

Community Process for the Walsh Property Plan Final Draft Process Design

Overview

At its Annual Town Meeting in April 2019, and ratified by ballot in May 2019, the people of Truro authorized the purchase of the Walsh property for the Town of Truro, to be used for general municipal purposes. The article further authorized and directed the Board of Selectmen to create a committee, to include citizen representatives from diverse sectors of the community, to lead a community wide process, beginning in June 2019, to engage a wide range of Truro residents in developing plans for the use of the property to be presented at a future town meeting for approval.

On June 27, 2019, the Town hosted a public forum to kick-off this community process. The Consensus Building Institute (CBI) was asked to help design, facilitate, and document the forum. The forum was designed to elicit initial public interests and concerns about the use of the Walsh property, and begin to explore process needs, opportunities, and suggestions to guide the creation of a committee to engage the community in developing a master plan for the future use of the property. At the suggestion of forum participants, the planning team created a survey to solicit input on those questions from additional community members to the questions posed to participants at the forum. The Town Manager publicized the survey and made it available online and in hard copy to the public between July 12 and August 15, and the responses from the forum and the survey were synthesized into a summary that was then released to the public.

As a next step, CBI was asked to build on that community input to recommend an approach for the committee and community wide process. The following is a draft of a recommended approach, to be refined based on further input from the community and the Board of Selectmen.

Walsh Property Community Planning Committee (WPCPC) Purpose and Task

The purpose of the Walsh Property Community Planning Committee (WPCPC) is to guide the development of plans for the use of the Walsh property. The WPCPC's mandate is:

- a) to embody, engage and include the full range of perspectives (interests and concerns, as well as geographic and demographic groups) of the town of Truro.
- b) to undertake, analyze and synthesize public input and widespread outreach to maximize involvement, understanding and support for the resulting plan and its implementation.
- c) drawing on active public input and engagement, to develop broad criteria for success, develop and evaluate a range of options and approaches, and ultimately seek consensus for plans based on these criteria for the use of the property to be presented to town meeting.

Community Members and Alternates:

- a) The role of Community Members is to actively participate in all discussions and deliberations on all topics, and to participate in making consensus recommendations to go to Town Meeting, the Select Board, and other decision-making entities. Meetings will be structured to provide first priority for community member input in discussions.
- b) Members will include ***8-12 representatives, plus alternates, of community constituencies from the town of Truro***, who collectively represent the balanced and broad range of perspectives, preferences and demographics of Truro. These will include the following categories and demographics:
- part-time (6 months or more)
 - seasonal residents
 - year-round residents
 - tradespeople
 - youth / students
 - young families
 - senior residents
 - local business owners
 - cultural and arts institutions
 - abutters (including the school)
 - people interested in housing/affordable housing opportunities
 - people interested in conservation and open space needs
 - people interested in the environment, habitat, and ecosystems
 - people interested in recreation opportunities
 - people interested in other development needs
- c) Members may be from existing Truro Boards and Committees, as long as those boards and committees do not have official authority over components of the plan. Examples are:
- Open Space Committee
 - Council on Aging
 - Recreation Commission
 - Climate Action Committee
 - Bike and Walkways Committee
 - Local Comprehensive Plan Committee
 - Truro School Committee
 - Water Resources Oversight Committee
 - Truro Housing Authority
- d) Although they are selected to help represent a set of perspectives and demographics, members will serve as individuals, rather than as official liaisons to any particular group.

One individual might represent multiple categories. Collectively, they should also represent a mix of experience, substantive knowledge, areas of expertise, and geographic and demographic diversity within the town.

