

Busa Land Use Proposal Committee
Minutes of 12-7-2010 Meeting
Town Office Building, room G-15

Attendees: David Horton (Chair), Bill Dailey, Ric Fulop, Ginna Johnson, Pam Shadley, Deborah Strod, Al Zabin

Mr. Horton called the meeting to order at 7:07pm.

1. Old Business

Mr. Fulop will upload the minutes of the Committee's 10-21 meeting for review by the committee and posting as draft on the website.

The 11/18 minutes were approved with one change: under the public comment the word "buys" was changed to "grows" and the word "from" was changed to "for."

2. Public Comment

One public comment was made. An abutter, who missed the last meeting, said he was surprised by "how little regard" all the presentations gave to the abutters, particularly the Housing and Recreation presentations. He felt he would be playing goalie for the sports field, and the housing complex would surround his house. He mentioned this directly after the meeting to a committee member and sent a letter, but wished his remarks to be entered into the public record.

3. Responses to Committee Questions

Mr. Horton noted that each of the groups that made presentations has responded to the Committee's questions, and that the responses were distributed to the committee and will be posted. The substance of the responses was not read at the meeting but he anticipated that the substance would come up in discussion.

4. Mr. Pressman's requests

Mr. Horton repeated Mr. Pressman's requests from his presentation at the last meeting regarding possible adjunct use by a Community Farm of Waltham street arable land. The requests were

- a) that the Committee mention possible use of the land in its report
- b) that the Committee suggest if the idea is worthy of consideration
- c) that the Committee transmit his report to the Board of Selectmen (BOS).

Mr. Horton noted that he can promise that the Committee will transmit the report to the BOS. The Committee can mention possible use of the Waltham land as the topic will come up in discussion. The Committee cannot promise to suggest use of the land – whether it will or will not will come out in discussions.

5. Mr. Horton reported on other information relevant to the discussion:

a) He spoke with the Town Manager, Carl Valente, regarding what the BOS is looking for from the committee.

"I met with Carl Valente and Hank Manz last week to get some information about what the Board of Selectmen (BOS) is looking for in a final report from our committee. What I understand about the report from our information-gathering meeting is that the BOS is not looking for a particular or specific use or uses, i.e., "This is it," but rather a description of the implications of each proposal that we have received. In other words, our thoughts on all of them - the pros and cons of each. We can also indicate if the town were to implement all three potential uses, here's how it might look; the same if the town were to implement two of them or just one of them. If we feel that some uses cannot co-exist, we should say that, too. The sense that I got is that we will not be the final arbiter, the BOS will. The BOS wants to hear how we evaluate the proposals and what our opinions are, based on all that we have read and heard, but is not asking us for "the" proposal for its reuse, plotted on a site plan, although if doing so helps us with our thinking and what we will present to the BOS, we can certainly do just that.

"We should also keep in our thinking whether or not any of the land owned by the Goldingers might help the town to realize its goals for the Busa property, the views of the Town of Arlington, and the ideas set forth by Bob Pressman, as well as what has been written to us in scores of interesting and heartfelt letters from people in Lexington and Arlington."

b) In response to BLUPC's request, Mr. Valente will also check on what codes could come into play.

c) Mr. Valente reported that the Busa land is free of contaminants and can be used for all CPA purposes with no restrictions.

d) the Engineering Department reported that the street is serviced by sewer lines.

e) Mr. Horton emailed Dr. Ash, the Superintendent of Schools, to ask what formula the schools use to predict the number of children from new developments. Dr. Ash replied that when the Avalon complex was proposed, the prediction was made using the idea that 1 child would occupy the 2nd bedroom, and 1 child would occupy the 3rd bedroom in the units. 111 children were predicted using this formula, but 160 children actually came. Mr. Horton said that the implication of this is that we can't anticipate only 1 child per bedroom in the new housing, but rather 50% more. He noted that this would not inhibit him from choosing affordable housing.

6. New Business: Evaluation of Proposals

The main topic of this meeting was to compare each proposal to the Evaluation Criteria and begin discussion of all the material seen in presentations, read and heard. He noted that Ms. Strod had also suggested keeping the Proposal Guidelines in mind as well.

