

REPORT

WRITTEN BY MR. DAVID FLOYD,  
CHAIRMAN OF THE TOWN'S SPECIAL COMMITTEE  
ON LANDS FOR PARKS AND PLAYGROUNDS.

NOVEMBER 4, 1909.

This report dealt very thoroughly with a very important matter and resulted in the purchase of the Playstead. The Boston Transcript referred to it as the best playground report extant at that date.

Report of Committee on Lands for Parks and Playgrounds for the Town of Winthrop, written by Mr. David Floyd and reported by him Nov. 4, 1909, (Mr. Floyd being Chairman of a special committee for that purpose.)

A public hearing on the question of acquiring the marsh land lying between the Beach section and the Center, and many later expressions from residents and tax-payers indicate a strong sentiment in favor of providing recreation grounds in that section of the town. The fact that on the 86 acres of land including Great Head and the Beach extending to the railroad bridge on the Shore Drive at the Highlands there are over 600 dwellings, many of which are built for and are occupied by more than one family, and that there are no open spaces in this area of sufficient size for playgrounds, is evidence of the necessity of procuring land as near as possible to this most congested part of the town. While the section referred to contains only 12 per cent. of the town's area, 30 per cent. of its dwellings are erected there, and most of the buildings are on lots of land containing not more than 5000 square feet.

The claim that the Metropolitan Reservation east of the Shore Drive provides ample opportunity for recreation for children and adults is not well founded, as anyone who considers the fact that it is simply a narrow and uneven beach mostly covered twice each day by the sea and thus restricted by nature and also by the rules of the Metropolitan Park Commissioners to but few, although very important uses.

The marsh land under consideration is the only opportunity to provide for the needs of the children in the beach section of the town and for the large number of summer, as well as year-round adult residents of any part of Winthrop, who would use an open-air gymnasium with running track, etc., and who enjoy participating in or witnessing such games as baseball, tennis and football. This special location will also give opportunity for bathing, canoeing and other water sports.

From the hearing referred to and from conversations with many residents and owners of property in all sections of Winthrop, it was evident to the committee that a strong sentiment prevailed, not only in favor of providing ample recreation grounds, but at the same time of removing a menace to the future best developments of the town by immediate public ownership of the marsh and flats west of the railroad location.

Following such expressions of opinion, the committee, for several months, has made a study of the territory referred to as to its fitness for playgrounds, and also (as in duty bound, if the voters were to have sufficient information to decide the question on its merits) has investigated the availability of the territory for residential purposes, and has arrived at an estimate of the cost to the town, if the plan of selling the land in small building lots continues, and if dwellings for decent human habitation are to be erected thereon.

The land in question has been laid out on paper into nearly 500 building lots and at present these lots are owned by 78 people; streets are shown on recorded plans, about 200 feet apart, to the number of 13; several buildings have been erected on the land near

the Ocean Spray Railroad station, and a three-family brick dwelling on Main Street, a private way; applications are before the inspector of buildings for permits to erect other houses; an attempt is to be made through the Courts to oblige the issuing of the permits desired and the claim is made that if permits are granted, the town must provide streets, sewers, water and surface drainage.

From plans and other information furnished by the chief engineer of the Metropolitan Sewer Commission; from the engineer who, for many years, has laid out Winthrop's streets, sewers and other public works, and from tests recently made in parts of the area removed from big sewer location, the committee is convinced that sewers cannot be maintained on the land referred to without pile foundations.

A record plan showing a profile of the Metropolitan Sewer from a point near the three-family brick house on the marsh, and extending to the railroad near the Shirley station, a distance of 1450 feet, shows that the foundation for the Metropolitan Sewer, under the private way known as the extension of Main Street, is on piles driven below the surface of the marsh from 28 to 55 feet. The same conditions prevail in most of the marsh area and such conditions should be considered by private parties before deciding to use this land for building purposes, and by the town before voting to assist land speculators by building streets and sewers.

Another question of great importance is the one of surface

drainage. Before the building of the Metropolitan Sewer a creek extended, by ever winding courses, from the harbor to a point near Locust Street, passing under Shirley Street, through a culvert placed there by the town. From and into this creek and another which drained the marsh land nearer the present railroad tracks, salt water flowed twice each day through ditches dug in parallel lines short distances apart, and also fresh water after rain or snow storms from about 200 acres of the surrounding watershed. No harm came to near-by inhabitants while these creeks and ditches were kept open.

The construction of the Metropolitan Sewer stopped the flow of water through the large creeks and some of the ditches, except for that which passes through a culvert over the sewer near the brick house.

