

West Boylston Open Space Advisory Meeting
Mixer Municipal Building
Town of West Boylston, MA
Selectman's Room
Thursday, December 14, 2006
Minutes of the Meeting

ATTENDANCE:	Chair:	Dr. Robert Tashjian	(RT)
	Secretary:	Maryellen Brown	(MB)
	Member	Barbara Wyatt	(BW)
	Member	James Edmundson	(JE)
	Chief of Police	Dennis Minnich	(DM)
	West Boylston Land Trust	George Bernardin,	
		President	(GB)
		Judy Rociewicz	(JR)
		Walter Rociewicz	(WR)

AGENDA Item 1:

Call to order at 7:32 P.M.

RT welcomed all attendees, and introduced George Bernardin, President of the West Boylston Land Trust, as well as Joyce Rociewicz and Walter Rociewicz..

RT again thanked Chief of Police Dennis Minnich for attending these meetings and for his support.

AGENDA Item 2:

Approval of minutes of last meeting October 19, 2006.

BW moved that the minutes be approved. RT seconded.

WHEREFORE it was moved and seconded that the minutes of the October 19, 2006 meeting be approved.

AGENDA Item 3:

Approval of minutes of last meeting November 16, 2006.

BW moved that the minutes be approved. RT seconded.

WHEREFORE it was moved and seconded that the minutes of the November 16, 2006 meeting be approved.

AGENDA Item 4:

Welcome to George Bernardin, President of West Boylston Land Trust.

RT welcomes GB and recognizes the significance of his joining tonight's meeting, he has had good relationships with the family over the years.

GB stated he has good contacts with the Land Trust Coalition regarding land preservation and protection, funding, etc. The 500 acres identified by the OSAC is a key target for the Land Trust. A task force may be formed consisting of a group focused on the issue, can help tap into other resources. The acreage is held between 5 different owners, and the town citizenry may have resources which are helpful. It's important to get people involved and we can work together to accomplish that.

RT noted that the issue is of public and environmental health. There is a 40b coming up re: the Estrada land. The Land Trust may be able to help with smaller parcels, but should be more than a few shrubs and trees. This must be monitored. Land Trust can be an ally. The Open Space plan is part of the Town Master Plan. OSAC plan is 5 years old and needs an update, the Master plan is only 1 year old, there are big differences between the two plans.

AGENDA Item 5:

Report on the letter of November 16, 2006, prepared by Jim Edmundson, submitted to the West Boylston Water District

JE stated there has been no response to date from the Water District, will follow up on this.

AGENDA Item 6:

Communication with Jennifer Sopher, Massachusetts Department of Environmental Affairs
Not specifically addressed.

AGENDA Item 7:

Mr. Leon Gaumond on goals of West Boylston, "working with the Open Space Committee to update the Open Space Plan; and creating a policy for 'new growth' money, or money the town is allowed to tax above Proposition 2½ based on new construction."

RT: The general feeling is that a buildout of the town will help it to grow economically. This has not been thought out properly. (See further discussion of this under Agenda Item 11.)

AGENDA Item 8:**Tour of Malden Brook Farm and review of American Veterinary Medical Frontiers (AVMF) projects with West Boylston by political leaders**

RT met with Leon Gaumond over 1 year ago, was very receptive and gave his support. Have had meetings with the selectmen and are working with town Fire and Police Departments. Chief Dennis Minnich has been an active participant in this process. Open space must have programs and goals, it impacts the quality of life in West Boylston. We have a combination of West Boylston citizens and other interested parties are very interested in the model program. Potential problems with I-190 could affect many towns, including Sterling. In working with the Sterling Open Space Committee, we must keep this in mind. We can only do our own promotion, and cannot count on any politicians, although we have good relationships there. When Harriette Chandler toured the farm, she said to keep an eye on the I-190 ramp on the Holden line. She stated it has been problematic before.

BW asked how Senator Chandler suggested we react.

RT said Sen. Chandler advised to watch for new governor's meetings, and to get Sterling and Holden involved in the I-190 issues. Assessors indicate this property is buildable. It is important property, but is certainly not buildable as the swamps must be maintained. 40b is important here as regards public health issues.

RT: All meetings have been good so far. The Prospect Street land containing botulism spores was viewed. RT asked Sen. Chandler what could be done if spores were indeed present, she stated that she did not know, it would depend on how serious it was. This is something that the OSAC should do, and attack them on a scientific basis with hard evidence. Need the facts and figures. We need more data, but can begin to organize the material. This issue can cause people to become upset and distressed. This, and other health factors, argue against a build out of the town. This is our dilemma. The physicians from Umass said our first responsibility in town should be public safety, without this, public health is affected. OSAC will be an important link to the plan, and must coordinate with other town committees, however, we don't want to alarm the community. Other suggestions from visitors and supporters are that we make sure to follow Governor Patrick's meetings and get active participation from the town. Chief Dennis Minnich is the strongest voice we have here in West Boylston. Open space encompasses more than scenic beauty and recreation, and we should have more outside support from people who want to work with the OSAC.

BW: Towns need new growth in order to pay for increased costs, forcing towns to build out. The state does not reward towns for keeping open space.

GB: Many state-funded programs are available to help preserve open space, however West Boylston has not requested or participated in these programs. There are millions of dollars which are distributed statewide, so there is money, but West Boylston is not plugged in, and we need to do this and close the gap.

