TOWN OF ARLINGTON

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING and
COMMUNITY DEVELOPMENT

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To: Town of Arlington Select Board

From: Claire Ricker, Director
David Morgan, Environmental Planner

Date: 09/16/2024

Subject: Open Space Concepts for 21 Pond Lane

The Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) was awarded a $15,000 Community Preservation Act grant in the FY24 cycle to study the feasibility of activating the Select Board owned property at 21 Pond Lane as an open space amenity. The study is halfway to completion and this memo serves to summarize progress to date, including community preference about how to repurpose the property.

DPCD, being responsible for Arlington's long-term plans, reviewed existing passive and active recreational spaces to identify gaps in Town amenities. Community members were asked to consider how the space could be uniquely repurposed. Following a pre-study survey and two public forums, a clear picture has emerged of 21 Pond Lane as a "secret garden." Although some objections were raised against any changes beyond plantings and reestablishing ongoing maintenance, residents, notably including abutters, favor a light touch that enhances the current open space land use to showcase a vivid and diverse array of low maintenance, ecologically appropriate plantings. This proposed use accords with a 1992 proposal for the site by Friends of Spy Pond Park.

Public Engagement

Prior to launching the project publicly, the hired consultant, HomeHarvest, canvassed the neighborhood to solicit concepts from abutters and visitors to Spy Pond Park. They collected 50 responses to the survey. Two forums were later facilitated by Ben Barkan of HomeHarvest and Arlington's Environmental Planner David Morgan. The first forum occurred on August 8, 2024, and the second on September 12, 2024. The first forum attracted an estimated 30 community members, while the second forum saw increased participation, with around 40 attendees.

Community priorities focused on enhancing biodiversity and promoting passive recreational use of the space. Concerns included ensuring safe access with minimal vehicular traffic, preserving mature trees, and avoiding attracting pests.

Attendees expressed a desire for quiet spaces, educational signage, and a carry in/carry out waste policy. Safety concerns regarding bridge and tunnel traffic were also addressed, with suggestions for improved bike and pedestrian access to the 21 Pond Lane site as well as Spy Pond Park.

The attached notes summarize both forums in further detail. Please also find enclosed a map of the site and a plot plan of the neighborhood, which details an MWRA easement through 21 Pond Lane that would not be affected by the proposal at hand.

The feedback from the survey and both forums indicates strong community support for creating a sustainable and accessible space at 21 Pond Lane. Key priorities include biodiversity, low maintenance, and the preservation of natural features. Safety and access concerns will need further attention in the planning process.

This being a Select Board owned property, DPCD requests that members provide feedback on the concepts in development. In particular, the Department is eager to know whether such a plan for repurposing the space would meet the Select Board's approval. Such input is always valuable to Town planning efforts and is a deciding factor in moving forward.

Please feel free to reach out if you have any questions or need further information.

Enclosures.

21 Pond Lane Feasibility Study

PROJECT NAME: 21 Pond Lane Feasibility Study and Preliminary Design Concept

TIMELINE: 2024-25 **BUDGET:** 15,000

GOALS:	• Assess suitable uses and design concepts for 21 Pond Lane as a community open space • Solicit input from town stakeholders and residents to determine how to make the property more accessible and meaningful • Explore ways to enhance the site as a conservation and open space asset
TARGET AUDIENCE:	• Local residents, especially those living in the surrounding environmental justice neighborhood • Town departments and commissions • Private partners like HomeHarvest
DELIVERABLES:	1. Conceptual plans and design proposals for the park 2. Facilitation of public forums to gather community feedback 3. Recommendations for potential changes and improvements to the 21 Pond Lane site 4. A vision and plan to guide future development of the property
TIMELINE	1. Concepts and feasibility 2024-25 2. Phase II: design and permitting 2025-26* 3. Construction 2026-27* *Pending funding