- e) All members will be expected to possess interest in the topics under consideration, as well as to demonstrate commitment to working collaboratively and productively on behalf of the WPCPC's objectives. All individuals interested in serving on the WPCPC should demonstrate how they meet the following criteria:
- Credibility and capacity to represent the demographics and/or articulate the perspectives they seek to represent
 - Willingness and capacity to engage in respectful and constructive dialogue with other participants, maintain an open mind, and seek creative options that respond to the interests of other participants as well as their own interests
 - Contribution to the diversity of experience, knowledge, expertise, geography, and demographics
 - Willingness and interest in attending all meetings, thoughtfully listening to public and constituent perspectives, and participating actively in discussions.
- f) Interested individuals will be asked to apply to participate in the WPCPC, and to specify which (one or more) of the above categories they can help to represent, using an adapted version of the town's standard Application to Serve form. This may include sharing their current wishes and vision for the site, in order to ensure that the range of perspectives is included. Applicants will be screened by CBI, serving as the neutral facilitation team, based on the criteria above. Interviews may be requested. CBI will offer recommendations to the Select Board, who will then appoint members.
- g) Additional members within each of these categories may be appointed as alternates in the same way. In the absence of a primary member, an alternate who shares similar attributes or perspectives may serve as a stand-in for that member and assume all the rights and responsibilities of the absent member. Alternates will be expected to keep up to date on all deliberations and fill in without disruption.
- h) The WPCPC will be an official Town body, and all members will be subject to state and town regulations governing such town bodies, including freedom from conflicts of interest and adherence to open meeting law.

Liaisons:

- a) A second category of participants in the WPCPC are *liaisons* from chartered town commissions and boards with official regulatory or decision-making roles. The role of liaisons is to actively participate in discussions and deliberations on topics that are relevant to their expertise, interests, and responsibilities. Liaisons are also charged with bringing ideas and concerns of their committee or board to WPCPC discussions and inform their fellow committee/board members about WPCPC deliberations. However, participation of

liaisons should not undermine their ability to perform their regulatory responsibilities, and should not outweigh deliberation among members. Further, liaisons will not be asked to weigh in on agreement-seeking consensus recommendations.

b) The following entities may be invited to appoint a liaison.

- Select Board
- Historical Commission
- Planning Board
- Conservation Commission
- Board of Health
- Zoning Board of Appeals
- Finance Committee

c) Additional entities may be invited to share their perspectives or knowledge, either at meetings or through engagement between meetings, at the determination of the WPCPC. For example, since the Walsh property is adjacent to the school, the WPCPC should ensure that input & feedback from teachers, administrators & students be sought out throughout the process.

Technical and Expert Advisors:

- a) Town of Truro staff and departments will serve as technical advisors to the WPCPC, as needed and requested by the participants. These may include the Town Manager’s office, Planning, Public Works, Health, Conservation, Public Safety, and others. Technical advisors will help members and the public understand 1) the existing site conditions, including topography, environmental conditions, zoning, and structural engineering 2) the planning, legal, regulatory, financial, economic, and natural resource implications of options being explored for use of the property, and 3) any other information needs requested by the WPCPC within the expertise of town staff.
- b) To the extent the WPCPC determines a need for information outside of the available or acceptable expertise of town staff, they can request it. If funding for such advice is needed, the WPCPC can request support from the Select Board to enlist additional expertise.

Decision Making

- a) The WPCPC, to the extent possible, will ***operate by consensus***, which is defined as unanimous concurrence of the primary members, or in the absence of a primary, his or her alternate. Members may also “abstain,” or stand aside. Abstaining means not offering consent or endorsement, but also not blocking an agreement. Abstaining members will not be counted in determining if consensus has been reached.

- b) If a member disagrees with a proposal, he or she must make every effort to ***offer an alternative satisfactory to all members***. Members should not block or withhold consensus unless they have serious objections to the proposal and can articulate the reasons for those objections. Consent means that members can accept, even if reluctantly, the package that emerges. The goal of the WPCPC is to reach consensus, recognizing that not all members will be equally satisfied with the outcome.
- c) If there are issues or topics where consensus cannot be reached, the final plan will include the majority view, with clear identification of areas where there was no consensus, explain the members' differences clearly, accurately, and fairly, and include alternative approaches suggested by dissenting members.
- d) Liaisons will participate actively in the deliberations, explain and advocate based on their knowledge and expertise, seek creative solutions, participate in drafting alternatives and other written documents, as needed, and provide background information. However, they will not take part in the final consensus on recommendations.

