

REGIONAL OPEN SPACE ALLIANCE MEETING

**Thursday, 27 January 2005
Mixer Building, West Boylston**

Co-hosted By

**WEST BOYLSTON OPEN SPACE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
Town of West Boylston**

**STERLING OPEN SPACE IMPLEMENTATION COMMITTEE
Town of Sterling**

Towns Represented: West Boylston, Sterling, Boylston, Clinton, Holden, Princeton, and Worcester

Meeting: 7PM scheduled meeting called to order by Dr. Robert J. Tashjian, Co-Moderator at 7:10 PM

Welcome: Dr. Robert J. Tashjian, Co-Moderator, Town of West Boylston

Attendance: Approximately 25 people were in attendance at this meeting including the following people:

Host Town Representation:

West Boylston Open Space Advisory Committee:

1. Robert J. Tashjian, V.M.D., Chairman
 - Also representing the West Boylston Land Trust
2. Mike Peckar, Vice Chairman
 - Also representing the West Boylston Land Trust
3. Diran Apelian, Ph.D.
4. Larry Caron
5. Betsy DeMallee
6. Thomas Halpin, M.D

Mr. Leon Gaumond, West Boylston Town Administrator

Sterling Open Space Implementation Committee

1. Robert Spencer, Chairman
2. Brian Cline, Vice Chairman

Other Municipality representation:

1. Anthony Costello, M.D., Chairman, Holden Open Space Implementation Committee
2. Kale Kallock, Princeton Open Space Committee
3. Deb Cary, Princeton Open Space Committee
 - Also representing Massachusetts Audubon Society, Broad Meadow Brook Conservation Center and Wildlife Sanctuary
4. Gary Tuthill, Boylston
5. Katie Donovan, Land Use Specialist, City of Worcester

State of Massachusetts Government offices represented:

1. Gladys Rodriguez-Parker, District Affairs Director for Congressman James McGovern, 3rd District
2. James Kersten, Legislative Aide for Representative James Leary
3. Jim DiToulio, Chief of Staff for Representative Harold Naughton
4. Senator Harriette Chandler, First Worcester District

Other Organizations Represented:

1. Judith Haran, President, White Oak Land Trust Conservation Society
2. James French, Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)
 - Also representing the Sterling Land Trust
3. Debbie Shriver, Wachusett Working Landscapes Partnership (WWLP)

Next Meeting: Thursday, April 21, 2005 at 7PM in West Boylston (Mixer Building).

- Also representing the Massachusetts Watershed Coalition
- 4. Frannie Hodge, President, Clinton Greenways Conservation Trust

Other Attendees:

1. Douglas Kirkpatrick, Esq. (potential pro bono support)
2. Reverend Dr. Gary Shahinian, visitor.

Meeting Agenda: A 4-page agenda including background information and a summary of expected attendees was distributed at the beginning of the meeting.

Meeting Overview:

After a brief overview of the purpose of this meeting and introductions of the members and guests present, Dr. Tashjian asked the various representatives of the committees to offer a few words as to the status of their organization. This activity generated an excellent open discussion with most, if not all, meeting attendees contributing to the discussion.

Deb Cary from Massachusetts Audubon Society (MAS) highlighted programs of the Society and had several brochures available for the taking covering the activities of the Society (See also www.massaudubon.com). Ms. Cary said that on Saturday, May 14th the MAS was planning a celebration for the 100-year anniversary of the Wachusett Reservoir. She invited others to consider coordinating activities on this day. Ms. Cary also noted the cooperation between the DCR and the Friends of Wachusett Watershed in the Stillwater Farm site protection efforts [near the intersection of Routes 140 and 62 in Sterling].

Kale Kallock from Princeton Open Space Committee related that she was a Graduate student at Antioch College pursuing a degree in environmental affairs (natural resource management).

Judith Haran from the White Oak Land Trust Conservation Society told the group that the organization was enjoying its 5th year of existence with 250 paid members and had just hired a part-time staff person with an office. The Society's Winter Carnival was scheduled to be held at Trout Brook Reservation on February 6th. Judy noted that the Society was cooperating with the City of Worcester and the Trust for Public Land (www.tpl.org) on watershed-related land protection efforts. A large pending state watershed protection grant was noted.

Dr. Anthony Costello from Holden Open Space Implementation Committee said an Open Space Action Committee has been established and town interest in taking action on open space matters has been on the rise. A revised open space plan for the Town of Holden was being submitted.

Gary Tuthill of the Boylston Open Space Committee stated that he was representing a new committee which completed an open space plan for the Town during the Summer of 2004.