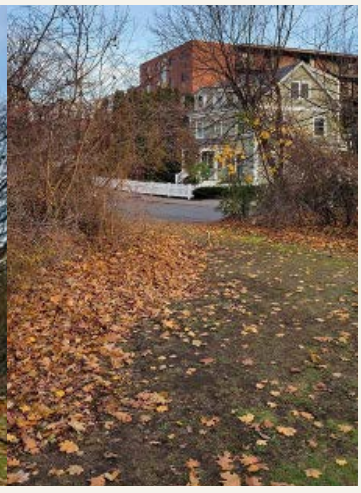
21 Pond Lane Feasibility Study

The Town of Arlington has a unique opportunity to reimagine a forgotten parcel of land at 21 Pond Lane. This vacant lot, owned by the Arlington Select Board, has long been underutilized, despite its proximity to the beloved Spy Pond. But now, the Department of Planning and Community Development (DPCD) is embarking on an exciting feasibility study to explore the possibilities for this site.

Thanks to a $15,000 grant from the Community Preservation Act, DPCD will be taking a closer look at how 21 Pond Lane could be transformed into a vibrant community space. Inspired by the charming Arlington Orchard, the feasibility study will consider various park design concepts and amenities that could make this area more accessible and meaningful for Arlington residents.

The planning process will engage the community, key town departments, and private partners to gather input and ideas. Landscape architects, urban planners, and community engagement specialists will lend their expertise to help shape a vision for the site. This collaborative approach will ensure that any future improvements reflect the values of environmental justice and inclusivity that are so important to the town.







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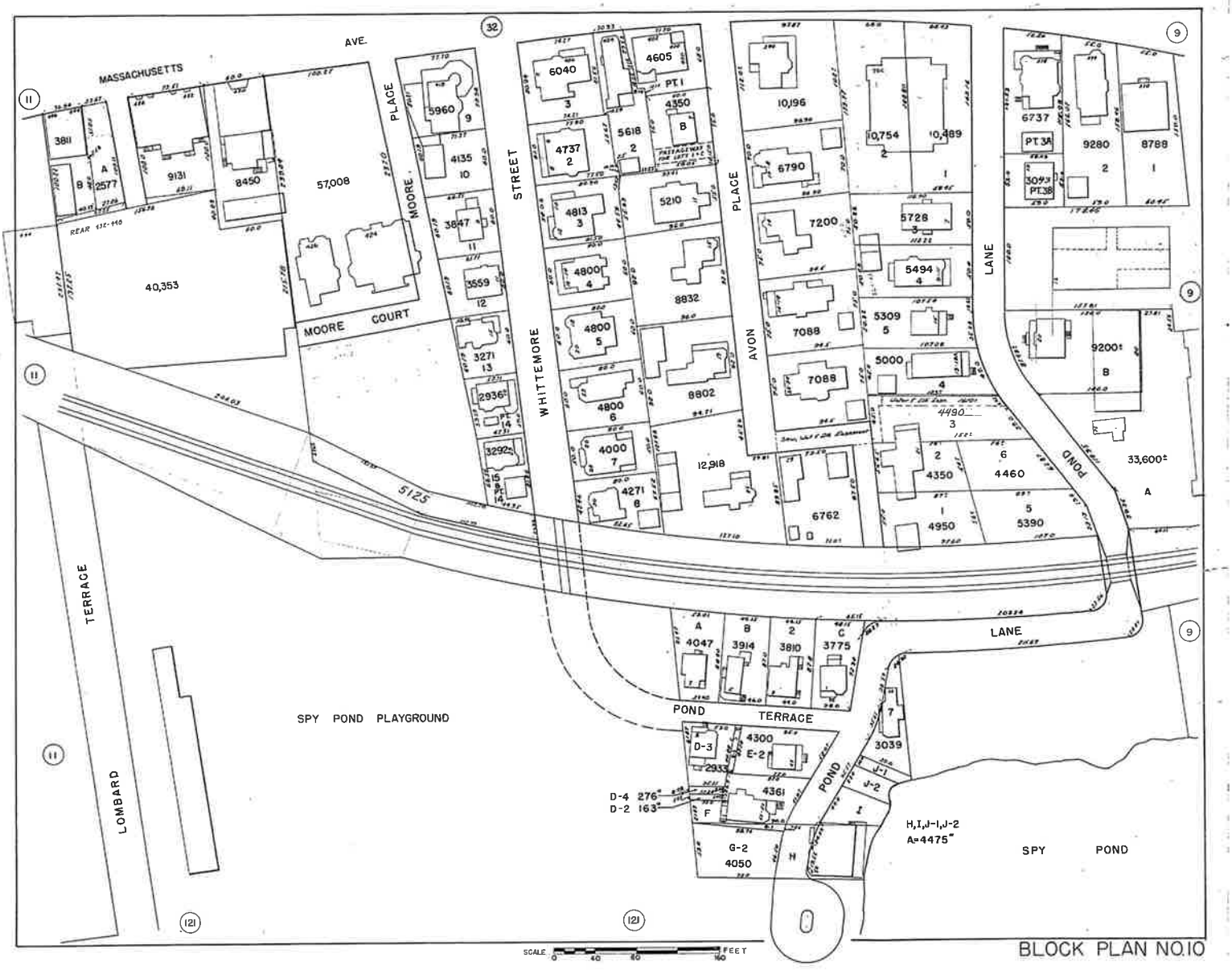
Planning and Community Development



