

Notes¹ from Meeting and Visit to Boston State Hospital

Discussions with: Julie Brandlen, Sanctuary Director, Boston Nature Center (617-983-8500 x 6901; jbrandlen@massaudubon.org) and Jean Dorcus, Education Manager, Boston Nature Center (617-983-8500 x6903; jdorus@massaudubon.org)[Introduction](#)

by Gil Rodgers and Ros Smythe, May 27, 2013

Boston State Hospital (BSH) is located on the Dorchester/Mattapan border of Boston -- adjacent to Forest Hills Cemetery, Mt. Hope Cemetery, and Franklin Park. The property is easily accessible from Blue Hills Parkway and the American Legion Highway. At one time this was a huge 1000 acre rural area located near the center of Boston surrounded by large areas of green, forested property. The 250 acre campus-style mental health institution, originally called the "Boston Lunatic Asylum," closed in 1979. In 1951 the resident population of the hospital hit an all-time high of 3,100, about 30% over the institution's official capacity.² The facility had extensive farming and, similar to Medfield State Hospital, emphasized fresh air, hard work, and separation from the adverse influences of city life to help restore the patients' mental health by incorporating residents in the operations, expansions, and improvements as an important part of therapy.

Almost all of the buildings from the former BSH have been demolished except for three cottages that have been restored and are now being used by the Mass Audubon Nature Center, and another old building that will be renovated by the U. Mass Biologic Laboratory. There still remains a significant amount of unused, overgrown land and wetlands, although the old roads still exist and can be used. Other than the properties that have been sold, DCAMM is the land owner.

The master plan was developed with very active participation of the community organized by a proactive Citizens Advisory Committee (CAC). Beverley Johnson was the legislative consultant to the Boston State Hospital and has a full history of the CAC's work.³

Compared to other state hospitals we have studied, BSH has a broad range of multi-use/multi-family housing, agriculture, research, and education tailored to the needs and interests of the Dorchester and Mattapan community, as summarized below:

Olmsted Green Multifamily Development

Forty-two (42) acres have been developed by Lena New Boston LLC -- a joint venture between New Boston USA Fund and Lena Park Community Development. This redevelopment program has two major parcels of land along both sides of Harvard Street: The West Campus containing 19 townhouses and 51 affordable apartments, and the East Campus containing 100 affordable apartments plus another 65 affordable rental units for seniors. \$95 million has been invested in this project -- \$83 million to support affordable housing. Permanent financing was provided by

¹ Notes prepared by Gil Rodgers.

² An excellent history of Boston State Hospital was written by Steven Pavlos Holmes, "A Healing Landscape: Environmental and Social History of the Site of Mass Audubon's Boston Nature Center," Mass Audubon Society, 2013. Steve's email: steve@facingthechange.org

³ bjohnson@bevcoassociates.comcastbiz.net

New Boston Fund's Urban Strategy America Fund and Massachusetts Housing Partnership. Rental units are reported to be entirely full. Rental rates that were being offered in the summer 2013 were: \$1267/mo for two BR apartments (860 sf), and \$1460/mo for three BR apartments (1205 sf).

Key contact for Lena New Boston and Olmsted Green is: Kirk Sykes, President of New Boston USA Fund: ksykes@newbostonfund.com.

Harvard Commons Affordable Houses

Harvard Commons occupies another section consisting of 99 units of single-family houses and duplexes. These are targeted as affordable, cooperative housing consisting of studio units; one, two, three and four bedroom units; units set aside for formerly homeless families; and others reserved for clients who receive subsidies from the Department of Mental Health. Prices for single family homes are in the in the \$300,000 range. As we drove and walked around both housing developments, we saw kids playing outside on the playground and adults outside their homes working on the yard, giving a community feel to the area. Houses were built by Cruz Development Corporation. Funding for Harvard Cooperative Housing was provided by DND, Mass Highway, Department of Housing and Community Development Home funds, Federal Home Loan Bank, MMA Financial LLC, and Banknorth.

Boston Nature Center

The Mass Audubon Society acquired 67 acres of land from DCAMM for only \$10 per acre paying a total of \$670! Mass Audubon has used this land to build the Boston Nature Center, consisting of an environmental friendly conservation center incorporating green building design concepts, an extensive walking trail network, 276 community gardens that are fully "leased", and a City of Boston leaf composting area. The Center is an educational center for all to learn and appreciate wildlife, plants, animals, and working gardens. During our visit we saw groups of little children participating in a summer camp.

In addition to Julie Brandlen, Sanctuary Director and Jean Dorcus, Education Manager who we met, the key person for land acquisition is Bob Wilber, Mass Audubon's Director of Land Protection, 781-259-2155 or rwilber@massaudubon.org.

University of Massachusetts Biologic Laboratories

UMass Medical School opened in 2005 a modern \$100 million facility to manufacture drugs and vaccines (such as diphtheria antitoxin and tetanus/diphtheria vaccine) located on a 15.3 acre portion of land on the hospital grounds. The medical complex employs about 330 people. The school is currently restoring one of the only remaining buildings from the original hospital (see photos below.)

Appendix A Boston State Hospital (Mattapan - Dorchester)



Boston Nature Center, Mass Audubon Society at former Boston State Hospital



Restored Cottages used by Boston Nature Center on Oak Street



216 affordable apartments at Olmstead Green including 65 rental units for seniors



Harvard Commons single family and duplex affordable homes



U. Mass Biologics Laboratory at BSH



Former BSH building planned for renovation
by U. Mass Biologics Labs