Jim French, a Land Acquisition Coordinator for the DCR (previously MDC) Division of Watershed Protection, noted that his organization is involved with fee acquisitions and conservation restrictions intended to protect watershed for both the Quabbin and Wachusett Reservoirs. Land protection efforts are paid for by the 52 cities and towns that utilize the water from DCR-protected reservoirs which equates to about 42% of the population. Mr. French claimed that his organization's control over the Quabbin watershed was much more thorough with 55% of the watershed lands under DCR control. By comparison, only 26.6% of Wachusett watershed is DCR controlled. The 2005 DCR budget provides 4.5 million dollars for land acquisition for watershed protection. It was noted that it is difficult for the agency to move quickly on at-risk parcels since the acquisition process (including due diligence requirements, etc.) can take from 12-15 months to "years" to complete. [During Mr. French's initial introduction, it was noted that approximately 50% of West Boylston's land area and approximately 25% of Sterling's land area was protected by the DCR with a focus on protecting the Wachusett Reservoir watershed.]

Michael Peckar questioned Mr. French regarding how the DCR develops and reviews access-related policies. Mr. French acknowledged that balancing watershed protection and recreational interests was difficult. He pointed out that much of the DCR land is available for passive recreational activities which, in his agency's view, do not create watershed risks. Access for dogs, horses, motorized vehicles, and mountain bikes is limited on most DCR lands. This is due in part to the fact that the size of the DCR land parcels offers the potential to attract extensive use by the public. The DCR's first priority is water protection.

Katie Donovan, Land Use Specialist from the City of Worcester (DPW) spoke briefly of the Coes Reservoir and its protection and progress. She said that the Conservation Commission has first refusal on all "Tax Title" properties (cases where landowners are not keeping up with tax payments). In fact, this was the means in which the Broad Meadow Brook land was acquired.

At this point, Dr. Robert Tashjian commented on his pleasure that all the listed towns on the agenda were represented.

Gladys Rodriguez, District Affairs Director for Congressman James McGovern expressed the Mr. McGovern's apologies for his absence (due to another commitment), but emphatically reassured the support and availability of his office for any matters of concern. She said that Mr. McGovern took an immediate interest in conservation when first elected and that interest and support has only increased over his years in office. She noted Mr. McGovern's involvement in the 1996-1997 efforts related to the Land Water Conservation Act. Ms. Rodriguez assured the meeting that Mr. McGovern's hope is that he might be able to be present at one of these meetings in the future. Dr. Tashjian confirmed the support received by Mr. McGovern and thanked Ms. Rodriguez for her attendance and reassurance. [The website for Congressman McGovern's office is www.house.gov/mcgovern/ . Based on information available on this site, the 3rd District of Massachusetts includes towns within Worcester County (Auburn, Boylston, Clinton, Holden, Northborough, Paxton, Princeton, Rutland, Shrewsbury, Southborough, Westborough, West Boylston, and Worcester) Middlesex County (Ashland, Holliston, Hopkinton, Marlborough) and extends southeastward in a narrow band all the way to Fall River.]

Brian Cline, Vice Chairman of the Sterling Open Space Implementation Committee reminded the meeting how very important it was for all the towns to work together for the greatest impact and success. Ms. Rodriguez appreciated this comment and assured the meeting that Mr. McGovern's office would certainly be in full support of the envisioned municipal cooperation regarding open space issues.

James Kersten from the office of James Leary said how important he felt it was to have meetings such this and assured the meeting that Mr. Leary's door was "always open" to any concerns from all the represented towns.

Jim DiToulio, Chief of Staff for Representative Harold Naughton expressed his pleasure to be present and said that he had worked with Jim French regarding the properties in the Wekepeke area of Sterling (old Clinton Reservoirs) and Wachusett Reservoir. He further noted that the office of Mr. Naughton would always maintain a major commitment to conservation concerns.

Frannie Hodge, President of Clinton Greenway Conservation Trust told the meeting that his organization was founded in 1989 as a legal trust. After the second annual meeting in 1990, the trust failed to meet again for 10 years. In the year 2000 the Trust was incorporated as a non-profit and the groups efforts were rekindled. The group attained its first parcel of land was acquired on South Meadow Pond in Clinton (donation from a member). The Trust is also involved in a land swap of 17 acres which includes a "floating island" on Mossy Pond, a pending effort supported by Representative Naughton. The Trust is also interested in support effort to develop the Mass Central Rail Trail (MCRT) through Clinton. Unfortunately, the most logical path of the MCRT lies in zones along and near the Wachusett Reservoir which are of DCR concern. Fortunately, the Berlin side of Town looks much less complicated. Presently, many more parcels are being considered by the Trust, the highest present priority being the last farm in Clinton which actually borders the envisioned MCRT pathway. The Clinton Greenway Trust is working closely with the owner of this farm (Fred Rogers) in an effort to preserve its heritage. From a Clinton municipal standpoint, Ms. Hodge noted that the Town of Clinton needs to update their open space plan.