In response to a question from the audience, Mr. Horton noted that all material received in writing is on the BLUPC webpage, including material handed to the committee during public comment (the audience member was looking specifically for Ms. Kern's comments from the prior meeting, which Mr. Horton noted should be up on the website now.)

Mr. Horton began the Evaluation discussion alphabetically, as all other discussions have been, with the Farm Coalition proposal, and proceeded to take the Evaluation Criteria in order and give the members a chance to speak.

Criterion: Value/Benefit to the People of Lexington

Ms. Johnson said that the value/benefit of the Farm proposal is high. There is benefit in preserving the land, also in the community-building aspect, the ability to volunteer, the recreation and social aspect, as well as the possibility of buying shares. She noted that this proposal has the benefits of Historic Preservation, Recreation, Open Space, community building and access to locally produced food.

Mr. Fulop also rated the proposal high in terms of value/benefit to the people of Lexington. In addition to the items noted by Ms. Johnson, he noted the educational aspect for children and the community, the quality of food, preservation of the town's farming heritage.

Mr. Zabin noted that all three proposals have great value to the town as a community. The Farm proposal would do that; Recreation is an important way to get people to work and play together; providing more housing has been a commitment of the town as long as he has been here. Whether the proposals are of equal value or not depends on your point of view; it is hard to rate one above the other objectively.

Mr. Horton suggested that, instead of proceeding by going through all the Evaluation Criteria for each proposal, that rather the Committee should take Mr. Zabin's example and talk about all three proposals at once, for one criterion at a time.

Ms. Strod noted, while still on Value/Benefit to the town, that while all the proposals have benefit to the community, a wide variety of ages came out for the Farm proposal, and people who had perhaps never been to a public meeting were engaged.

Mr. Fulop said that it is a unique aspect of the land to be able to keep a farm on it – there are not a lot of parcels that are able to be used for farming. There are technical alternatives for the other uses (affordable housing and recreation), such as taking existing fields and putting turf on them to increase their productivity.

At this point, Mr. Horton read the Evaluation Criteria to the audience, for their information.

Ms. Shadley said it is hard to not say that each proposal has value. She asked to move on to the question about how many people benefit and the benefit to underserved populations. Her conclusion is that the Farm proposal benefits an underserved population the best:

- There are other fields and housing, but not many if any farms
- The number of people who came out to meetings and wrote letters displays the high interest of an underserved population
- The number of people served was described in the Farm proposal – variety of ages; the field would serve the players; housing – everyone gets a little bit but nothing large.

Bill Dailey spoke next.

He thinks that 6 acres will not support the use suggested nor a farm manager, and that more land would be needed. 4 acres will be serving educational uses.

He would not support 10-14 units of affordable housing. After inquiry about Avalon, he sees as staggering that 160 kids came from that development. It was clear in February that there are difficulties with the school budget. However it happens, he perceives that a large number of special needs children came out of the units. A member of the audience interjected that is not true. He would support one unit of affordable housing along Lowell Street. He understood that the housing advocates were deferring to the larger proposed use for a number of units, but were ready to step in if there were a recommendation of one unit. Could be a single-family unit or duplex, he's not sure the area is zoned for a duplex.

To add a full-sized field would require 1½ acres, and he has not heard any good reason why it could not have been on the Busa land. People on Parker Street back up to the sports complex there and he doesn't hear complaints. Any proposal will always have some objections – he hasn't heard one to think two times about having a field.

Each proposal serves a great need and all should be considered.

Ms. Shadley asked why Mr. Dailey believes 6 acres, which is what he believed the farm was, might be too small to support the suggested use nor a farm manager.

Mr. Horton said:

The farm is of value, affordable housing and recreation are important needs. He has a question about how large any might be but all have great value. Families need housing, and affordable housing would meet a need of the town. Recreation's field and passive recreation – there are dozens around town. Each notion has value and benefit.

Scale

Affordable Housing seemed large to Ms. Shadley because of the impact on the land and potential impact on the schools. 12 new units would affect the neighbors and traffic flow. It seems like 10-15 children might live in the housing and the cost to the town would be considerable.

Ms. Strod appreciates the new model for proposing the housing, as it is more cost effective and more efficient than one at a time to build in multiple units. In an interchange with the Housing proponents, it was clarified that if the Committee considers the proposal too big, reducing it might affect the financing, particularly the Low Income Tax Credits which are described in the proposal as usually being based on a higher number of units. Still, one building of 7 units would be more efficient and cost effective than seven separate units spread throughout town.

