



**Centre Island Great Meadow Creek Conservation**

*Prepared for the Board of Trustees*

*January 27<sup>th</sup>, 2026*

## Cover Letter

**To:** Village Board of Trustees

**From:** *Ragnar Oelsner*

**Date:** 1/27/2026

**Re:** Conservation Easement Strategy for Village-Owned Marshland — Permanent Protection, Grant Eligibility, and Non-Public Use

Dear Board of Trustees,

In support of the Village's proposal to permanently protect Great Meadow Creek as an environmental refuge and long-term natural asset for Centre Island, please see the attached memorandum along with Exhibit 1 / 2 Aerial visuals for the Board / Public's consideration.

The memorandum outlines a strategy for securing permanent conservation while retaining Village ownership and control, avoiding public access, and maximizing eligibility for state, federal, and private environmental and resilience-focused grant funding.

It also identifies three potential uses of grant funding that reinforces the Village's conservation intent over time including a potential opportunity to acquire the Jonas property, which could be repurposed with minimal improvements as a low-impact, Village-controlled community access and conservation site. Acquisition of this parcel would provide a controlled access point to the Village-owned Great Meadow Creek while strengthening the Village's overall conservation framework and competitiveness for environmental grant funding.

This material is intended to assist the Board in formalizing a durable conservation framework and to provide a clear, visually presentable framework for public understanding and community buy-in as the Village advances this effort.

Sincerely,

Ragnar Oelsner

Village Resident

[ragnar@occidentalm.com](mailto:ragnar@occidentalm.com)

