

August 3, 2023 Meeting Minutes
West Boylston Open Space Implementation Committee (OSIC)
West Boylston Town Hall, 140 Worcester St. Meeting Room

Members Present: Brenda Bowman, Ray DeSanti, Gary Flynn, Mike Peckar, Vin Vignaly

Members Absent: Bill Chase

Others Present: Neil Peterson, Elise Wellington, Emily Lehman-Miller

The meeting was called to order by Chair Vignaly at 6:05 pm at the WB Town Hall.

Motion by Mr. Peckar, seconded by Mr. DeSanti: the minutes of the May 1, 2023, meeting were approved 4-0-1 abstention, Ms. Bowman did not attend the meeting.

Blueberry Hill Property - 353 Goodale St Property

Ms. Bowman noted that she had trouble following the marked trail and ran into some barbed wire at the south end. Mr. Peckar explained that trail does not go into the property to the south yet. The barbed wire is on that property at the boundary and still needs to be removed. He will add more trail blazing to make following the trail more easy. Mr Vignaly asked to update the map to remove reference to anything but Blueberry Hill and add a QR code so that people can get the map on their cell phone. Discussion of the kiosk was tabled because Mr. Chase was not present and has not provided a draft design of the kiosk yet. Mr. Peckar is still working with GWLT to fabricate a sign for “Blueberry Hill” like the sign at Pine Glen on Goodale Street. A sign noting the site was funded using CPA money and for regulatory wording are needed to address hours of operation, rules, hunting, leashing dogs, no camping without a permit, and no fires. Mr. DeSanti and others will forward photos and information about operational/rules signs at similar trails in abutting communities. Mr. Peckar will review the ditch crossing with Mr. Minnich who may be willing to use his tractor to move a couple of boulders into the ditch to make a more easily passable crossing.

18 Malden Street and Other Possible 40B Properties:

The Chair, as requested at the May 1, 2023 meeting, sent a letter to the Selectboard asking for them to engage with the owners of 18 Malden Street for the town to purchase the property. The site has been on the list of properties of interest in the approved West Boylston Open Space and Recreation Plans since about 2008.

Town Administrator, Jennifer Warren-Dyment, was in attendance and spoke from her perspective based on her meeting with the owners and then the realtor representing the owners. She explained that the town is interested in purchasing the property. When she met with the realtor, she was told that the owners wanted to put it on the market to “see what they could get”. She said the list price is \$1.925 million. She said the town doesn’t have that money. She explained the Town Meeting process and added that the Parks is interested in purchasing the property. The Selectboard planned a site walk but she cancelled that when the realtor told her they were putting it on the market.

Ms. Wellington commented that there are new industrial lots being developed on Century Drive and they will provide significant new tax revenue. She suggested that the Assessors do a “New Growth” estimate to document how much will be possible. Dave Hennessey asked about potential public funding sources and whether GWLT been contacted about it. Mr. Peckar who is on the board of GWLT, replied that they are willing to assist with that and he will get more detail on grants, State funding, and bonding options to assist with financing. Town purchases take a Town Meeting vote GWLT has assisted the town on the Blueberry Hill purchase to pay the property owner and hold the property until the Town acquisition process is complete (bridging).

Ms. Halpin agreed with the idea that since the property is now for sale, then now is the time for the town to act. She asked Ms. Warren-Dyment to request that the Selectboard begin the acquisition process. The land has potential for use as open space, recreation, housing and has historical value. Ms. Warren-Dyment replied that the Selectboard heard that the owners want to put it on the market so have not acted.

Mr. Peckar motioned for the OSIC to request the CPC to meet and hire a consultant to appraise the 18 Malden Street property, and survey it if needed, to facilitate potential acquisition of some or all of the property by the Town. Ms. Bowman seconded, voted 5-0 in favor.

Mr. Berglund suggested the appraisal be for 'highest and best use' and reference similar properties. Mr. Trudeau offered to conduct public meetings and/or charrettes for public outreach and education, while Ms. Halpin suggested coordinating with Open Space Committees in other towns to learn what worked for them in similar circumstances.

Open Space and Recreation Plan Update

Mr. Vignaly checked on the end date for the OSRP with MA Division of Conservation Services and they clarified that the plan is valid until November of 2024. The Town Administrator is in the process of obtaining a grant to hire CMRPC to do the bulk of the update. But since the OSRP is approved, the town is eligible for the associated grant opportunities.

Open Space Properties of Interest

Ms. Goodale mentioned that someone should contact the Trows on Crescent Street. This property has also been on the 'properties of interest' list for years and the owners may be interested in talking to the town about it. The Committee will make an inquiry.

The committee welcomed new member, Ms. Ginny Rose Pellegrini. She was recently appointed but had not had time to get sworn in to vote at this meeting.

The next meeting was tentatively scheduled for September 25, 2023. Upon motion by Mr. DeSanti, second by Mr. Flynn: committee unanimously voted to adjourn at 7:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Vincent Vignaly