

# WEST ROXBURY ~ ROSLINDALE BULLETIN

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The site, 1225 Centre St., was once destined for condos but will now likely be kept as a garden area.

COURTESY PHOTO



The inside of the shop at 5252-5270 Washington St.

COURTESY PHOTO

## Sophia Snow CPA project more than just a cleanup

Jeff Sullivan  
Staff Reporter

The Sophia Snow Place in West Roxbury, on the Jamaica Plain and Roslindale lines, recently purchased the site at 1225 Centre St. sitting adjacent to the group's building.

The lot at 1225 Centre has recently come under some controversy, as developers had been trying to turn it into six or eight (depending on the timeframe) condominium units.

"They were actually trying to get a waiver to build on the wetlands buffer zone," said Sophia Snow President and CEO Patty Roggeveen. "And that's not something we're interested in. We're interested in protecting it and keeping it natural."

Roggeveen said the Sophia

Snow Board decided to purchase the land in 2019, and then started looking into the Community Preservation Act (CPA) application process to see how they could use those funds to increase greenspace around them, both for the residents at the House and for the public.

"We became much more aware of the limitations of our campus in terms of accessibility, and also as to what that lot added," she said. "We thought about if it could be developed – which I know is a dirty word but you know what I mean – in a way that's consistent with the sense of the Allandale Woods and what it has to offer. It used to be a gas station, so you know it's not in a position to just get folded back into the Allandale Woods. We have to do something to sort of clean up the

invasives and improve the site."

Boston Mayor Michelle Wu recently announced her endorsement of this project and several others for the Boston City Council to vote on in the coming weeks. Roggeveen said she's excited, but this will be the first step in a longer rejuvenation process for the property.

Roggeveen added just buying the property was a cleanup process.

"It actually had an order of conditions on it when we bought the property, so we cleaned up all that as part of the purchase to get clearance from the Conservation Commission," she said.

"I've been hearing more and more about these healing gardens and I thought this would

Sophia Snow  
Continued on page 4

## HP resident takes Low Key approach to cannabis

Mary Ellen Gambon  
Staff Reporter

Hyde Park resident Jeff Similien said he discovered that the best way to succeed in his careers as a semiprofessional football player and commercial and residential real estate broker is by cultivating good community relationships.

Similien is hoping that by cultivating cannabis in Hyde Park and simultaneously opening a recreational cannabis dispensary in West Roxbury that he can employ more local residents as part of his company, Low Key Dispensary.

In a recent interview with The Bulletin, Similien described his efforts to create a

cannabis brand that will be accepted throughout Boston and will prioritize employing local residents. He grew up in Dorchester and is opening his first recreational dispensary in Codman Square this summer.

"When cannabis was legalized in 2016, I realized I had a unique ability to utilize my education and real estate experience to pivot into the cannabis industry," said Similien, the CEO of Boston Trust Realty Group in Mattapan Square. He is a former board member of Hyde Park Main Streets and a graduate of Curry College with a bachelor's degree in business management. He also has a

Low Key  
Continued on page 6

## Sophia Snow continued from page 1

be a perfect location for something like that because of its proximity to so many locations where people are taking care of health needs, and between us and Springhouse – two living areas for senior citizens – the idea for this came as part of that and a real nice way to use the space."

Roggeveen said the project will be split up into two phases, with the first for mitigation and a cleanup of the area at cost of about \$150k.

"The application is basically to finish up the work the Parks Department has been doing for years along the banks of the vernal pool there," she said. "The pool actually has a little stream that runs under the street and winds up going to the Arboretum. We feed into that location there and the banks of that stream are completely

overgrown with invasive species and dead trees and things like that. So the principal part of this grant is to clean that up so when we do develop our healing garden the water element of that will be that natural stream and vernal pool and we'll have done the work to present that in a way that's really attractive and keeping with the natural elements."

She said the project also includes the construction of a 60-foot bridge to allow access from Sophia Snow to the Allandale Woods in the first round of funding. She said they will have a more comprehensive plan for the full healing garden in September when they apply for CPA funds once again.

The maintenance of the park will be taken care of by Sophia Snow. Roggeveen said the organization, which was

originally founded as the Roxbury Home for Aged Women in 1856, has an endowment that helps to keep prices low and keep the grounds clean. She said they can handle the maintenance, but the capital investment for such a project would not be feasible by Sophia Snow. In contrast, the Boston Parks Department and the Urban Wilds subsidiary do not have the staff to maintain more parkland under its current budget. So it makes for a really good match.

"I think it's in keeping with what Parks is looking for on so many levels and I think that's an important piece here," she said.

For more information on this project and others the Community Preservation Committee considered, go to <https://www.boston.gov/community-preservation>.