Debbie Shriver from Massachusetts Watershed Coalition and Wachusett Working Landscapes Partnership (WWLP) said their next meeting would be in Leominster on 17 March 2005 (3-5PM, Trustees of Reservations office, <http://www.thetrustees.org/>) and encouraged all present at this meeting to attend. WWLP (pronounced "whil-op") includes 9 community members interested in fostering "Smart Growth" concepts. She reaffirmed the need for people and towns to all work together to achieve the greatest results for all organizations. She had many brochures available for the meeting attendees and encouraged all to "sign up" for the WWLP Internet List Serve, a broad scope referral for conservation coalitions. It was noted that meeting attendees Deb Cary, Jim French, and Judy Haran were all WWLP Steering Committee members.

At this time, Dr. Robert Tashjian asked Jim French to reflect on 61a status for those present at the meeting. Mr. French said DCR gets the land and decides whether to abandon the land for wildlife or maintain the land by cutting the grass and disallowing "active agriculture" of any kind.

Brian Cline asked Jim a general questions regarding how drinking water was processed after leaving the reservoir system. Mr. Cline's concern was that the DCR's approach to water protection through watershed land protection might be at risk given the increased threat of terrorism. (In a worst case, Mr. Cline questioned whether terrorism pressures might force the state to sell off DCR watershed lands to fund the construction of chemical treatment facilities.) Mr. French said that the water was disinfected on its way to the consumer but not filtered. Mr. French noted that his colleagues closely monitored abnormalities which might be noted in the water supply and immediate response is generated if any abnormality is observed. (The DCR's recent response to a benzene detection situation in Southboro was noted as an example.) Mr. French clarified his confidence that the DCR's watershed protection program offers the most effect means of watershed protection and any future sale of DCR lands was highly unlikely. Reference to Article 97 restrictions on such sale was noted.

Judy Haran noted her involvement with LandBase and its associated website at www.landbase.org. The goal of this website was to link "Conservation Buyers" interested in acquiring open space for general preservation purposes, conservation-focused housing developments, or for usage such as horse farms to unique parcels of land. Judy suggested that landowners interested in selling, but protecting, their lands should consider this website as a resource. The equine property focus of Maureen Harmonay, a Coldwell Banker real estate agent from Harvard was also noted as interesting to land preservation groups. See <http://www.maureenharmonay.com> for more information. Acton's "New View" development (<http://www.newview.org/>) was also discussed as an example of conservation-focused development.

Dr. Robert Tashjian voiced concerns about the risks presented by "Biocontainment Labs" being created within academia. Dr. Tashjian specified that laboratory fires or other damage could be deadly to humans and such labs are particularly risky in populated areas.

At this point, Senator Harriette Chandler arrived, apologizing for her tardiness having another commitment. She was graciously received by Dr. Tashjian and those present at the meeting. Dr. Tashjian asked the Senator if she had anything she wished to say and she said at this time, she would prefer to listen. She did say that she thought it was important to include towns like Berlin, Northboro, Paxton, etc. in efforts as this would enhance results.

Bob Spencer said that the Sterling Fair last year was a start and the hopes are that this effort will grow and that all are welcome. Senator Chandler said that she felt that the idea of the Sterling Fair was stellar and a great vehicle for spreading information about the various town conservation groups.

Brian Cline emphasized the importance that the envisioned alliance not compete with each other groups such as WWLP. Rather, a focus on municipal open space planning needs was recommended with an acknowledgment that these other groups are critical resources for the municipalities represented at the meeting.

Deb Cary expressed the need to educate the public so people will speak up and the state will be pressured for funding for conservation efforts.

Bob Spencer said Sterling is now moving ahead and educating their people as was demonstrated by the Sterling Fair. Bob also said that he thought all these various town groups were dynamic and dedicated to the cause of conservation.

During discussions regarding which towns should be represented, Brian Cline presented the importance of including towns cities that were proximal to the core groups such as Leominster.

Dr. Diran Apelian suggested that an alliance be formed between groups with similar passions and that this passion would serve as a "glue" for the coalition.

Dr. Costello said that there should be an alliance of open space commissions in each town and Dr. Tashjian agreed, saying that the Sterling Fair was an example of such success.

Senator Chandler informed the meeting that Senator Pam Resor from Marlborough would be very interested in the evolving coalition/alliance and that her interest should be tapped. Senator Chandler also reminded the meeting that the CPA (Community Preservation Act) is critical to achieving goals.

Dr. Apelian said that maybe this group should gather together and educate one another on "effective practices" which would benefit all attendees from the various towns.