561-301-6261

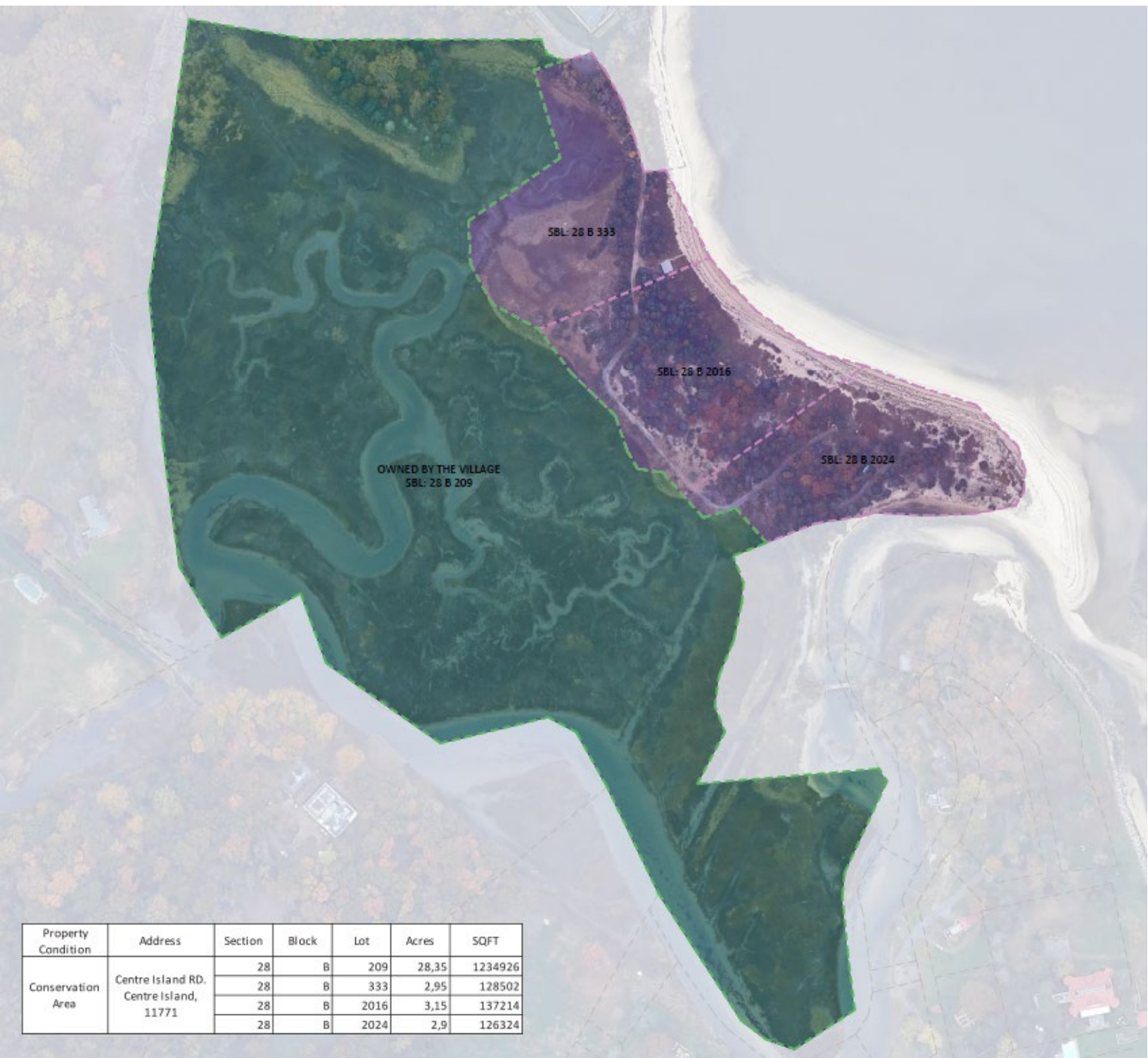
## Contents

Exhibit 1- Area of Reference .....	4
Exhibit 2- Detailed Tax Lot View .....	5
Exhibit 3- DEC Wetland Resource Mapper .....	6
I. Executive Summary.....	7
II. Background and Objectives .....	7
III. Key Legal Context.....	8
IV. Recommended Strategy: Granting a Conservation Easement .....	8
V. Grant Funding Opportunities Enabled by This Structure .....	10
VI. Reinforcing Local Law (Recommended).....	11
VII. Grants Worth Applying For.....	12
VIII. Expected Grant Amounts (Range & Likelihood) .....	13
IX. Permitted Uses of Grant Funds (Marsh-Specific).....	14
X. Proposed Grant Use 1: Oyster Restoration as a Use of Grants (Proposed Enhancement).....	16
XI. Proposed Grant Use 2: Funded Community Clean-up Events .....	19
Addendum- Jonas Property- Community Use Proposal .....	21
Exhibit 4- Potential Village Acquisition.....	23
Exhibit 5- Proposed Acquisition Community Use Site Plan.....	24
Exhibit 6- Overall Conservation Plan.....	25