WPCPC Meetings

- a) All WPCPC meetings will be conducted in accordance with Massachusetts Open Meeting Law, and WPCPC members will be required to participate in training on Open Meeting Law requirements. They will be open to the public and posted in advance according to Town procedures. Discussion at the meetings will be conducted primarily by members of the WPCPC. There will be a public comment period at least once during each meeting. Time allowed for public comment will be limited to ensure that other meeting topics can be covered.
- b) In order to achieve its objectives in the allotted time, the facilitators and WPCPC members may communicate between meetings to follow up and update on action items, use internet polling, email, and other technology to collect and disseminate information and input, and otherwise move the process forward, within the constraints of Open Meeting Law. In order to conform to Open Meeting Law, no deliberation, decisions, or agreements will be made outside of WPCPC meetings.
- c) Materials relevant to the meeting agenda will be provided in compliance with Open Meeting Law, which requires notice of meetings at least 48 hours in advance, containing the date, time, and location of the meeting and listing all topics that the chair reasonably anticipates will be discussed. Meeting minutes of WPCPC meetings will be prepared by the facilitators in compliance with Open Meeting Law and Public Records Law requirements, including:
 - the date, time and place of the meeting;
 - the members present or absent;
 - the decisions made and actions taken, including a record of all votes;
 - a summary of the discussions on each subject;

- a list of all documents and exhibits used at the meeting; and

After review and approval by the members, meeting minutes will be corrected and made available to the public. The minutes will identify key points of discussion, action items, points of tentative agreement and next steps, and will generally be written without attribution.

- d) In order to develop shared understanding and experience of the Walsh property, members will participate in tours and field trips to all parts of the site, as needed, throughout the process.

Public Outreach and Engagement:

- a) A core task of the WPCPC will be to outreach to, engage, and synthesize public perspectives and viewpoints on all aspects of the plan. Accordingly, the WPCPC will convene a series of public meetings and engagement opportunities throughout its process. This might include leading public tours of the Walsh property, convening public forums to elicit ideas, share information, and evaluate options, and presentations or targeted outreach to particular groups or community events to ensure the full range of community members are invited and empowered to participate in the process. The initial work plan offers suggestions for sequencing these activities within WPCPC deliberations – this plan will be refined by the WPCPC throughout the process.
- b) The town will engage in outreach to the community to inform them about the Community Process, including investing in significant outreach to highlight the opportunity to apply to serve on the WPCPC, as well as opportunities to participate in public meetings throughout the process. Outreach strategies should include email blasts, social media postings, postcards to town households, among other tools – WPCPC members will help expand and refine the public engagement and outreach strategy throughout the process.
- c) To the extent possible, WPCPC meetings will be filmed and televised by Government TV and footage will be made available to the public subsequent to each meeting. Live streaming options will be considered.
- d) The town will post all meeting materials on a designated webpage, to allow clear and easy citizen access. Agendas will be posted in advance, meeting materials as soon as possible, and summaries once they are approved. Interested residents can also opt into an email listserve to receive materials directly via email. Updates will also be provided at Select Board meetings.

