

LONGMEADOW STUDY GROUP

MINUTES OF MEETING

September 13, 2017

Members Present: Joe Amico, Jeanise Bertrand, John Cusolito, John Serafini, Jack Wilhelm (co-chairman), and Bill Wilson (co-chairman).

This meeting was called to order at 6:35 pm at the Wenham Town Hall.

Bill Wilson recalled the previous meeting and said he had sent an e-mail out looking for potential uses for the property and received feedback. Both Towns had indicated that their departments would not have a use for the land, except for Recreation or the School Committee (School). Mr. Wilson suggested looking at the School's potential uses such as fields or buildings. The 2012 Recreation Plan had been distributed. Mr. Wilson was looking to the Recreation Department and the School to identify uses.

Minutes

Minutes of the August 23, 2017 meeting would be approved at the next meeting.

Elect Committee Chair and Secretary

John Serafini suggested having both Selectmen be the chairmen of the Committee because the topic would be discussed at each Town Meeting if there was an affordable need for the project as well as how the costs would be split between the two town's residents. Jeanise Bertrand noted the competing interest of the tax rate and at large bias problems. Ms. Bertrand did not think School Committee or Recreation Department members should be chairman.

Motion made by John Serafini that Jack Wilhelm and Bill Wilson be co-chairmen of the Committee.

Seconded by Jeanise Bertrand.

Vote: Unanimous in favor.

Motion made by Bill Wilson to nominate Jeanise Bertrand as secretary as he wanted to keep the School Committee involved.

Seconded by John Serafini.

Vote: Unanimous in favor.

Hamilton Development Corporation present to address the Committee.

Brian Stein and Rick Mitchell were present to discuss the Willow St. property and its relationship with the Longmeadow property. Harborlight had linked the 20 affordable units of senior housing at Willow St. to 40 affordable units at Longmeadow. The Longmeadow parcel would be four to five acres with access at Bay Road. Harborlight had asked the Affordable Housing Trust (AHT) for \$600,000 for the project, which was the purchase price for the Willow

St. property. If the proposal passed without an appeal, there would be a 70% local preference offered.

The Hamilton Development Corporation's (HDC) expressed concerns of delay now that the property was in front of the Long Meadow committee to evaluate. Mr. Mitchell referred to the turf playing fields, which would cost \$9M. Jeanise Bertrand said the current cost for Phase I was \$3.5M. The Planning Board was currently reviewing two fields, lights, and a track, which was about \$5M, according to Bill Wilson. The Longmeadow property acquisition would cost \$3M to \$4M in addition to that cost. The superintendent had reportedly said if the turf fields were built, there was no need for additional playing fields, as recalled by Mr. Mitchell. It was noted that the School had an interest in the site as a long term building site, but it would be ten years before a project would begin, according to Mr. Mitchell.

Rick Mitchell suggested that the School would have time to study the property more if Harborlight were able to utilize the front four acres, which would lock up the remaining 16 acres for two years. Mr. Mitchell said the Study Committee was holding up everything up. The AHT and Selectmen were waiting for the Committee to determine if it was feasible. Harborlight and the AHT wanted the Committee to come to Fall Town Meeting in Hamilton with a preliminary finding. Wenham would not have a Fall Town Meeting.

If Harborlight or the HDC did not see some commitment for the joint project, then Harborlight would withdraw both proposals at Willow St. and Longmeadow, which meant the Longmeadow property would be available to anyone, according to Rick Mitchell. Jeanise Bertrand said that Rick Mitchell neglected to mention that she had suggested to create one large school building on the site to replace the existing Cutler and Winthrop Schools because they were two pieces of property that the Town owned and the land could become commercial properties that would provide taxable income.

Rick Mitchell offered the history of the HDC and the Willow St. property. Brian Stein said the reason the HDC purchased the Willow St property was that they wanted the Town to have control over the future of the property. Rick Mitchell said Harborlight was the only respondent with 20 units of affordable senior housing and the neighbors understood that 20 units of senior housing was preferable to general housing. Harborlight had linked the Willow St. site to Longmeadow as they needed a certain magnitude to make it economically feasible. Mr. Stein said it would be one application of 60 affordable units to the State.

In regard to the timing, Bill Wilson said the Committee wanted to answer the Citizen's Petition by April Town Meeting and wanted the Committee to keep an open mind while it determined uses for a potential purchase. The Planning Board already approved the turf field plan and Mr. Wilson wondered if Longmeadow were available, would the Schools pull the existing application for turf fields. Another potential use would be a school complex on site with a consolidated elementary school and athletic complex. The sponsor for the purpose would be the School or the Recreation Department to determine what to do with the property and how much it would cost. In response to the question if the Town had the tolerance for the cost of a new

school, Jeanise Bertrand responded that there would be grants for a significant portion of the cost. Mr. Wilson thought previous work might inhibit any potential grant matches.

Jeanise Bertrand thought the School Committee would pull the current permit for the turf fields as the project was encroaching on the environmental buffer zones. The turf field would be moved out of the buffer zone if more land was available. Ms. Bertrand believed the School needed more information as to the feasibility to acquire a part or all of the land. Ms. Bertrand wanted to know what the acquisition would do to the tax rolls, the value of the land, and the benefits and disadvantages as part of a cost/benefit analysis. Bill Wilson noted eminent domain. Harborlight wanted to split the cost and subsidize the cost for the School, according to Mr. Wilson. According to Ms. Bertrand, the School had an interest in the property but did not want to get in the way of the Harborlight project.