**Exhibit 1- Area of Reference**



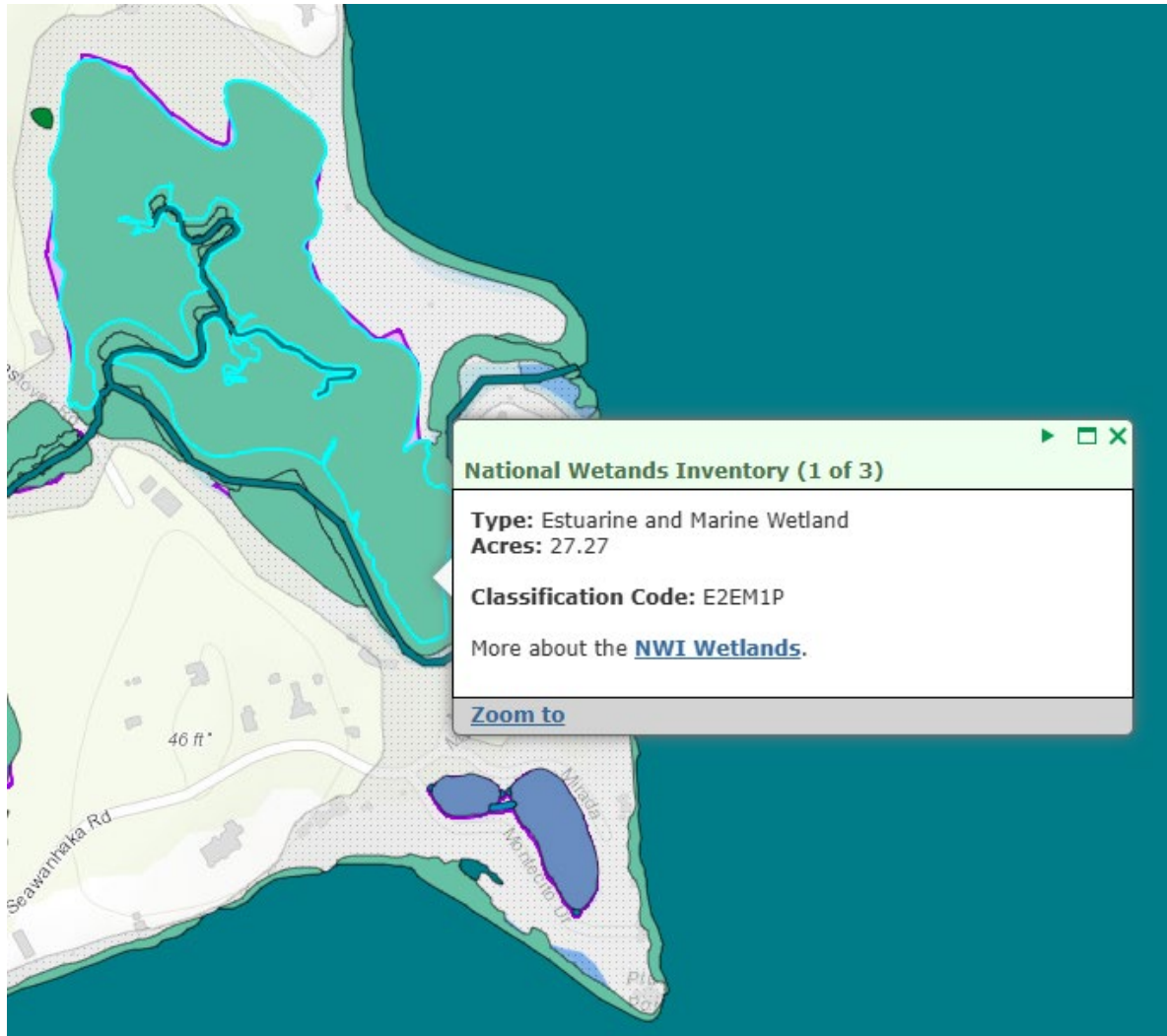
Exhibit 2- Detailed Tax Lot View



Property Condition	Address	Section	Block	Lot	Acres	SQFT
Conservation Area	Centre Island RD. Centre Island, 11771	28	B	209	28,35	1234926
		28	B	333	2,95	128502
		28	B	2016	3,15	137214
		28	B	2024	2,9	126324

## Exhibit 3- DEC Wetland Resource Mapper

### A. [Click Here](#)



This classification denotes a tidally influenced estuarine marsh system characterized by high ecological productivity, significant habitat value, and important flood attenuation and water-quality functions. Estuarine and marine wetlands of this type are recognized by DEC and federal agencies as priority conservation assets due to their role in coastal resilience, storm surge mitigation, and biodiversity support.

The presence of this designation supports the Village’s proposed use of a permanent conservation easement and strengthens eligibility for state and federal funding programs focused on wetlands protection, climate resilience, and nature-based infrastructure.

## I. Executive Summary

This memorandum outlines a best-practice strategy for the Village to permanently protect the 28.35 acres of Village-owned creek and marshland legally described as SBL 28 B 209 and located on the eastern section of the island and highlighted in **Exhibit 1 and 2**. The long term protection of the area can be secured through the use of a **conservation easement**, while:

- Retaining Village ownership and control
- **Prohibiting public access or recreational use**
- Maximizing eligibility for **state, federal, and private conservation grant funding**
- Reducing long-term political, legal, and environmental risk

The recommended approach is to grant a **recorded conservation easement** to a qualified third-party conservation entity (e.g., accredited land trust or New York State agency), paired with a reinforcing local law. This structure is widely used by coastal and environmentally sensitive municipalities and represents the strongest available mechanism for permanent conservation without park designation or public use obligations.

