

# **WESTBOROUGH STATE HOSPITAL CHARRETTE SUMMARY**

**April 28<sup>th</sup>, 2014**

## **Introduction**

The purpose of this report is to summarize the positions of approximately 80 residents of Westborough provided at a Charette Workshop held at Westborough High School concerning the future development options for the former State Hospital site. The site consisting of 91 acres and myriad buildings is expected to become property of the town in the near future. The charette focused on three specific questions:

- 1) What are the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) that are associated with its future development?
- 2) What are the key elements of the site that should be saved and what future uses should be considered?
- 3) What actions should the town take in the next ninety days to “jump start” the project?

The report is divided into five parts. Part One is a point-by-point summary of the SWOT Analysis that was highlighted on the poster boards. They are ranked from most frequently stated to minimally stated. See the numbers at the end of each point. Due to different manners of explaining the views of the citizens, Mullin Associates Inc. (MAI) summarized them in the most common categories as much as possible.

Part Two is a listing of those actions identified as important to undertake, respectively, in the next ninety days and the, next year, and over the next five years. They, too, have been ranked from most to least significant. The frequency of the listed actions can also be noted in parenthesis at the end of the proposed action.

Part Three represents an overall assessment of the charette from the perspective of MAI staff. The perspectives are listed in point form.

Part Four is the recommended actions that MAI believes are critical to the project. They are also in point form.

**I. Thoughts, Perspectives and Ideas of the Citizens through the Strengths, Weaknesses, Opportunities and Threats (SWOT) Process**

**A. Strengths**

- The beauty of the lake and the shoreline (9)
- The architecture and historic qualities of existing buildings (8)
- The site is easily accessible (8)
- The beauty of natural vistas and topography (7)
- The open spaces (7)
- Existing recreation activities (6)
- The size of the parcel (6)
- The site is rich in natural habitat (4)
- The size abuts large open spaces (3)
- There is adequate water supply (3)
- The site is a blank slate (2)
- Utilities are in place (2)
- The site is relatively free of contamination (1)
- The site is relatively free of wetland conflicts (1)
- The Town has the resources to invest (1)
- The Town controls most of the site (1)
- The site is a community asset (1)

**B. Weaknesses**

- The location of the DYS buildings/security (14)
- Condition of buildings (10)
- Lack of adequate infrastructure (water, sewer, steam lines, electric power) (7)
- The liability of the Town upon taking ownership (5)
- The traffic pattern/constraints (5)
- Municipal operating expenses (4)
- Sense of isolation from downtown (2)
- Lyman Street needs improvement (1)
- There are large wetlands throughout the property (1)

- The Town does not own all the property (1)
- The future of nearby state lands and Northborough properties is unknown (1)
- The image of the sad history of the Lyman School (1)
- The possible unmarked cemeteries on the site (1)
- The lack of pedestrian access (1)
- The cost of demolition (1)
- The presence of endangered species (1)
- The loss of historic buildings (if neglected) (1)
- The presence of potential brownfield sites (1)
- Parking could negatively impact the natural habitat (1)

### **C. Opportunities**

- Develop as recreation center (active, passive, water) (14)
- Potential for mixed use development (manufacturing, commercial, office, agriculture (14)
- Development will create local jobs and increase tax revenues (12)
- Create community/recreation/arts center (9)
- Create trail network (9)
- Can undertake both sensible and creative planning (a clean slate) (8)
- Provide open space (7)
- Potential of a campus setting for future education purposes (6)
- Save/re-use historic buildings (5)
- Expand and light athletic fields (4)
- Potential site for “over 55” housing/market rate housing/affordable housing (4)
- Bring community together (i.e.: fire works) (3)
- Access to the lake (3)
- Land bank for future municipal needs (3)
- Could be linked to agricultural spaces, other town properties (3)
- Implementation of green energy options (3)
- Creation of a second town center (2)
- Pursue philanthropic funding (1)
- Coordinate with Northborough on land use compatibility (1)

- Sewer and water system upgrades (1)
- Make pedestrian friendly (upgrade sidewalks) (1)
- Improve Lyman Street (1)
- Preserve wildlife habitat (1)
- Protect the beach (1)
- Create redevelopment authority (1)
- Size of parcel – biggest ever for Town (1)

#### **D. Threats**

- Higher municipal costs (environmental clean up, schools maintenance, public safety, other services (10)
- Environmental degradation, habitat loss (6) + 1 +2 (9)
- Town meeting opposition/unpopular solutions (6)
- Housing of any type (5)
- Loss of open space/trail (4)
- Impacts on schools (4)
- Increased traffic problems (4)
- Brownfields (3)
- Lakefront degradation (environmental, over use) (2)
- Increased Town liabilities (2)
- Over building/sprawl (2)
- Impacts on sewer and water (2)
- Inadequate infrastructure (1)
- Incompatible land uses (1)
- Failure of Town to invest (1)
- Cost of demolition (1)
- DYS will decrease property value (1)
- Lack of tax returns from non-profit activities (1)
- Costs of delay (1)
- Loss of historic buildings (1)