Mr. Zabin said he can't get exercised about 8-12 new kids, which would really be marginal costs unless things had changed significantly since he was on the School Committee. Those costs would not be very great in comparison with the overall school budget or town budget. His

main concern is that he is not satisfied that a road and parking can be designed that can accommodate a development of this scale.

He thinks if we are trying to get two uses on the Busa Land, we could suggest to the selectmen that using the land on Waltham street might help make that possible.

Janet Kern, of the Farm Coalition, was asked to respond. A farm, and especially a community farm, needs infrastructure such as the greenhouse. A community farm adds a big influx of people into the farm for education and volunteering. The farm itself needs a base of operations. None of that infrastructure is available at the Waltham street land.

In addition, though some of the land is prime land, some is not. Mr. Busa grows corn on it, and corn is one of the few things that can grow on that soil, and it is hard for him to do it. The community farm would not be like that – the vegetables and other crops would be different based on the community's needs. To say now that we could use this or that parcel of land equally is getting way ahead of ourselves. The Farm Coalition was focused on what could be done with what is available at the Busa land.

An audience member asked to correct "misinformation" from a prior comment and that he thought Ms. Kern was on the right track, but Mr. Horton noted that this is not an openly interactive meeting but rather a chance for the committee to hear responses from the proposal proponents. He asked that the audience member send a letter with his comment. Others remembered that celery was grown in prior years.

Ms. Shadley returned to Scale, item 3 on the list. She noted that the abutters were upset with the scale and placement of the field. She noted that the Recreation proponents agreed that the drawing was not to scale, and that there was not adequate runoff area. A full-size field would take much more space. If there is not room then an intermediate-size field could be built but that would only be suitable for 8 v. 8 soccer, and would not meet the identified need for a full-size, multi-sport field. She believes a multi-use field is not feasible, the lesser field is the only one feasible, and it is not what recreation is looking for.

Mr. Coleman responded – the clear preference is for a full-size multipurpose field. The alternative is an intermediate-size field with the dimensions listed in the response to the Committee's questions.

Mr. Fulop followed up on the assertion from his colleague that 6 acres was not feasible. He suggested getting more facts, learning more about Kenny farms in Concord, which was suggested by Mr. Dailey. It depends on the crops, Integrated Pest Management, whether the approach is fully organic, other practices that affect density and yield.

Ms. Johnson said that passive recreation would have to be sacrificed to get a multi-purpose field. The scheme [proposed by the Recreation department and Recreation Committee] would have to be rearranged to get a larger field, which would not allow fulfilling of the farm need.

The Housing proposal does not show personal outdoor spaces, such as for a grill. That kind of space is important. She's not sure if that housing piece is accommodated in the plan.

By trying to do everything, those two proposals aren't doing anything well. They are of good intent, but as drawn they aren't as successful as they could be, and they would need to be redrawn.

Mr. Zabin said he is concerned about traffic and parking on a playing field; if the scale is such that a full-size field is not possible, he's not sure about the need for a smaller field, since all the statistics we were given related to a large field. He's not sure if using other land [such as the Waltham Street land] is feasible. We won't recommend a specific use and it seems to him that to make best use of what we have, we have to think out of the box as a town. It could be that the Waltham Street land is not viable with the Busa land, but we don't know that.

Mr. Dailey said that the fact that Dennis Busa is raising corn on the Waltham Street land is an indicator it is practical. It wasn't used for corn, it was fine crops, not sure if it was lettuce or celery effectively. Half the land wasn't good for anything because the Town hasn't cleaned the brook, but it could be used in connection with the open land on Lowell street.

Mr. Horton said he felt the housing proposed was a large development for the property – particularly the infrastructure; he's not concerned about the number of children. He is more concerned about parking spaces and impervious surfaces and traffic. He loves the idea of recreation but is not sure if a small field would meet the needs expressed by Recreation. The drawing was not to scale and didn't show borders with the neighbors. He feels the neighborhood would be very changed by having it right there. Putting a road in would be costly and maybe money well spent, but costly.