---

## II. Background and Objectives

The Village owns marshland that serves important ecological and environmental functions, including wetlands preservation, flood attenuation, habitat protection, and coastal resilience.

The Village's objectives are to:

1. Permanently preserve the marsh in its natural state
2. Prevent development or future conversion of the land
3. Avoid public access, recreational use, or park designation
4. Reduce long-term liability and political exposure
5. Maximize eligibility for environmental and resilience-focused grant funding

6. Bind future Village boards to a conservation outcome
- 

### III. Key Legal Context

- New York law permits municipalities to **voluntarily encumber their own land** with conservation easements granted to qualified holders.
  - **Public access is not legally required** for conservation easements unless expressly required by a specific funding source.
- 

### IV. Recommended Strategy: Granting a Conservation Easement

#### A. Structure

1. **Village retains fee ownership** of the marshland.
2. The Village grants a **perpetual conservation easement** recorded against the deed.
3. The easement is held by a **qualified third-party conservation entity**, such as:
  - An **accredited land trust**, or
  - New York State Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC), or
  - NYS Office of Parks, Recreation and Historic Preservation (OPRHP)

This separation of ownership and enforcement is a critical factor for grant eligibility and long-term credibility.

---

#### B. Core Easement Purposes (Grant-Optimized)

The easement should explicitly state that its purposes include:

- Protection of wetlands and marsh ecosystems
- Preservation of wildlife habitat and biodiversity
- Water quality protection

- Flood mitigation and storm surge attenuation
- Coastal and climate resilience
- Carbon sequestration and “blue carbon” functions

Embedding these purposes directly into the easement substantially strengthens eligibility for state and federal funding.

---

### C. Explicit Prohibition of Public Access

To preserve Village intent and limit liability, the easement should **unambiguously prohibit public access**.

The easement should state that:

- No public access rights are granted or implied
- No recreational, park, or trail use is permitted
- Access is limited to:
  - The Village
  - The easement holder
  - Agents or contractors solely for monitoring, enforcement, or ecological restoration

This is fully consistent with New York conservation law and grant requirements for wetlands, habitat, and resilience funding.

---

## V. Grant Funding Opportunities Enabled by This Structure

Once the conservation easement is in place, the Village becomes eligible for **non-acquisition, non-public-access grants**, including:

### A. New York State Environmental Protection Fund (EPF)

- Wetlands protection
- Coastal erosion and resilience
- Habitat restoration

*Public access is not required for wetlands or resilience categories.*

---

### B. DEC Climate Smart Communities Grants

- Natural flood mitigation
  - Marsh restoration
  - Coastal buffers and living shorelines
- 

### C. Federal Grants

- **NOAA Coastal Resilience Grants**
  - **FEMA Hazard Mitigation / BRIC Grants** (where marshland provides flood protection to developed areas)
- 

### D. Private and Nonprofit Funding

- Easement-holding land trusts often bring:
    - Foundation grants
    - Philanthropic matching funds
    - Stewardship endowments
-

## VI. Reinforcing Local Law (Recommended)

To further protect Village intent and strengthen grant applications, the Village should adopt a **local conservation law or resolution** that:

- Designates the parcel as “Environmentally Sensitive Conservation Land”
- References the recorded conservation easement
- Prohibits:
  - Public access
  - Recreational facilities
  - Transfer or repurposing without supermajority approval and/or judicial review

While local laws can be repealed, in combination with a recorded easement they provide strong political and governance reinforcement.

---

## VII. Grants Worth Applying For

The following grant programs are **well-matched** to an upper tidal marsh of this scale and do **not require public access**.