The little material displaced a number of years ago, in an attempt to have the land appear to conform to a plan made to sell lots by, served for a while to show where the alleged streets were located, but with the final result of preventing the flow of surface water so as to form a number of stagnant pools, in one of which there were to be seen, a few months ago, "millions of mosquitoes in the pupal stage of development," according to a statement of the Chairman of Winthrop's Board of Health.

Some of the building operations of the past two years, on the north part of this land, have resulted in further stopping the ditches in an attempt to grade the land around these houses. A comprehensive scheme of draining the entire seventy acres should

at once be carried out, whether the land remains private property or otherwise. The expense of such drains will be far less if the land is kept open for public uses.

Under the general laws the amount of money a town can borrow, outside of its debt limit, to pay for land for playgrounds is one-half of one per cent of its valuation. Winthrop's valuation last May was \$11,993,600. This fixes the amount which can be borrowed above the three per cent. limit, at \$60,000. The present borrowing capacity allows a further debt of \$15,000 without impairing the treasury for ordinary purposes. As the statutes provide that no land shall be taken for public playgrounds "until an amount equal to the estimated cost thereof has been appropriated by the town," it was evident that not more than \$75,000 could, at present, be voted for the purpose named.

In deciding upon that part of the whole area which would best provide the land needed, and at the same time save the town and private owners as well from the great expense necessary to put the land in condition for residential purposes, the committee selected that section of the marsh which would require the most filling if it were to be built upon, and which is consequently worth the least money. The committee recommends that the town acquire, by purchase or otherwise, the land and flats bounded substantially as follows: westerly by Cross Street and by a line along the rear of the lots shown on the late O. E. Lewis' plan of land on River Road; southerly by Washington Avenue; easterly by the railroad location, and northerly by Tappan Street, and

in addition thereto the land extending southerly from Shirley street near the Ocean Spray station, lying between the railroad and Crescent Street. This area consists of about 42 acres of marsh land, exclusive of the land devoted to streets, and 13 acres of flats. Thirty-two acres of the land are shown on a plan divided into 285 building lots, and this plan makes no account of the creeks, in some places twenty feet in width, and six feet in depth, which cross the marsh, thus dividing some of lots. The remaining 9 acres, if developed (?) in the same manner as the larger area, would make seventy-eight more so-called building lots, a total of 363, averaging less than 5000 square feet each. The length of the streets necessary to develop this land is 8300 feet. The cost of sewers placed on piles, and of filling the streets to one foot above the grade established by the town, after deducting the sewer assessment, would be about six dollars per running foot, a total of \$50,000. This amount does not include sidewalks or edgestones, nor does it provide for the settling of the material used to build the streets.

A moderate estimate of the number of children who would inhabit this land if the lots were built upon, and the consequent cost of a schoolhouse and annual school expenses would add \$80,000. to the town's indebtedness for school buildings, with a yearly cost for the education of the children of \$18,000. As to other expenses which are common to all sections of the town, the voters will judge whether the probable population would demand more than the residents of land better fitted for residential purposes. The voters will consider also whether

the taxes received from the land when improved as above suggested will be an adequate return for the money expended by the town.

The town, two years ago, accepted an act of the General Court establishing a cellar grade of thirteen feet. If the 285 lots referred to should be raised three feet, to make the entire plotted area as high as the bottom of the cellars of houses built thereon, the cost thereof, at six cents per square foot, would be about \$84,000. Is it probable that the owners of this land will go to this expense? If not, and houses are erected high above the land level, as has already been done in several instances, will it make a desirable section of Winthrop? Will the rest of the town be improved by such buildings?

The entire area of marsh and flats herein recommended was owned last May by 53 individuals and corporations, and was valued by the assessors \$58,350. The three buildings were valued \$8400.00, making a total of \$66,750. The question at once arises, can the land be bought for the amount named in the warrant? The committee asked many of the owners to submit prices, and although about one-fourth of them replied, only a few named a price. These ranged from six cents to ten cents per foot. A number referred to the amount the land would bring when the town did its duty in building streets and sewers. One man who controlled all but 100 of the 285 lots already referred to, and a number more outside the area now under consideration, offered to sell his entire holdings for eight cents per foot. A large part of his land is that portion lying south of the Metropolitan Sewer location and was bought in his interest last March, the payment being made entirely by a note



secured by a mortgage which amounted to six cents per square foot on the area purchased. The committee does not believe the land is worth the amount named in the mortgage, and as the consideration in a mortgage is not a factor in arriving at the value of land through the courts, the town should not be afraid of a settlement by a commission or a jury.