Mr. Horton moved on to Evaluation Criteria 4 and 5: Impact to the Neighborhood and Abutters

The Lexington Housing Partnership proposal that puts all three onsite affects the abutters the most. It adds a second access road. He heard the Arlington representatives and audience talk about safety on Lowell Street as a significant factor. The Recreation Committee proposal could affect traffic and the abutters, because of the number of cars coming in and out of 1 driveway.

The impact to the abutters is least from the farm – one use, edges are protected, and the use currently exists.

Mr. Zabin said the least traffic impact is likely to be the housing – the farm with hundreds of visitors would be a higher impact. Change always has impact. A farm is not a bucolic paradise; there are lots of people coming in and out.

Mr. Horton asked if the Farm Coalition representatives had any information on traffic counts at other farms. Ms. Kern replied that they did not. The greatest traffic would be during the Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) pickup time. Volunteers and educators/students filter

in and out. The traffic would be at least what there is now, but not different from normal traffic on the street. Larger events would be held on the weekend; in the weekday, 10 preschool kids or a school field trip midday would be the impact.

Mr. Horton clarified he was thinking about traffic on the land itself, not the street; and asked Mr. Coleman of Recreation for his traffic estimates. His guess is either 12-15 players per team depending on the game, some would carpool and some would not. 5 games would be played on a Saturday at 9, 10:30, 12, 1:30 and 3 typically.

Ms. Johnson suggested that domestic pets from a housing development might have an environmental impact; she also noted that there might be a farm cat as well.

Ms. Strod asked about drainage – the materials from Arlington noted that the Busa land drains into the Arlington Res area, and while the Recreation and Housing presentations said that there would be appropriate drainage, she wondered where it would guide water to. The answer was the same place.

Ms. Johnson said in Arlington many were in favor of the farm, there was great concern about traffic, no surprises.

Ms. Johnson said she was impressed with the level of expertise with which the concerns and appreciation were expressed. She was surprised by how beloved the Res is to the people of Arlington.

Ms. Shadley pointed out that the materials shared by Arlington about the ecological significance of the area showed that there were over 200 species of birds seen in the area. She said that it is important to look not only at the immediate edges where the Busa land meets the Arlington Res land but to recognize how the entire farm links to the habitat of the whole area. All three proposals are equal in their treatment of the edges of the Res, but we are right to be steering toward the overall impact and not just uses. While each of the proposals may be low impact within the context of their intended use, we have to look at whether the way of developing is sustainable.

Mr. Horton said that Arlington residents were eloquent about their relationship to the land, and how the whole area is part of a chain.

Ms. Johnson noted that when the Committee first started, we thought that the development at the buffer zones was going to be the big concern, but it is less of a concern than we thought it would be and we do need to really consider the impact of development outside of the buffer zones.

Mr. Horton moved the Committee on to Item 8, Public Utilities. He noted that the Committee was informed by the Town that there is a sewer on Lowell Street. He feels Housing has the greatest impact within this criterion. The Farm demands nothing, nor does the soccer field,

although the Committee is still waiting for answers to its questions about what codes might kick in for these uses which might require, for example, bathrooms. The farm plan is for port-a-potties with a hope to develop composting toilets.

Mr. Zabin said these are all important assets to the Town. The land is too small to accommodate everything. Unless the Waltham street land is suitable, he doesn't see how the Town can cram it all in and still protect the borders, deal with traffic, minimize the impact on the neighborhood. It's like trying to put 50 pounds of cement into a 10 pound bag. He doesn't see much security impact, not much vandalism to fields, no problems with security in the housing. These assertions were confirmed by head nods by the proponents in the audience.

Mr. Horton moved on to Evaluation Criterion 10, Maintenance.

The farm is proposed to have no cost to the town. The housing proposal would remove the hoop greenhouse but not the metal one. Maintenance would be done by the people responsible, either owners or 99-year lease tenants, or the Housing Authority or current public entities that take care of affordable housing in town. Though there are various vehicles for ownership/renting of the buildings, the assumption is that the land would continue to be owned by the town. The Recreation proposal is estimated to cost \$7,000 per year to maintain.

This led the committee to Evaluation Criterion 11, Financial Impact.

Ms. Shadley inquired about the possibility that the Farm might return money to the town. Ms. Kern replied that they had included \$6,000 in rent in the budget, as it is a common term in an agreement for a community farm – but that and other terms would be negotiated with the town if a Community Farm went forward.