### A. New York State Environmental Protection Fund (EPF)

#### Relevant Categories

- Wetlands Restoration
- Coastal Resilience
- Habitat Protection
- Water Quality Improvement

#### Why this marsh qualifies

- Size exceeds minimum thresholds for competitive review
  - Upper tidal marshes score highly for resilience and habitat
  - Conservation easement strengthens long-term protection
- 

### B. DEC Climate Smart Communities (CSC) Grants

#### Relevant Categories

- Natural Flood Mitigation
- Climate Adaptation Infrastructure
- Living Shorelines
- Nature-Based Solutions

#### Why this marsh qualifies

- Upper tidal marsh provides flood and surge buffering
- Eligible for both planning and implementation grants
- Strong alignment with state climate policy

---

## C. NOAA Coastal Resilience Grants

### Relevant Categories

- Living shorelines
- Tidal wetland and marsh enhancement
- Nature-based coastal protection

### Why this marsh qualifies

- Scale is appropriate for NOAA funding
  - Upper tidal marshes are priority assets
  - Strong federal emphasis on non-structural flood mitigation
- 

## VIII. Expected Grant Amounts (Range & Likelihood)

The following estimates reflect **realistic awards** for a marsh of this size, assuming competent applications and phased implementation.

### A. Expected Funding by Source

Grant Source	Typical Range	Likelihood
NYS EPF	\$300,000 – \$1,200,000	High
DEC CSC (Planning + Implementation)	\$200,000 – \$600,000	High
NOAA Coastal Resilience	\$500,000 – \$2,000,000	Moderate

---

## **IX. Permitted Uses of Grant Funds (Marsh-Specific)**

Grant funding associated with the conservation easement and marsh protection may be used for the following:

### **A. Environmental & Technical Work**

- Wetlands delineation
  - Marsh health assessments
  - Vegetation and habitat surveys
  - Baseline documentation for the easement
  - Long-term monitoring programs
- 

### **B. Engineering & Modeling**

- Flood attenuation modeling
  - Tidal flow and hydrology analysis
  - Sea-level-rise vulnerability studies
  - Living shoreline design
- 

### **C. Marsh Restoration & Enhancement**

- Marsh grass planting and enhancement
  - Invasive species removal
  - Sediment nourishment
  - Erosion control at marsh edges
  - Tidal channel restoration
- 

### **D. Long-Term Stewardship**

- Annual monitoring by easement holder
  - Reporting and compliance documentation
  - Stewardship endowment contributions
  - Legal defense of easement if necessary
-

## **X. Proposed Grant Use 1: Oyster Restoration as a Use of Grants (Proposed Enhancement)**

### **A. Description**

Oyster restoration would be implemented **not as a commercial activity**, but as an **ecological and water-quality enhancement** within or adjacent to the conserved marsh.

This would involve:

- Subtidal or intertidal oyster reef structures
- No harvesting
- No commercial sales
- No public access
- No recreational use

---

### **B. Why Oyster Restoration Is Appropriate for This Marsh**

Oysters provide measurable, fundable benefits:

- **Water Quality Improvement**
  - Oysters filter nitrogen, particulates, and sediments
- **Habitat Creation**
  - Supports fish, crustaceans, and invertebrates
- **Shoreline Protection**
  - Reefs reduce wave energy and erosion
- **Marsh Stability**
  - Oyster reefs protect marsh edges from undercutting

Upper tidal marsh systems are particularly well-suited to oyster-assisted stabilization.

### C. Grant Compatibility

Oyster restoration is explicitly recognized as:

- A living shoreline
- A nature-based climate solution
- A water-quality improvement project

It is **eligible under**:

- NYS EPF
- DEC CSC
- NOAA Coastal Resilience
- EPA / estuary-focused funding (where applicable)

Public access is **not required** for oyster restoration grants when framed as habitat and resilience infrastructure.