BLOCK PLAN NO.10

21 Pond Lane Public Forum Notes
Facilitated by Ben Barkan (Home Harvest) and David Morgan (DPCD)
Town Hall Auditorium
08.08.24 6:00 – 7:30 PM

Approximately 30 community members in attendance

Proposed concepts included:

- Do nothing
- Sustainable Landscape Handbook demo site
- Adventure playground/movable park
- Bike pitstop
    - Friends of Spy Pond Park (FSPP) previously explored this proposal and determined it to be unfeasible
    - Add bike parking on the Minuteman
- Greenhouses (to include educational programming, outdoor space with picnic tables, etc.)
    - FSPP supported, proposal to grow for public projects and spaces
- Rewilded forest and/or meadow
    - Labels on trees and other plants
- Stewardship Center (i.e., programmable space for nature-focused education)
- Outdoor working space
- Low maintenance edible garden

Priorities included:

- Biodiversity
- Passive use

Concerns included:

- Providing safe access, including drawing minimal vehicular traffic
    - Instead encouraging foot traffic, potentially relocating entrance on Pond Lane
- Designing for low maintenance
- No or few fabricated or constructed elements
    - Having a light touch on the existing landscape
- Adding signage to indicate public use
- Preservation of mature trees
    - Inventory of existing vegetation
- Coordination with partners like Friends of Spy Pond Park
- Uninvited/unwelcome critters

Objections included:

- Any changes beyond plantings and resumed maintenance
- Bocce or exercise courts

21 Pond Lane Public Forum Notes
Facilitated by Ben Barkan (Home Harvest) and David Morgan (DPCD)
Town Hall Auditorium
09.12.24 6:00 – 7:30 PM

Approximately 40 community members in attendance

Preferred components of refined concepts included:

- Native plantings with ADA compliant path access
    - Demonstration gardens of varying types
- Retaining and/or installing mature shade trees
    - Shadow/succession plantings/phased approach to tree removal
- Invasive species management and prevention
- Quiet, reflective space for visitors
- Long-term plan for garden tree/plant growth
- Maintaining a vegetated buffer for neighbors
- Installing educational signage
- Using paths as visual cues
- Not adding trash cans, informing visitors of carry in/carry out policy
- Maintaining considerable (≥50%) shade cover for cooling, especially in seating areas

Concerns included:

- Bridge and tunnel traffic
    - Consider adding bike/pedestrian access via Minuteman Bikeway, Avon Place
    - Add safety features to bridge/tunnel, including consideration of:
        - A mirror for visibility
        - Low bridge signage
        - A crosswalk north of the tunnel
        - An additional tunnel for two-way traffic, or a separated bike/ped lane
        - Sidewalk extension

Design considerations included:

- Circular or triangular path design with access to all points of egress deemed feasible
- Natural materials, e.g., wood, stonedust
    - Potential path materials: granite, permeable pavers, attractive pavers, bluestone, asphalt, low maintenance paver solution, etc.
- Low profile elements, including seating or tables
    - A diversity of seating options (e.g., seated chairs, benches, lounge chairs) and locations
- Keeping seating and other elements placed along path