

Town of Westwood

Pedestrian & Bicycle Safety Committee

Wednesday, September 7, 2022

50 Carby Street

Committee Members in Attendance:

Chair Michael Kraft, Vice-chair Enkelejda (Kela) Klosi, Steven Olanoff, Tom McShane, Mike Tinsley, Dave Atkins

Ex-officio: none

Residents in attendance: Eric Arnold, Elaine De Reyna, Steve Weyland

Chair Kraft called the meeting to order at 7:36 pm.

Selected to record minutes: Dave Atkins

1. Presentation from Hale Education on the proposed Conservation Restriction

Eric Arnold, Executive Director, Hale Education (and Westwood resident) gave a 15-minute presentation on the history and current status of Hale's efforts regarding a possible conservation restriction and answered questions from committee members and residents in attendance.

Hale has been located in Westwood and Dover, and educating youth in outdoor activity for over 100 years. Starting from 38 acres in Dover, the operation expanded over the years and now includes approximately 1200 acres of land (500+ in Westwood; 600+ in Dover). The land is privately owned by the nonprofit Hale Education. Hale currently has no endowment and operates a \$4 million dollar budget providing teacher training and summer camps. Over the years, Hale has been concerned about what would happen in the event revenue was insufficient to cover operations due to some unexpected event...what happens "if the dam breaks," figuratively, and literally since Hale maintains 4 actual dams on the property.

In the past, Hale has sold small parcels of land to raise money to cover expenses. In Westwood, 3 homes on Twin Post Road built in 2000 are an example of this.

According to Arnold, Covid was "the dam breaking," resulting in Hale owing over \$1 million dollars to customers because Hale could not deliver programming during the pandemic. This immediate crisis was ultimately resolved through Federal Government PPP funding reimbursement, but it served to highlight the ever-present vulnerability of operations where there is no long-term buffer against such financial disruptions.

Hale decided to embark on a 3-part plan:

1. Expand education programs
2. Build an endowment to achieve financial sustainability
3. Protect the property from development

The initial endowment goal was to raise \$40 million, \$20 million from private contributions and \$10 million each from Westwood and Dover through the sale of a conservation restriction (CR).

The conservation restriction would permanently restrict the development of land currently owned by Hale in Westwood and Dover, consisting of a ring of restricted land, with an interior zone for Hale operations. The terms and conditions of the CR would be managed by the Trustees, (the nonprofit organization formerly known as the Trustees of Reservations, which manages many conservation lands in Massachusetts). The interior zone would not be completely restricted from development in order to allow Hale to continue maintenance and improvement of facilities for operations.

The proposed CR is unique and different from typical CRs that are sometimes implemented to protect individual parcels:

1. The money raised from the sale of Hale's development rights will go to an endowment to support operations of Hale. Typically, CR proceeds go to individual landowners for their own use.
2. Because Hale is a nonprofit organization, the Towns of Westwood and Dover do not currently receive property taxes as they would from land owned by an individual; therefore the elimination of development rights has no impact on property tax revenue to the towns.

Committee Members and Residents asked questions. Some highlights of the discussion included:

One member asked what alternatives have been considered/what if the CR is not approved? Likely continue to sell parcels as necessary; this has been done 25-50 times since Hale's inception. If the CR is implemented and in the future, more money is needed to support Hale operations, the land will not be available for sale or development.

The area at Hale is currently "open space," but not "protected." In 1968-69, Hale opened the land up to public access, so there is a perception already that the land is conservation land for residents to use, but in reality, it is privately owned by Hale and public access is allowed by Hale's policy. The CR would make the land permanently open to the public. A member suggested Hale provide free parking for Westwood and Dover residents.

One member asked if Hale had data on who is currently using the area - approximately 60% of trail use is by Westwood and Dover residents and a total of over 50,000 people per year visit to walk/hike. The day camps are used by residents of many towns; Westwood is the largest number.

\$7.5 million has been raised through contingent donations; i.e. residents will donate IF the towns purchase the CR. Another \$12 million has been raised for the endowment but not contingent on the towns' purchase of the CR.

