

May 1, 2023 Meeting Minutes
West Boylston Open Space Implementation Committee (OSIC)
West Boylston Town Hall, 140 Worcester St. Meeting Room

Members Present: Bill Chase, Ray DeSanti, Mike Peckar, Vin Vignaly

Members Absent: Brenda Bowman, Gary Flynn,

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

The meeting was called to order by Chair Vignaly at 6:15 pm at the WB Town Hall.

Motion by Mr. Peckar, seconded by Mr. DeSanti: the minutes of the March 29, 2023, meeting were approved 3-0-1 abstention, Mr. Chase did not attend the meeting.

Blueberry Hill Property - 353 Goodale St Property (formerly Malden Hill South)

Mr. Peckar questioned the need to realign the trail over the ditch. He didn't believe it was necessary. Mr. DeSanti thought it was also costly. The Committee decided to wait to see if there are complaints and will address it if needed. There is a link to the trail map available on the Greater Worcester Land Trust (GWLTL) website and on the West Boylston OSIC website. Mr. Peckar will update the map to have a QR code so that people can get the map on their cell phone. It should be added to the map on the kiosk that will be installed at the site as well. Mr. Peckar is still working with GWLTL fabricate a sign for "Blueberry Hill" like the sign at Pine Glen on Goodale Street. A sign for regulatory wording is needed to address hours of operation, rules, hunting, leashing dogs, no camping without a permit, and no fires. Mr. Chase will provide a draft design of the kiosk for the next meeting. Mr. DeSanti and others will forward photos and information about operational/rules signs at similar trails in abutting communities. Mr. Peckar said he contacted Mr. Minnich who was supportive of extending the trail onto his abutting property. Mr. Peckar said the priority now is to remove the barbed wire along the property line. He will also ask Mr. Minnich if he would 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 18 Malden Street site has been on the list of properties of interest in the approved West Boylston Open Space and Recreation Plans since about 2009. It is the only contiguous land to the existing Junior/Senior High School for expansion of playing fields or other school facilities. Town-owned Open Space makes up less than 1.5% of the land area in West Boylston. Mr. DeSanti reminded everyone that once it is developed, it is gone forever. The 18 Malden Street property is currently under agreement but is not yet sold. The law allows the town to make a taking by eminent domain for a 'legitimate public use'. That is clearly the case here. Mr. Peckar spoke to Colin at GWLTL who indicated that they would be willing to support the town by partnering with the town and to apply for grants and are willing to hold a Conservation Restriction. The residents of the area have commented that they might be willing to make donations for acquisition of the land if it is protected from development. The town is considering spending a million dollars on renovations to a softball field at Mixer and another million dollars on ADA renovations to Pride Park. Not to diminish these other projects, but spending a million dollars to acquire 15 acres adjacent to the town parks and Middle/High School at 18 Malden Street seems like a prudent action. Mr. DeSanti reminded the committee that not everyone in town is against the housing development. There is some suggestion that "those rich people deserve having to deal with what has already happened in other parts of town". Mr. Peterson was recognized and commented that an attorney hired by the neighbors found case law that an 'unfriendly 40B project' could be denied if the property was specifically included in an 'approved' land management plan, such as a local Master Plan or Open Space and Recreation Plan.

Mr. Peckar motioned and Mr. DeSanti seconded a vote to recommend to the Selectboard to initiate the process to acquire the 18 Malden Street property through typical mechanisms as well as a more friendly 'eminent domain taking' that could be used. Vote was 4-0, unanimous

Open Space and Recreation Plan Update

Mr. Vignaly checked on the end date for the OSRP and the DCS website indicated that it expired at the end of November 2023. Mr. Vignaly has spoken with the Town Administrator about hiring CMRPC to do the bulk of the update. Mr. Peckar noted we will need information from the Parks Commission, especially for budget planning around Pride Park and Mixter Field projects. Ms. Lehman-Miller asked if assistance from parents and the public would be useful for the survey of town needs and interests. She was enthusiastically encouraged to make the contacts and we will keep her informed of the progress of the update. It will probably be slower than she expects, but it will happen.

Open Space Properties of Interest

Mr. DeSanti asked about the large field/open area north of High Plains Cemetery. Mr. Vignaly believed it to be under the care of a family he has spoken with in the past and they have no interest in developing it or selling it to the town or others.

Mr. DeSanti then asked what was happening at 118 Maple Street. Mr. Vignaly noted that the Planning Board signed a plan dividing that property into three lots about a year ago, but was not aware of anything more. There are wetlands and a tributary to the reservoir, so they will need to get approval from the Conservation Commission and DCR.

Mr. Peckar told the Committee that GWLT has acquired about 10 acres of land from the Goodales in town on Crescent Street. It was underway and he will provide details at the next meeting.

Committee Elections were tabled to a future meeting.

The next meeting was tentatively scheduled for mid-July. Upon motion by Mr. DeSanti, second by Mr. Peckar: committee unanimously voted to adjourn at 7:35 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Vincent Vignaly