## ***II. Key Actions Recommended by the Participants***

### ***A. Actions within Ninety Days***

#### **1. Public Education and Involvement**

- Publicize the charette results and summary report across town (8)
- Host a meeting with Northborough concerning compatibility of adjoining lands (6)
- Organize and host walking tours of property (6)
- Update the legislature and special interest groups on the findings (4)
- Organize an education program concerning the site (3)
- Gather further input from non-attendees (including children) (3)
- Create video/visual education material (1)

#### **2. Research, Data and Information**

- Undertake comprehensive inventory of all buildings, property, infrastructure and facilities (9)
- Determine Town recreation needs (3)
- Survey Town departments and community groups on open space and facility needs (2)
- Identify best practices from other revitalized state hospital sites (1)
- Identify maintenance and security needs and implement (1)
- Gain a clear understanding of the significance of historic properties (1)
- Clarify all legal issues (1)

#### **3. Development Process**

- Create a master plan committee (15)
- Develop a communication plan (2)
- Develop the master plan process (1)
- Reach out to newcomers for the committee (1)
- Develop process time line (1)
- Divide plan into <90 day, one year and five year increments (1)

#### **4. Other Actions**

- Gain control of the property (4)
- Write RFP for consultant services (1)
- Obtain list of potential grants (1)
- Engage State on possible move of the Allen Building (1)

### **B. Actions within One year**

#### **1. Continue Public Education and Involvement**

- Activate public relations/education outreach program (3)
- Hold public meetings on the state of the project (3)
- Keep project active through town meeting updates (1)
- Report on progress on border issues with Northborough (1)

#### **2. Master Plan**

- Develop comprehensive plan (19)
- Vote/approve master plan (3)
- Gain town meeting acceptance of zoning revisions (3)

### **C. One to Five Years**

#### **1. Public Outreach**

- Develop recreation components to gain town confidence in the project (4)
- Host Town's 300 anniversary (2017) at the site
- Bring progress report/actions to town meeting on a regular basis
- Undertake comprehensive marketing strategy

#### **2. Master Plan and Development**

- Complete master plan and implement (18)
- Delegate spaces for projected uses (5)
- Insure infrastructure is in place (3)
- Undertake RFP process for development (2)
- Insure traffic safety issues have been resolved (2)
- Maximize state and federal grants and philanthropic opportunities (1)

- Insure neighbors are constantly involved in development process (1)
- Hazardous waste removal is complete (1)
- Allen Hall residents are moved (1)

### **3. Research/Collect More Information**

- Seek out a new name for the site (4)
- Study Rt. 9 crossing options (2)
- Evaluate carrying capacity of the site (1)
- Assess Town needs and report to town meeting (1)
- Undertake an environmental site assessment (1)
- Create marketing campaign (1)
- Undertake a fiscal impact assessment (1)
- Determine operational costs (1)
- Develop history of the site (1)

### **4. Other Actions**

- Establish endowment to collect donations to offset potential community costs
- Finalize ownership
- Place transportation projects on the TIP

### ***III. An Assessment***

- There is wide support for an open process of deciding the future of the hospital site.
- There is need to develop means and methods for disseminating information about the project consistently, broadly and in a transparent manner: Without such an approach, the support of town meeting may be in question.
- There is clear consensus on the desire to create recreation (passive and active) opportunities, maintain open spaces respect the natural habitat and protect endangered species.
- There is concern that the site will be inward looking and that it will be a geographic and cultural island within Westborough: Connections to the existing town must be part of the plan.
- There is little understanding of the carrying capacity of the site: After water, wetlands and conservation land and recreation areas have been determined, what is available for other land uses (office, industrial, commercial/retail, municipal).
- There is significant fear concerning the placement of “family friendly” activity in the shadow of the detention facilities.
- There is a requirement to clarify statements concerning, among others, access issues, underground pipes, tunnels, burial grounds and environmental issues (asbestos pipes).
- There is an opportunity to link the site with land uses in Northborough – a dialogue between towns would be fruitful.
- There is some concern over municipal tax services that would have to be dedicated to the project: Funding scenarios should be prepared.
- The future uses of the site must be integrated into the goals of the existing comprehensive plan, the capital plan (?), school plan (?) and the conservation plan.
- The long-term future of the detention facilities should be determined through discussions with DCAM and DYS: Long-term alternative placement of these facilities should be on the table.
- While there is moderate support for well placed, well designed, and environmentally sensitive commercial and light industrial uses, they should not overwhelm the site.