This land was sold eighteen years ago for less than one-half a cent per square foot, and since that time the tide has been kept from covering it by the filling of Washington Avenue bridge, and the drainage, once perfect, has been nearly destroyed as already referred to. The owners of large sections of the land have spent money in advertising and in paying large commissions rather than improving the land. The result of the enterprise of owners of real estate in other sections of the town has been used to make some people believe that this land, if not what they called for, was "just as good."

With only feelings of pity for those who have paid good money for a few lots of this land and with feelings of another kind regarding some real or alleged owners, the committee believes that evidence can be produced which will result in town ownership of this land at about the price of the appropriation herein named.

No considerable expense need be incurred at present to make a small area of the land available for one or more baseball diamonds and for a children's playground. A plan ought to be determined upon at once, and some draining done in consonance with the ultimate scheme.

The town in general will reap a large benefit in perfecting the drainage scheme for the whole locality and in providing for the building of cross streets connecting parts of the town not now readily connected, namely: Main Street extension to the Shirley station, Cross Street, and possibly Crescent Street, and by a footway from Buchanan Street to the Shirley station.

The railroad officials do not feel that they can comply with a request to place posts west of the Shirley Street station and thus give for foot passengers a grade crossing. A steel bridge over the tracks at this point would accommodate many residents of the beach section who want to go to the Center by a much shorter route than by Washington Avenue or Shirley Street. The estimated cost of such a structure fourteen and one-half feet clear height above the tracks is estimated at \$1000.

Considerable amounts of material may be obtained by excavations from "Lewis Lake", the proposed lagoons and ditches, which will go a long way in making any necessary fills. Filling as a whole, is not required except to give a surfacing and make some difference in elevation to obtain drainage. This would also result in cleaning up "Lewis Lake", thus abolishing a nuisance of a number of years standing. The main expenditures for construction may be put off as far as is desired. All this is for the future more than for the present. It is, therefore, fair to make the expense payable, at least in part, thirty years hence.

The committee recommends the passage of the following votes under Article 3:

Voted, That the sum of seventy-five thousand dollars (\$75,000) be appropriated for the taking or purchase of land and flats lying west of the location fo the Boston, Revere Beach and Lynn Railroad Company in the vicinity of the Ocean Spray, Shirley and Winthrop Beach stations in Winthrop for public playgrounds, and

That no purchase of land or expenditure of money, under the authority of the foregoing vote, shall be made by the Park Commissioners except with the previously obtained written approval of the Board of Selectmen.

Voted, That the Town Treasurer be authorized, when so directed by the Selectmen, to borrow seventy-five thousand dollars (\$75,000) appropriated at this meeting for the taking or purchase of land for public playgrounds. Bonds or notes shall be issued therefor, signed by the Treasurer, and countersigned by a majority at least of the Selectmen, with interest payable semi-annually at a rate not exceeding four per cent per annum. Such bonds or notes shall be made payable in such annual proportionate payments as will extinguish the same in thirty-years from their date. "None of such bonds or notes shall be obligatory without the authenticating certificate of the City Trust Company, of Boston. All other particulars as to the place of payment of the principal and interest, and as to the form and issuance and sale of such bonds or notes, shall be determined by the Town Treasurer and the Selectmen."

Under the plan suggested by the above vote \$2500 of the debt of \$75000. would become due each year, and the interest, if placed as high as four per cent. would make \$3000. making a total payment of \$5500. the first year. The interest payment would be decreased \$100.

each year until the whole of the bonds were paid. The annual payments referred to would add to next year's tax rate about forty cents. This amount would be decreased each year by the growth of the town and the smaller amount of interest required.

The "1915" Boston Exposition, now being held in the Old Art Museum, exhibits object lessons of work accomplished for the betterment of Boston and the surrounding places within the Metropolitan area. It also aims to show what conditions will be if certain things are not done, or if the doing is delayed.

A table published by the state a few years ago gave the population of all the cities and towns in the Metropolitan district at five year periods up to 1890. The estimated population of each municipality up to 1930 was also given, and it was estimated that Winthrop would have 9295 people in 1910. Next year's census figures will greatly exceed this number. For 1915 the estimate is 11,750; for 1920, 14,450; in 1925, 17,600 and in 1930, 21,300.

The duty of today is not performed by a recital of the mistakes of the voters of ten or twenty years ago. If the larger Winthrop foretold in the figures named is to be a good place for physical, mental and moral development of the children who will then live here, the 2000 voters of to-day have a duty to perform.

The committee has tried to present certain facts in regard to the problem, and respectfully submits them to the citizens of Winthrop.