The Housing proposal is estimated at \$38,000 per unit to build each of the 14 units (versus ten times that for an individual unit in stand-alone housing). It is proposed to be financially neutral once up.

Mr. Fulop suggested that a deed restriction could be written which would allow use of the land as a farm while reserving the possibility of other CPA-permitted uses, based on his own prior experience with deed restrictions. Mr. Horton reiterated that Mr. Valente, the Town Manager, is asking the Committee's questions about deed restrictions to Town Counsel. Mr. Zabin asked what deed is being discussed, as the town already owns the land.

Mr. Coleman was asked to explain whether the fees for youth players might cover the maintenance. A flat fee of 13\$ per participant is charged to each team, and this money goes into the recreation department enterprise fund. An estimate of the revenue (13\$ x 15 players x 2 teams x 5 games on Saturday = 1950\$ is an approximation since the midweek usage would likely be practices and a duplication of players in games). The \$800,000 to build the field would likely be requested from CPA funds.

Mr. Dailey raised again the question of whether a full-size field could be placed at the open space between Worthen Road and the end of the football field and baseball field there, saying

it was 200x300 feet as he paced it off himself. Mr. Coleman did not have the figures at hand. [subsequent to the meeting, the Committee was informed that the space is not large enough]. If it were possible, then the building of a field would not require the extra parking and other infrastructure that would be required for a field at the Busa Land site.

Mr. Coleman did reply that the area mentioned drains very badly. It will be addressed in Phase 3 of the center complex program. It is under water most of the year, even though some teams use it. The rehabilitation of this area would likely far exceed the 800,000\$ to build a multipurpose field at the Busa Land. He noted again that the Recreation plan proposes an application for CPA funds for the \$800,000.

Evaluation Criterion 13, Sustainability was discussed next.

Ms. Johnson pointed out that it is possible to do each project sustainably within its framework – the Housing project proposes green building and the possibility of LEED certification, the Farm proposes organic and other best practices, recreation describes its Integrated Pest Management and pesticide-free practices. Nevertheless we are considering the overall sustainability of this land, given that it is a farm already.

A Committee member asked if the field would require sprinklers, and Mr. Coleman replied that it would not.

Ms. Johnson said that on the dimensions of infiltration, preserving water quality and other measures of sustainability, the Farm gets the most points. Considering the larger perspectives of global warming, large regional scale activities, local farming gets points for reducing trucking and the transport of food.

Ms. Shadley continued: each project could be built sustainably, but if you take it up one notch up, the global approach to sustainability is the use of particular parcels of land and how to do better than before. Because this land was farmed before, it is suitable for farming now. If we change it with fields and pavement, it will never be suitable again. No matter how you look at it, the farm has all the points in this category. If the town is committed to sustainability we have to look at it this way.

Mr. Zabin said that this farm has not always been profitable. If it turns out that the farm is not profitable, and we are indeed restricted to keeping it as open space, our options afterward will be limited and we will have to take care of it. Maybe it is not a big risk, but it is still a risk.

Mr. Fulop reiterated his offer to explore the issue of deed restrictions because he had done multi-use deed restrictions.

The last Evaluation Criterion, Timeline was discussed briefly. The farm could start almost immediately, Housing would take 1 year or so from permitting and the Recreation proposal would take approximately 2 years from permitting. Mr. Horton noted that this is a long-term decision, and the time difference was likely not determinative.

Next Meeting:

The committee decided that it had enough information not to do a “tracing exercise” next meeting (this would have been taking the elements and trying to rearrange them in a way to explore further how the uses might be fit together onto the land). Mr. Fulop asked for more detailed profit and loss from the Farm Coalition, and Ms. Kern said they could share some more detail.

Next meeting is on 12/16. The Committee will narrow down its views of the pluses and minuses of the proposals, and each member will give his/her view, expecting that there will still be some give and take. This meeting will be back upstairs in room 207.

The Board of Selectmen has asked for an interim report from the committee on 12/20 or 1/3. The Committee decided to ask for a later date. The report will cover what we have done, who we have talked with, a running record.

The next meeting dates after that were set as January 5th and January 19th, 7 p.m., both Wednesdays, Room 207, Town Office Building.