

BY B.J. ROCHE

HISTORIC HANGAR AS THE NEW WALDEN POND?

Ah, the civilized village of Concord. Home of Ralph Waldo Emerson, Louisa May Alcott, and historic landmarks like the Old North Bridge, Walden Pond, and... Hangar 24? Yes, Concord town meeting voters recently won a skirmish with Massport without firing a shot. They added the decrepit (but, they say, historically significant) hangar at Hanscom

Field to the list of nearly 60 properties protected by the town's demolition delay bylaw.

Under the bylaw, Massport, which owns the property, must wait at least six months before

tearing down the building, which was condemned last year but is now on the State Registry of Historic Places. The clock started in November, which gives

some time to local aviation buffs seeking the funds to convert the place into an aviation museum.

The hangar, which has been vacant for several years, was built in 1948 and served as a lab for Charles "Doc" Stark Draper, whose research led to several big advancements in aviation navigation technology. It won't be cheap to rehab the structure; in fact, no one really knows how much it will cost. But for locals, another historical site is preferable to what Massport had planned for the parcel of land: a distinctly unpicturesque refueling station with above- and below-ground jet fuel tanks.

"You might say, 'This is just a 20th-century hangar, so what?'" But this place is important," says Concord Historical Commission chairman Nancy Butman. "This is a positive approach. It's a way to tell Massport that we're not just saying no to *everything*."



CAPE COD OUT OF BALANCE

Cape Cod certainly has its charms, but its appeal seems to be lost on young families, fewer of whom live there these days. Peter Francese, director of demographic forecasting for the New England Economic Partnership, told an economic summit on the Cape in October that the region currently faces zero growth in its year-round population and now has a median age of 45.7, making the Cape's Barnstable County the oldest in New England—and

one of the oldest in the country. (Approaching geezer status among Cape towns: Orleans and Chatham, with median ages over 55.)

The trends contribute to the declining school enrollments in 13 of the Cape's 15 districts, says Francese. For example, the number of students in the Barnstable district dropped from 6,924 in 2000-01 to 5,446 in 2006-07.

Still, school costs keep going up. Francese calls this conundrum an

imbalance of the region's "human ecology" and says that policies such as banning high-density housing, buying up land for conservation, and promoting "child-free" communities can actually make the situation worse by keeping out new taxpayers.

"The problem is very tiny school districts," he says. "The costs are very high, and the burden of those costs fall very heavily on the property taxpayer."

Francese's suggestion: Consolidate

BLACK LOCUST AS THE NEW BELGIAN ENDIVE?

They all laughed 20 years ago when then-presidential candidate Michael Dukakis told Iowa farmers that the key to survival lay in diversifying their crops into products such as Belgian endive. (OK, he might have been wrong about endive, but who'd have thunk we'd get so wild about pea tendrils?) But specialty farm products and the "buy local" movement have helped preserve Massachusetts farmland and beef up the state's farm economy. Could the same happen for forestland?

Williamsburg lumber mill owner Dave Lashway thinks so. Lashway belongs to the Massachusetts Woodlands Cooperative, which markets Home Grown Wood, a brand of native lumber products raised under Forest Stewardship Council regulations. The FSC rules call for sustainable management and attention to wildlife habitat and forest diversity.

"I get calls all the time from people who say, 'We're trying to avoid buying lumber from clear-cutting' [lumber companies] and looking for guaranteed resources from a sustainable forest," Lashway said. "Here, you're not just buying a mass-produced product from China. You know how it's produced."

It might not be apparent in the 617 area code, but 60 percent of Massachusetts is forestland, and most of it (2.4 million out of 3.2 million acres) is privately owned. Forest products generate \$600 million per year, and woodlands also provide recreational opportunities, help clean the air, and preserve wildlife habitat and watersheds. And it's estimated that trans-

porting wood products from China uses about eight times as much energy as buying the same products from within the state.

But landowners face strong economic incentives to sell, and Massachusetts Audubon estimates that the state loses nearly 40 acres of forestland per day to development. By sharing equipment, expertise, and marketing tools, the co-op encourages the "buy local" movement—and represents a tiny beachhead in the fight against development. It currently has 55 members and 11,500 acres, and hopes to eventually have 25,000 acres under management.

The group also promotes lesser-known-but abundant forest species such as black birch, ash, red maple, and beech. Lashway is especially bullish on the black locust, which is technically an invasive species in Massachusetts but is also a good alternative to pressure-treated wood because of its toughness and natural decay resistance.

At Cows Building Supply, a ninth-generation lumber business in Amherst, sales of Home Grown Wood are brisk. "We're getting more and more requests. People buy everything from flooring to siding to heavy timbers for post and beam construction," says manager Evan Jones. "People are thrilled that they can get something that's locally grown."



school districts, take a regional approach to services, and get real about the costs of the hallowed tradition of home rule.

All of which is heresy in Massachusetts. And it may be one reason why, Francese quips, he's generally not invited back after giving his analysis to groups throughout the state. But it was a slightly different story last year on the Cape. Francese was invited back, and spent three days in December speaking with

legislators and nearly 100 municipal administrators and school officials about the issue. "It was very definitely a call to arms," says Clare O'Connor, director of workforce development for the Cape Cod Chamber of Commerce. "With a demographic snapshot, you have the time to change things."

And, Francese says, the Cape is not alone. Berkshire County and parts of Franklin County have similar problems of population loss and

graying demographics.

"Environmentalists have done a good job of showing the interconnectedness of life. I'm trying to show the interconnectedness of people," he says. "You need young people, middle-aged people, and children in schools, and when you unbalance that by massively favoring one age group, you're committing economic suicide. Unless there are some serious efforts to rebalance the human ecology, we're in deep trouble."