Bill Wilson noted the short and long term need for fields and buildings. Jeanise Bertrand said the School could have a use for the property but needed to determine the short and long term feasibility. There could be savings on transportation and building costs by having one elementary school. Rick Mitchell responded that the property was not in their capital plan and that as a citizen he did not want to pay for both the fields and the new school at one time. Mr. Mitchell suggested cutting off the front four acres. John Serafini said determining if it was a key piece would be important before cutting it off for Harborlight.

Andrew DeFranza said he was happy to defer to the School Committee regarding which parcel was the most important. John Serafini noted the issue of access, which may come into question. Mr. DeFranza responded that he would work with Mr. Miller regarding access. Mr. Serafini described the rights of the abutters, which would be an issue for Harborlight or the School. Mr. DeFranza said he did not say he would pull out of Willow St., but Rick Mitchell responded that the HDC wanted more than eight or nine units, which would be the result if the two parcels were not packaged together. Mr. Mitchell said 23 units could be built on the Willow St. property. The AFT was concerned with the linkage of the properties but wanted Willow St. to go through.

Andrew DeFranza said the likelihood of appeal was costly for a small project and the proposal was in response to the community wanting to see under 40 units. John Serafini said the downtown project was not likely to be appealed. Mr. DeFranza said the State was not warm to senior housing, especially in affluent communities, which was why the project was coupled with a family housing project. Mr. Serafini said that the projects were disparate and that coupling might have occurred in other situations but here it might not work. Bill Wilson said he didn't like the linkage but worried about what might happen if Harborlight did not control the property.

Mr. DeFranza said Harborlight was flexible and that any units below 40 would increase the acquisition price by \$25,000 for the Town and any units above 40 would decrease the price by \$25,000 for the Town, in the event they wanted to share the property. If 30 units or under was allowed, Harborlight would abandon the proposal. The School would be the most interested party, according to John Serafini, who recalled that the School had made a mistake not getting extra land next to Winthrop School 25 years ago. Jeanise Bertrand said the Committee would

not have the answers by the November 4, 2017 deadline. John Serafini agreed that the timetable was not appropriate and Bill Wilson suggested an April decision. The School would need to sponsor and indicate their needs. Mr. Serafini wanted to involve the FinCom of both towns.

Sean Timmons referred to the Recreation Master Plan of 2012. The Findings indicated there were not enough fields before added use had been realized by flag football, softball, little league, JV girls lacrosse, and freshmen soccer. The Recreation Committee had supported the study but made it clear their priority was the turf fields. The benefits of turf fields were far better for usage patterns. Mr. Timmons said the Master Plan had identified the high school as the site for a new turf field. The Master Plan did not have back fields but the high school plan had two iterations. The Plan approved by the Planning Board was for the entire concept. Rick Mitchell repeated that the Superintendent of Schools was on the record that there was no additional need for playing fields if the turf fields were built out. Shawn Farrell said there were no tennis courts on campus.

John Serafini said it was up to the School as primary stakeholder to determine if they wanted to explore the use of the land. Mr. Serafini added that when a special opportunity came along, it would be important to take advantage of it. Jeanise Bertrand said the School would not need 15 acres. While Harborlight needed four acres, the 11 acres would be considered for the decision. Ms. Bertrand wanted to study building a new elementary school or moving the fields over to get them out of the buffer zone. Ms. Bertrand wanted to understand the implication for the tax rate and how much the acquisition would cost. Mr. Serafini added that the front four acres might prove to be the key access point for a future school complex so it might not be possible to cut off the four acres. Andrew DeFranza responded that any four acres on the site would work. Bill Wilson wanted to hear from the School about what land they needed to accomplish their goals. Jeanise Bertrand repeated that by building a new consolidated school, it would release two parcels of land in town that could be taxable.

Bill Wilson suggested building a new high school and having the elementary schools at the existing high school. Mr. Wilson expressed the need for the District to identify a future use as well as a preferred source of funding. John Serafini noted the economic benefits of freeing up two sites, but was concerned about politically closing two elementary schools and consolidating them with teen agers. Committee tasked Bill Wilson to create and send a list of questions to send to the School Committee and Administration regarding future infrastructure plans and potential use of Long Meadow.

Jack Lawrence (Rock Maple Road) spoke about the history of the site, noting the plan indicated that "No Further Subdivision" could occur and that the Planning Board had turned down three separate subdivision proposals for the site. Rick Mitchell said a 40B proposal would not matter. Mr. Lawrence noted that the high school and middle school were landlocked. While the current year was experiencing an increase in kindergarten students, the general student population was declining. Kate Walker (Ortins Road) said the owners had contracted with Andrew DeFranza for an overvalued price and that the School could obtain the property for a lower cost than what

Harborlight had offered. Bill Wilson responded that once the Committee understood what was needed, then they would drill down to determine the costs.

Jeanise Bertrand said the School Committee was interested in the parcel, but didn't want to overburden the Towns. The School Committee did not want to propose something without public support. John Serafini debated the concept of analyzing something in consideration of its costs and suggested the Committee consider assuming it would be a sizable but affordable piece of land for the right, justified, potential use for it that could be articulated, then that was the question the Study Committee could get to.

Jack Wilhem proposed that the Study Committee schedule another meeting focusing on the School, who would be invited to respond if they were interested in putting forth the time and energy to answer the questions posed this evening.

Adjournment

Jack Wilhelm made motion to adjourn at 8:13

Seconded by Jeanise Bertrand.

Vote: Unanimous in favor.

Prepared by:

Marcie Ricker

Attest

Date