---

### D. Typical Oyster-Related Grant Use

Grant funds may be used for:

- Oyster reef or cage structures
- Seed oysters
- Installation and maintenance
- Water-quality testing
- Scientific monitoring
- Engineering and permitting
- Replacement and adaptive management

---

## VI. Policy Rationale

For an 18–20 acre upper tidal marsh, oyster restoration offers:

- A defensible ecological enhancement
- Strong alignment with state and federal priorities
- Additional grant eligibility without public access
- Improved water quality and shoreline resilience
- Long-term reduction in erosion and flood risk

It represents **environmental infrastructure**, not a revenue activity.

## XI. Proposed Grant Use 2: Funded Community Clean-up Events

### A. Description

Grant funds may be used to support **periodic, supervised environmental stewardship and clean-up activities** within and immediately adjacent to the conserved marshland. These activities would be conducted solely for ecological protection, water-quality improvement, and habitat preservation.

Eligible activities may include:

- Removal of marine debris and accumulated refuse
- Invasive species identification and removal
- Limited marsh-edge stabilization and debris clearance
- Environmental monitoring assistance and data collection
- Educational stewardship activities led by qualified environmental partners

### B. Access and Control

To preserve the environmentally sensitive nature of the site and limit liability:

- No general public access is granted
- Activities are limited to **pre-authorized, supervised participants**, including:
  - Environmental organizations
  - Academic or civic groups
  - Volunteers approved by the Village or easement holder
- Events are conducted on a **limited, scheduled basis** under Village oversight

Participation in stewardship activities does **not** create any recreational, park, or access rights.

### C. Grant Compatibility

Environmental stewardship and debris removal activities are recognized as eligible uses under:

- NYS Environmental Protection Fund (EPF)
- DEC Climate Smart Communities (CSC)
- NOAA Coastal Resilience and estuary programs

When framed as habitat protection and water-quality improvement, these activities do **not** require public access.

#### **D. Policy Rationale**

Funded stewardship events:

- Improve marsh health and resilience
- Reduce environmental degradation and long-term maintenance costs
- Strengthen grant competitiveness through community engagement
- Preserve the site as protected ecological infrastructure rather than recreational land

## Addendum- Jonas Property- Community Use Proposal

The Jonas property has been listed for sale at an asking price of \$899,000 for an extended period. Based on market conditions and the duration of the listing, it is reasonable to anticipate that the property could be acquired through negotiation for approximately \$500,000. With a modest capital improvement budget, the parcel could be repurposed as a **low-impact, high-value community asset** that complements the Village's broader conservation and resilience goals.

The proposed use of the property would prioritize environmental protection while providing controlled, non-commercial community access. Specifically, the property could be utilized for the following purposes shown in Exhibits 4-6:

**1. Conservation and Habitat Protection**

Preservation of the site as a natural coastal buffer and wildlife habitat, consistent with environmentally sensitive land-use principles.

**2. Controlled Community Access**

Limited, Village-managed access designed to minimize environmental impact while providing residents with a designated shoreline entry point.

**3. Kayak Storage and Launch Access**

Installation of a small, orderly kayak rack system to facilitate resident access to the Village-owned Great Meadow Creek without disturbing sensitive marsh areas.

**4. Bicycle Access Infrastructure**

Provision of secure bike racks to encourage non-vehicular access and reduce parking demand.

**5. Wildlife Observation Area**

Installation of simple bench seating to support bird watching and passive observation of the surrounding marsh and shoreline.

**6. Small Picnic Pavilion**

A modest, open-air patio intended for passive use, and educational or stewardship-related gatherings, not large-scale events.