WR stated that Attorney Janet Morrison of Fitchburg obtained 9 million from the state for land preservation.

BW: We need to find out why West Boylston never did anything there. If we want to preserve the Prospect Street property, it must be specifically identified. If the state gives money under a program, who requests the funding?

JE: How do we connect?

GB stated he would find out about the process, it is vital that we determine proper procedures, time frames, etc. and get the whole story.

RT agrees

JE agrees, the property must be placed on an inventory, described and our reasons for preserving it should be delineated. If we don't have this, there is no point in OSAC Plan revision, it would simply be a clone of the old plan, which only contains boilerplate language. We must be very specific and detailed regarding numbers, square footage, and justification for preservation.

GB: Even now, if there is a danger to public health from the botulism spores, we don't have the parameters to create and mark a zone as fragile public health area, and do not build on this property. The easiest way to do this is to include it a "hit list" of properties targeted for open space protection.

RT: The DCR is a good agency, but very slow...it never moves. We have the scientific evidence, however, the state should fund us more.

DM: Repeated that he was told by Tyke that if soil samples prove the presence of botulism, the impact is huge. The land cannot be touched since building would release the botulism spores into the air, and then the aquifers become an issue. Then the town's resources are already reduced, the police department alone lost 2-3 million from its last budget. West Boylston does not have any money.

BW: Need new ways of obtaining funding.

DM: For the OSAC, the #1 goal must be the one (1) page document to apply for funding to test for botulism spores. Go from there to the I-190 runoff issue. Governor Patrick is holding a lot of meetings with a lot of people. Forget about money from the town until the samples come back positive.

RT: We would be looking for \$50,000.00 in funding for this purpose.

DM: It would stop the 40b project on Prospect Street cold.

GB: Cannot believe that Senator Chandler would be unable to assist us in funding the testing, surely some state agency could pry the money loose. It's important to public health.

RT: We must stop going in circles covering the same material. Our mission is to make a new OSAC plan which factors in all of these projects and goals. Must delegate responsibilities and try to get as much outside help as possible. Need to devote time and attention to the project.

JE: The revised Plan should briefly summarize the old plan in a few pages, and then cut to the chase. We don't need to update the old plan, just to cite it. Need to focus on this.

GB: The key is targeting certain pieces of land and making a "hit list," then go after the state or other agencies/programs for funding and assistance.

JE: Need data on the botulism spores to go into the revised plan. As previously stated, still waiting for a response on the written request for aquifer statistics from the Water District. Once we bring in this data, we can designate how many acres of open space are at issue. Dr. Tashjian's plan and the revised OSAC Plan should dovetail each other.

AGENDA Item 9:

Publicity

JE will prepare a summary article for possible distribution to local news outlets so the citizens are made aware of these issues, including biological and chemical terrorism, as chemicals would definitely affect the aquifers, also mentioning the I-190 problems, and can be segued into the topic of potential chemical spills.

DM: We will need a spokesperson for most newspaper consideration. The papers will contact the DCR and want interviews with them. Must therefore be careful, watch for misquotes, misrepresentations, etc.

WHEREFORE it was moved and seconded that the draft newspaper article would be collectively reviewed by the OSAC before any submission to the media.

AGENDA Item 10:

Report on West Boylston Town-Wide Planning Committee meeting on December 7, 2006.

RT: Was disappointed at this Town Wide Planning Committee meeting, the idea is for a full build out of West Boylston, and does not take into account wetlands and other issues. It is not a well thought out plan. (See Agenda Item 11, below).

AGENDA Item 11:

Economic development, full build out in West Boylston

At the Town-Wide Planning Committee meeting, RT pointed out that there are four (4) major areas for real estate tax purposes. One is general real estate taxes from businesses and residents;

there are two (2) factors to be considered with this type of tax, 1) capital vs. operational expenses, and 2) sewers which were supposed to handle growth in the town cannot handle the load. This has been an environmental disaster and will continue to be one. There are huge potential contamination problems, the cost of which could be astronomical. 3) The water department is very good, however, the pipes are old (circa 1939) and in terrible shape, and will become a huge expense in the future. 4) The municipal light department will also require major capital for construction costs. A build out will raise the cost of living in the town, the larger the population, the more money must be spent.

RT asked BW if the Economic Committee is addressing these issues.

BW indicated that they have begun some work on this but have not come to any conclusions yet. Leon provided figures which reflect 85% of tax income is residential. The committee is looking into ways to get more money from businesses.

JE: As far as OSAC, if we want input, we must get beyond the present perception of open space. We must demonstrate the financial benefits of open space, along the lines of the chart we used in the booth at the Sterling Fair. If land is developed, then the town must provide services. Emphasize "Sensible and Smart Growth." Need to keep up front the fact that open space makes economic sense. We will be on firmer ground then. Open space offsets other costs.

AGENDA Item 12:

Not specifically addressed

AGENDA Item 13:

Other business

There was no other business before the Committee.

AGENDA Item 14:

The next meeting of the Open Space Advisory Committee will be on **Thursday, January 18, 2007 at 7:30 PM.**

WHEREBY the meeting was adjourned at 9:02 P.M.

RESPECTFULLY SUBMITTED:

Maryellen Brown, Secretary