue Hills area is rich with stone resources for tools. It is also rich as a source of food. Native Americans followed deer and water-fowl along the streams.

She went into her data-base and while she couldn't give me specific locations she was able to confirm that there are catalogued sites all around this area.

She said that the proposed development site is within an “extremely sensitive archaeological area.” She called it a “hot spot” based on the archaeological finds in the area.

She said, to understand the triggers that indicate likely Native American settlement or activity, one has to think as a Native American living in nature would:

- If you were looking for a place to settle or travel on you would want a dry area with some exposure to sun so you could stay warm. So you would not settle on a North facing or cold portion of a hill.
- You would want water sources nearby. Native Americans travelled along streams and settled near water sources.
- Were their food sources to follow with the seasons?
- Is the soil well drained?

A walk on the proposed development site shows that this land has these characteristics. The site is sloping, downward from the Blue Hills area to the abutting Fowl Meadow

below it. There are dry areas and wet areas. The high dry areas are West and Southwest facing – not North facing. The site includes streams with lots of evidence of deer, birds, wild turkey. At least one of the streams comes all the way down from Blue Hills, down the sloping land, and into Fowl Meadow. Sloping areas tend to be well drained and there are numerous trees in the wet and dry areas of the proposed site. Trees grow in well-drained soil.

The current development of this 22 acre property is three homes with minor structures near them. The rest of this land is undeveloped, pristine and much like it was when the Native Americans roamed this area.

The “Ask”

This section is based on notes from call with Deborah C. Cox, President of Public Archaeology Laboratory in Rhode Island, 401-728-8780.

The following is the key thing that the town wants to put in their letter to Mass Housing regarding the archaeological significance of this site:

The proposed development area is within an extremely sensitive archaeological area. There are three known, significant archaeological sites within a half-mile of it. The immediate vicinity is, therefore very sensitive from an archaeological standpoint.

Moreover, the proposed development site has the physical characteristics of land that is known to have supported Native American settlement and other activity.

In sum, the proposed development has the potential to impact important archaeological resources. For this reason the town of Milton asks for a professional archaeological survey to be done by an independent firm and paid for by the developer before site approval or financial approval is granted to the Milton Mews project by Mass Housing.