- There are particular concerns over the Lyman Street Corridor: Planned improvements need to be publicized.
- The historic and architectural qualities of the remaining buildings are valued. However, there is significant concern over their condition and the cost of their revitalization.
- There is an underlying concern over the liability of the Town over the long term including co-existence with detention facilities, the use of Lake Chauncy, environmental cleanup, and the proximity to hunting grounds: Is the town sufficiently insured.
- There is little understanding of the infrastructure capacity required to service the site: There are conflicting perceptions over water, sewer, and electric power capacities.
- There was little support for wide scale, suburban style, market rate housing. If anything, there was moderate support for over fifty-five housing units.
- There was significant support for the Town to embark on a well-funded, sophisticated planning process that moves steadily (neither quick nor slow) forward.
- The participants regard the site as a blank slate of tremendous value to the Town: All planning must respect the long term.
- There is support for the land banking of parts of the site for the long-term capital needs of the Town.
- The sites features ranging from view sheds, vistas, forest cover, and Lake Chauncy, to walking trails, and the natural habitat were overwhelmingly noted.
- The overwhelming consensus was that gaining control of the site is a once and a lifetime event for the Town.
- There was strong support for the planning of community facilities beyond recreation for the site. Meeting places, a center for the arts and celebrating spaces were particularly mentioned.
- The future of Lake Chauncy lacks clarity: Some view it as a place of active recreation (boating, kayaking, swimming) others worry about the impacts of overuse.
- The process must pay special attention to abutting neighborhoods to insure that their investments are protected.

#### **IV. Recommendations**

Based on the expressed thoughts of the participants, the following actions appear to have merit.

##### **A. On Process**

- The Town should be prepared to invest in a long term planning process for the future use of the site. We expect this to take up to three years. The end result should be a ten-year master plan for the site.
- A significant element of the process must be an open, transparent, constant, information approach that keeps the public abreast of the progress of the plan.
- The process should include an advisory committee of a wide array of citizens who are reflective of the Town of Westborough. It should be sensitive to age, racial diversity, income diversity, and geographic location in Westborough.
- The process should be the responsibility of the Select Board, and controlled by the Town Manager while the town planner should be the technical advisor.
- The actual work should be undertaken by consultants: The workload will be too large for existing staff.
- The final approval of the Town should rest with town meeting, following the review of the Select Board, and other town boards.
- The Federal and Commonwealth senators and representatives must be constantly informed of the progress of plan development as it is expected that Federal and State assistance in implementation will be required.
- The plan must include enough financial analysis such that the public is comfortable that the benefits are greater than the costs. Moreover, particular attention must be paid to potential short-term additions to the tax rate.
- A conference should be called in Westborough that features the leaders of other similar projects in New England. The intent will be to determine best practices.

##### **B. On Values**

- The Town gained a tremendous asset that must reflect the long-term future of the Town.
- The site should not be used for typical residential development. If any residential activity, it should be used to meet the needs of the Town's seniors or for people over 55 years of age and be well designed.

- The values expressed by the Town centered most strongly upon the natural environment. It must be nurtured.
- There is interest in preserving the historic legacy buildings but future uses will have to be carefully articulated. Moreover, information on the condition of the historic buildings should be made public.
- The participants are extremely uncomfortable with the contiguous detention centers. Future site plans must reflect the need for security.
- Any commercial or industrial uses must be seconded to maintaining the natural, pastoral character of the site. There is minimal interest in an industrial park or suburban style shopping mall.
- The issue of seasonal hunting on nearby properties must be addressed: Is there room for both hunting and active recreation?
- The site should become a uniquely defined “place” with a defined identity.
- Smart growth and green community principles should be applied to the site.

### **C. On Land Uses**

- The site should emphasize outdoor recreation uses that are characterized as active and passive.
- The site should be designed in part to meet the long-term outdoor sport activities of the Town.
- The lakefront will have to be designed quite carefully: There are those who see it as an active beach and those who see it as a contemplative place.
- Land should be designated for possible future municipal, community (non-profit), and school needs. These uses need not be defined at this time.
- Separate parcels should be designated for pastoral and natural uses with minimum intervention beyond trails and signs.
- Housing, commercial and industrial uses, if desired should be master planned and subject to special permit, site plan approval and design guidelines.
- Open space parcels should connect as much as possible to contiguous natural areas.
- Coordination with Northborough and the State over possibilities of connecting open spaces is in order.

- Identification of polluted lands and brownfields (if any) must be made public along with planned remediation efforts.
- Open spaces that are not needed for recreation, natural habitats, municipal needs or development purposes, should be considered for alternative energy uses.

#### **D. On Infrastructure**

There is little clear understanding of the state of infrastructure: The Town should prepare a citizen friendly report on the location, condition, and carrying capacity of existing infrastructure systems. Topics should include the following, among others:

- The availability of existing and future water supply and the responsible provider (MWRA?)
- The condition of sewer pipes and water pipes
- The existing and future capacity of Lyman Street
- The state of Fibre Optic connectivity

#### **E. Funding the Project**

- The long term cost to the Town for the development of the site needs to be estimated and made clear.
- An active grant program with the intent of gaining state, federal and private foundation assistance is essential.
- A fiscal impact analysis should be prepared that reflects town costs and revenues over an extensive time period.