

Open Space and Recreation Planning Committee
Focus Group Meeting
Meeting Minutes
Thursday, June 4, 2020

Present: Seth Ridinger, Gerry Quam, Elaine Jones, Helen Dexter and Crystal Byron, **OSRP committee**; Joe McGrath, **Conservation Committee**; Bill Manter, **Planning board**; Jessica Rubinow, **Resident Advisory Board, Guardians Lacrosse, Boylston Soccer**; Suzanne Hermalyn , **Resident Advisory Board**; Robert Thibeault, **Board of Health**; Tom Martiska, **Board of Assessors**; Emily Glaubitz , **Assistant Planner CMRPC**

Meeting called to order at 6:03 pm.

Seth began the discussion by explaining the definition of open space and that the town needs a state approved Open Space and Recreation Plan to apply for grants. He explained the process the committee had used to acquire resident input into the creation of the goals, objectives and action plan. A survey was available on line and at locations in town over two months asking residents to give feedback on the town's open space and recreation. There were 290 respondents and many people wrote extensive comments. The public forum scheduled for March had to be postponed. With the restrictions necessary due to Covid 19, holding a public forum was no longer feasible. The committee decided a focus group composed of representatives from the various town boards and committees would be a great way to gather further input on our proposed goals and objectives.

Participants had been sent the document before the meeting. During the review of goals, Emily shared a copy of the objectives and actions on her screen as each goal was discussed. Input received from the participants was recorded to be included in the final draft. The goals are listed below with participants' comments.

Goal 1. Be proactive about continuing to enhance and preserve Boylston's town character and small New England town feel. Gerry commented that the establishment of a standing Open Space Advisory committee would monitor the progress of the plan. The plan would be less likely to be filed away and forgotten.

Goal 2. Preserve and Protect Boylston's open spaces, including waterbodies, woodlands, farms and parks. There was some discussion of the Community Preservation Act (CPA) as a funding source. Joe McGrath provided more details of the CPA, and agreed it was worth exploring.

Bill Manter explained the process of preventing large developments by which the town votes on a bond issue to purchase the land. For example, there are presently 40 undeveloped acres that could be developed into 90 housing units or the town could prevent it from being developed by purchasing the land with a 20 year bond.

Joe McGrath made several recommendations. He suggested lengthening the time period listed for creating criteria for open space acquisition. He recommended adding a process for accepting donations of land. There is the potential for the developer of the former YMCA property to donate a portion to the town. He also suggested a change to the wording of objective 2c. to “ Permanently protect town owned property “ . He explained that several years ago, BOS had auctioned off 5 pieces of town owned property to developers without talking to Conservation Committee or Parks and Rec . He recommended the Open Space Committee and Conservation committee should be notified and included in the discussion of any sale of town-owned property.

Sue Hermalyn asked “what is the revenue positive sale price of a home”. She thought any discussion of acquiring open space needed to be accompanied by an understanding of what is revenue positive or revenue negative.

Bill Manter explained Boylston’s development is limited by the number of buildable lots without poor soil and wetlands. Robert Thibeault explained how building is also limited by the guidelines of septic systems. He also noted that improved technology of future septic systems may permit more development than presently allowed.

Goal 3. Maintain, add and enhance recreational facilities and programs as needed.

Jessica Rubinow explained the needs of the soccer and lacrosse programs. There has been a huge expansion of the soccer program (80 children to 150). Guardian Youth Lacrosse program has 130 children. Tahanto Lacrosse players had to practice in Berlin this year as there were no available fields. We don’t know who is responsible for the fields. Who is in charge, what is the cost? Why is the football field at 140 and 70 not used in the off season? Why do some sports have ownership of fields? There needs to be better communication and an Organizational chart, with ownership, costs, maintenance and an official Field Use policy.

Goal 4. Regulate and guide development to be consistent with town character and to protect open space and natural resources. Jessica suggested the boards and commissions of the annual task force should report to the Selectmen. Bill explained Planning Board tries to recommend that developers put in low impact developments. Joe thanked committee members for their work and said a member of the Conservation Committee would be willing to serve on the Open Space Advisory Committee. Jessica encouraged the Open Space Advisory Committee to be active and to continue to collaborate with the Resident Advisory Board.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:30 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Elaine Jones, Clerk