At this time, Senator Chandler again mentioned the success of and the idea of the Sterling Fair and Jim French told the meeting that interestingly, the site of the Sterling Fair which was the Sterling Airport, was up for sale. Mr. French and others are working on a "smart growth" land protection effort for the 310 acre site in Sterling with a focus on a range of land functions including protecting the Wachusett watershed (Stillwater River) as well as possible uses including sustaining an active airport, creation of sports fields, and creation of affordable and/or elder housing facilities. The attendees seemed interested in supporting efforts such as this as an alliance/coalition.

Judith Haran from White Oak Land Trust said that she thought that financial support should be solicited from the various industries in the various towns, Nypro in Clinton being an example.

Dr. Tashjian presented the example of the tent donated for the Sterling Fair by a local business. He said that industry does like to contribute and support activities of this nature.

The hour approaching 9:30 PM, Mr. Spencer suggested that the minutes of this meeting be prepared and distributed to those in attendance and then a future meeting being scheduled in three months. The suggestion was made for a sub-committee to prepare an agenda for the next meeting.

Dr. Apelian suggested an Ad Hoc Committee might be formed.

Mr. Spencer welcomed all who might like to volunteer their services for the committee.

In preparation for the adjournment of the meeting, Dr. Tashjian thanked all those in attendance for their interest and dedication and said that he felt it was a most cohesive group. He again thanked Senator Chandler for taking time to be present.

Based on meeting discussions, the potential for alliance cooperation on the following topics was identified.

- a.) CPA: Support education of municipalities and regional townspeople about the potential benefits of the Community Preservation Act.
- b.) Regional Fairs and Events: Use Town Fairs and other outdoor events as a means to network amongst each other and educate the public about regional open space issues and related organizations. Use the upcoming 100th Anniversary of the Wachusett Reservoir as a means of educating the public and getting them out into our great open spaces.
- c.) Open Space Access: Work as a regional group to improve access (or communication related to allowable access) to regional resources including DCR lands, rail trails, and water resources.
- d.) Support Agricultural Land Use: Work with landowners, farmers, government agencies, and municipal governments to foster the continued future use of regional land for agricultural purposes.

The next meeting date for this group was set for Thursday, 21 April 2005 at 7PM at the same location.

Following adjournment of the meeting at 9:35 PM, coffee and refreshments were offered and enjoyed.

The following is a partial summary of organizations and resources represented and/or discussed during this meeting:

- Massachusetts Land Trust Coalition (<http://www.massland.org/>)
- West Boylston Land Trust (www.wblt.org)
- Sterling Land Trust (<http://shell2.shore.net/~mltc/demo/TEXT/NEARTRUST/landtrusts/sterling.html>)
- The Mass Central Rail Trail Coalition (coalition focused on maintaining the continuity of the MCRT from Northampton to Boston)
- Wachusett Working Landscapes Partnership
- Trustees for Reservations (www.thetrustees.org)
- Acton's New View Development (www.newview.org)
- White Oak Land Conservation Society (<http://www.whiteoaktrust.org/>)
- The Trust for Public Land (www.tpl.org)
- Mass Audubon (www.massaudubon.org)
- Massachusetts Community Capital Fund (http://www.mass.gov/dhcd/publications/fact_sheets/mccf.pdf and <http://www.mass.gov/dhcd/components/cs/1PrgApps/MCCF/default.HTM>)
- Congressman McGovern's office is www.house.gov/mcgovern/
- Representative Leary's office (<http://www.mass.gov/legis/member/jbl1.htm>)
- Senator Harriette Chandler (<http://www.mass.gov/legis/member/hlc0.htm>)
- Representative Harold Naughton (<http://www.mass.gov/legis/member/hpn1.htm>)
- LandBase (www.landbase.org)
- Maureen Harmonay, equine property sales <http://www.maureenharmonay.com>
- The DCR's (MDC's) 2003 Wachusett Watershed Access Plan (<http://www.mass.gov/mdc/wachaccess.htm>)
- Nashua River Watershed Association, noted as digital mapping source for Sterling open space plan (<http://www.nashuariverwatershed.org/>)
- Montachusett Regional Planning Commission (<http://www.mrpc.org/>)
- Central Mass Regional Planning Commission (<http://www.cmrpc.org/>)

Minutes Compiled By: Brian Cline and Linda Bogosian. (Any important corrections can be emailed to Brian Cline at brian@clineinnovations.com)

Minutes Review for Distribution on 3/16/05 By: Brian Cline, Robert Spencer, Mike Peckar, and Dr. Robert Tashjian

Next Meeting: Thursday, April 21, 2005 at 7PM in West Boylston (Mixer Building).