**7. Reuse of Existing Structure**

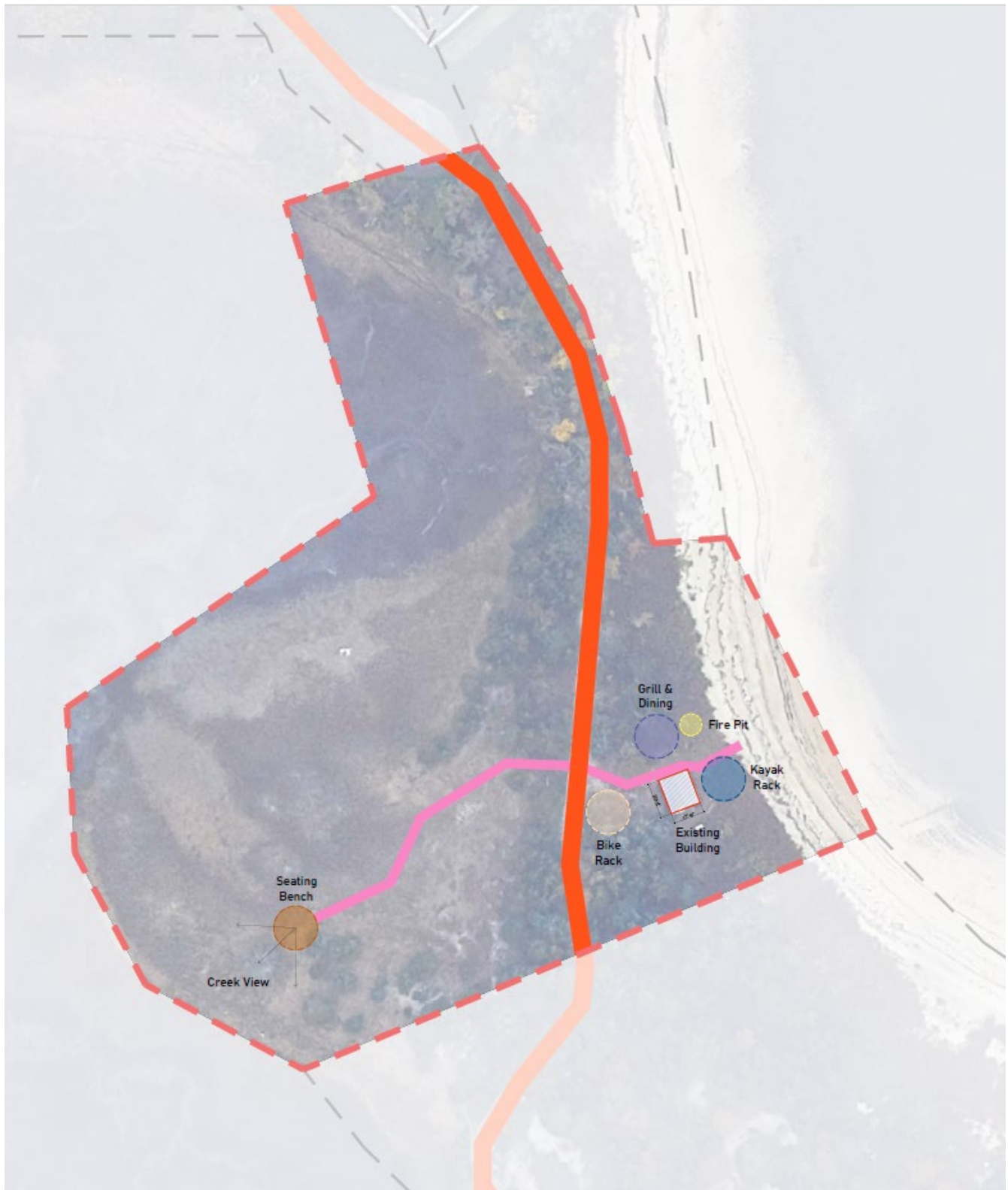
Restoration of the existing structure for use as a changing room and support facility for beach access, avoiding new construction and minimizing environmental disturbance.

In addition to its direct community benefits, acquisition of the Jonas property would provide a strategic access point to the Village-owned Great Meadow Creek, strengthening the functional connection between conserved lands. This integration may also enhance the Village's competitiveness for state, federal, and private conservation grants by demonstrating a comprehensive, system-wide approach to coastal access, stewardship, and environmental protection.

## Exhibit 4- Potential Village Acquisition



## Exhibit 5- Proposed Acquisition Community Use Site Plan



### Exhibit 6- Overall Conservation Plan