Safeguards and Ground Rules for Participation

- a) Participants will commit to the principles of decency, civility, and tolerance. Each person will be respectful, and refrain from making personal attacks, name calling, distributing personal or inaccurate information about other participants, and other such negative behaviors.
- b) Participants will not attribute statements to others involved, seek to present or represent the views or position of other members or alternates, nor attempt to speak on behalf of the group as a whole in or to the media. "Media" for these purposes includes the press, television, radio, websites, blogs, social media applications or sites, and any other public information distribution mechanism. WPCPC members will abide by these ground rules in all communications during the process in and out of WPCPC meetings.
- c) Members on the WPCPC also agree to the following.
 - Speak to the interests and concerns they are helping to represent as accurately and thoroughly as possible, and work to ensure that any recommendations developed by the group meet the needs of the town as a whole.
 - Arrive at the meetings prepared to discuss the issues on the agenda, having reviewed the documents distributed in advance.
 - Be constructive and maintain an open mind. Strive throughout the process to bridge gaps in understanding, to seek resolution of differences, and to pursue the goal of achieving consensus on the content of the potential alternatives under discussion.
 - Only one person will speak at a time and no one will interrupt when another person is speaking.
 - Each person will make every effort to stay on track with the agenda and avoid grandstanding and digressions.
 - Make a good faith effort to participate in all scheduled meetings or activities.

Facilitation:

- a) The Town of Truro should enlist support from a neutral, external facilitation team. Facilitators should be responsible for helping to ensure that the process runs smoothly, developing draft meeting agendas, preparing and distributing draft and final summaries, generating draft agreements, and helping the parties resolve their differences and achieve consensus, to the extent possible, on the issues to be addressed by the WPCPC. They may use any number of techniques to help ensure that everyone has the opportunity to speak,

that comments are kept to a reasonable length of time, and that subjects under discussion are provided sufficient time and focus for progress. The facilitator should be responsible for implementing the agenda and keeping participants on track.

- b) The facilitators should have no stake in the outcomes of the process. Neutral facilitators have no decision-making authority and cannot impose any solution, settlement, or agreement among any or all of the parties. They should abide by the Ethical Standards of the Association of Conflict Resolution. In part, these standards require that: “The neutral must maintain impartiality toward all parties. Impartiality means freedom from favoritism or bias either by word or by action and a commitment to serve all parties as opposed to a single party.”
- c) For purposes of complying with Open Meeting Law, the WPCPC may designate one or more Chairs.
- d) The facilitators will be available to consult confidentially with participants during or between meetings. Facilitators, if asked, are required to hold confidences even if that means withholding information that the facilitators would prefer to be made available to the full group.

Initial Draft Workplan:

- a) The WPCPC will aim to meet monthly (or bi-monthly) at dates and times to be determined by the group, as well as at other dates and times as needed. Public meetings or tours may require more time or may take place during the day.
- b) Workshops, public forums, and informational meetings to broader constituencies will also be scheduled in coordination with WPCPC members.
- c) Actual dates and schedule will be determined and revised by the WPCPC. For illustrative purposes, a potential schedule might look as follows:

WPCPC Meeting One: Convening

- Meet group members, the project team, and liaisons
- Committee Organization
- Initiate and refine WPCPC process and operating protocols
- Present overview of existing site information
- Identify initial outcome goals and success criteria
- Identify additional information data needs

WPCPC Site Visit: Group Tour

- Group tour to view and understand Walsh property

WPCPC Meetings Two (or more as needed)

- Debrief Site Visit
- Prepare agenda and methodology for a Public Visioning workshop
- Review additional data collected, discuss impacts

Public Visioning Workshop

- WPCPC/Public tour(s) of site pre-meeting
- Present existing site information
- Elicit range of public interests and priorities for the site
- Refine the set of success criteria for evaluating options and alternatives for planning for the site

WPCPC Meetings Three-Six (or more as needed)

- Review/synthesize information gathered from visioning session
- Review additional data collected, discuss impacts
- Brainstorm, Explore, and Evaluate range of options for site plan
- Develop a set of option packages for the site

Public Evaluation Workshop

- WPCPC/Public tour(s) of site pre-meeting
- Present additional data
- Public evaluation and refining of options packages

WPCPC meeting Seven (more as needed)

- Refine outcomes from Public Evaluation
- Identify and refine top package(s)

Refine as needed