This project has been under discussion for nearly 6 years, but Hale was only recently encouraged to start outreach and engagement with the public about the CR. Committee members felt more transparency will help the project get greater support.

One person asked if neighboring towns and users of the day camp program such as the City of Boston could contribute to the purchase of the CR. No, because they do not have a physical connection to the land. They would be investing in a resource over which they would have no control.

Another person asked about dog walking policies and the potential creation of an off-leash or dog park area at Hale.

Another person asked about the relative size of the fully-protected area and the operations zone—the inner part of the “doughnut.” The overall area is around 1200 acres. The inner zone would be around 300 acres and includes wetlands which are already effectively blocked from development or use. The operations zone is also governed by an agreement administered by the Trustees, which limits specifically the type of operations Hale can do/what can be built.

There was a question about Eversource transmission line easements; basically this land is under their control already and would not be affected.

Mr. Olanoff expressed interest in having the committee vote to endorse the proposal. Several committee members expressed support for the work being done, and the consensus was that this project was of great benefit and relevance to the priorities of the committee. The consensus was that Hale should continue educating residents about the proposal and continue the discussion into the spring town meeting cycle, but no formal action or vote was taken.

2. Updates from Police, Public Works, or Planning Department

Attached memo from DPW Director Todd Korchin, dated September 6, 2022.

3. Westwood Community Trails - no update

4. Old Business

a. **Gay Street Sidewalk** - there will be no Fall town meeting; the committee’s recommendation for action at the “next” town meeting would be the Spring town meeting.

b. **Bylaw changes**

After submitting our changes to the bylaws from the last meeting, town counsel Pat Ahearn suggested we change the wording to be based on a majority of appointed members so that the quorum threshold would adjust automatically based on the size of the committee.

Dave Atkins moved to change the wording in our previously adopted definition of a quorum to be “the greater of three (3) or half or more of the appointed members.” Steve Olanoff seconded the motion.

There was a discussion to clarify the intent because in the past there has been confusion over the interpretation of “majority.” The reasoning is as follows:

- 1) If the membership of the committee has become very small, then at least 3 people must be present for quorum.
- 2) If the membership is an even number, then half is a quorum. Example if there are 8 appointed members, then a quorum is 4, not 5 as would be required under a strict interpretation of “majority.”
- 3) If there are 7 appointed members, then the “or more” applies and the number required for quorum would be 4 because “half or more” rounds up from 3.5 to 4 and is greater than the basic quorum of 3.

The motion passed unanimously.

5. New Business: Concerns from any residents in attendance

Elaine De Reyna of Hartford Street spoke on her and her son’s desire for bike lanes in Westwood—“there are no bike lanes in Westwood.” The sidewalk work on Hartford Street is greatly appreciated and has made the street much safer. She sees so many people walking around now. She asked if the strip of grass could have been used as space for a bike lane.

The committee noted that there is one bike lane in Westwood, on Blue Hill Drive, which was created when the road was reconfigured, and that Hartford Street has been marked with shared lane use arrows (“sharrows”) indicating bikes can use the lane. The committee will continue discussion with DPW on prioritizing bike lanes.

Steve Weyland of Pond Street reported that the push button activating walk lights on High Street at Gay Street does not appear to work. A committee member noted he had also observed problems with the crossing light at Harford and advised whenever these problems are noticed, to call the DPW and report them.

6. Information on Moving Together Conference

This annual conference returns in person on November 1, 2022 in Boston:

<https://www.umasstransportationcenter.org/assnfe/ev.asp?ID=5055>

7. Acceptance of minutes of previous meetings

Dave Atkins moved to accept the meeting minutes for August 4, 2022. Seconded by Steve Olanoff. Approved by unanimous vote.

The next meeting will be Thursday, October 27, in person at Carby Street. Dave Atkins to pick up the key from the Police Station. *Note: through the official public notice, the meeting location was moved to the main branch of the Westwood Public Library.*

On a motion by Dave Atkins, seconded by Mike Tinsley, and a unanimous vote the meeting was adjourned at 9:19pm.