



TOWN OF WATERTOWN
Conservation Commission
Administration Building
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WATERTOWN, MASSACHUSETTS 02472

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Charles C. Bering, Member
Patrick W. Fairbairn, Member
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Colleen Egan, Member

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MINUTES

Meeting Date: Wednesday, March 4, 2020, 7:00 PM, Philip Pane Lower Hearing Room

Conservation Commission Members Present: Leo Martin, Maria Rose, Jamie O'Connell, Patrick Fairbairn, Charles C. Bering, Colleen Egan

Absent: N/A

Also Present: Magdalena Lofstadt, Nicholas Watkins, Glenn Howard, Dianne Velandorchia, Devin Bathchelder, Gene Johnston, Rick Corsi, Paul Tamburello, Georges Balesdent, Peter Deltredici, Andrew Copelotti, Gideon Schreiber

Staff Present: Laurel Schwab, Conservation Agent, Susan C. Jenness, Assistant

Martin chaired the meeting.

1. Minutes- February 5, 2020

The minutes were continued for review at the April 1, 2020 meeting.

2. Notice of Intent- Department of Conservation and Recreation, (DCR)- Test Plot Implementation for Charles River Basin Riverbank Vegetation Management Plan, Applicant: Rick Corsi (DCR)

Rick Corsi, Project Manager appeared for the DCR along with Devin Batchelder, Environmental Scientist from Weston & Sampson. Corsi explained the DCR filed the NOI seeking to install 8 test plots that would be fenced in along the river, and 1 of the plots would be located in Watertown along the Charles River Basin Riverbank, along the south bank of the river near California Street. Corsi clarified there would be signage informing the public what is taking place inside the fence.

The applicable CC jurisdictions for this project are the riverfront area and the land subject to flooding zone. The temporary test plots would be used to collect data for the DCR's vegetation management plan, which includes the clearing of invasive species and the planting of native trees, shrubs and herbaceous plants. The purpose of the test plots is to zero in on a native species-oriented vegetation plan that works best with the ecosystem along the Charles River.

Commission Discussion

Fairbairn commented that the test plot location is a good spot for vista clearing and he expressed he was concerned about the potential for herbaceous plants to become trampled. Batchelder and Corsi reminded the CC that this test plot will be fenced in. Batchelder said that they would work to address it if there are signs of any species being trampled.

Public Comments:

Peter Deltredici said he has been walking the river since around 1990 and was interested in the method for removal of invasive species. Corsi explained there are several methods being considered, but it will take time to determine the best ones for this project. He said he chose Weston & Sampson because they are well known for handling this type of project very well.

Deltredici said he felt the DCR has been remiss taking care of the vegetation along the river for years. Corsi said a lot of money was invested in this project and there is commitment to a good maintenance plan to follow up upon completion of the project, which is expected to take 5 years.

Genie Johnson said she has been a walker along the river since 2002, and that in 2010 there was enough vegetation along the river banks so the trees were able to sustain themselves during flooding. She explained there was a huge increase in the number of dogs frequenting the area and they are destroying the vegetation, which causes erosion and negatively impacts the health of the trees in the area.

Rose said she wanted everyone to know that the plans by Weston & Sampson were the most stellar plan she had seen in her 12 years on the CC. She pointed out that the DCR would not have invested money in this plan were they not intending to take care of the site in the future, or had not been considerate of times of drought and change.

Motion: Fairbairn made a motion to close the public hearing and for the Conservation Commission to allow the notice of intent to go forward, with the set of conditions to be entered at the close of the CC meeting. Rose seconded the motion.

Vote: A unanimous vote was reached on the motion made by Fairbairn.

3. **Request for Extension – 485-615 Arsenal St.-** Mass. DEP 321-0165- to review the request for an extension of the Arsenal Yards Order of Conditions until Jun 20, 2023, Watertown Retail, LLC C/O Boylston Properties, Representative: Andrew J. Copelotti, Principal

Andrew Copelotti appeared to present a request to extend the order of conditions on behalf of Boylston Properties. The extension request was being made to accommodate the projected completion date of the overall phasing of the project, which he said should be completed before June 20, 2023.

Rose stated for the record that it was not precedent setting that the CC generally grants a 3 year extension on an order of conditions so quickly. She pointed out to Copelotti she noticed a silt fence had come out and in need of attention at the site. Copelotti said that this was a result of trying to save some trees and would be taken care of. Rose requested that someone from staff go out and make sure it is taken care of.

Corsi asked Copelotti if he'd had his project team contact DCR to review the overall plan yet, and Copelotti answered that he had done so.

Schwab said she wanted to issue a perennial reminder to keep all the soils on the site cleaned up and contained.

Motion: Rose made a motion to close the hearing. Fairbairn seconded the motion.

Vote: A unanimous vote was reached to close the hearing.

Motion: Rose made a motion to grant a 3 year extension on the order of conditions issued in March of 2017. O'Connell seconded the motion.

Vote: A unanimous vote was reached to grant the 3 year extension on the order of conditions issued in March of 2017.

4. Arsenal Park update- Presentation and discussion of updated construction drawings for Phase 1 of improvements to Arsenal Park.

Glenn Howard from CDM Smith appeared to review the current proposal for Phase 1 with the CC, so that it could be scheduled for an informational review before Town Council for approval to go out for public bid.

Howard explained that this presentation was a review of Phase 1 of the project and that CDM Smith has been working on getting the plans converted over for public bidding. He explained that the Department of Public Works (DPW) is currently reviewing the stormwater plans for any final comments. Howard said he hoped for construction to begin by the summer or fall.

Howard introduced members of the CDM Smith team as Nick Watkins, Senior Landscape Architect, Magdalena Lofstedt, Permitting Specialist, and Dianne Velandorchia, Stormwater Scientist.

The CC reviewed the actions that had been taken on all the previous comments that were made by the CC at the July 2019 meeting, with members of the team from CDM Smith answering any questions. Martin submitted a list of comments he had about the construction document details, which is on file in the Office of Conservation.

Public Comments

Peter Centola, Director of Recreation for Watertown and resident, thanked CDM Smith and the Planning Department and said they have all done a wonderful job. He expressed his frustration that this redesign and redevelopment process has taken such a long time. He said he worried about how little space there will be available for users during construction and potential disruptions with the summer weather coming.

Jesse Hammond, a Watertown resident, commented that this looked like a great plan and asked if it were possible to make requests at this time as he had recently been to another park and had seen some nice ideas for the planned skate park portion. He was informed that there would be opportunity to do so at a later meeting, since the skate park will be redone during a later phase.

After commission discussion and public comments the CC was ready to make a motion.

Motion: O'Connell made a motion to accept Phase 1 of the plan with the exception of the comments that were expressed at this meeting, in order to move the project forward for an informational meeting with Town Council. Bering seconded the motion.

Vote: A unanimous vote was reached to accept Phase 1 of the plan with the exception of the comments that were expressed at this meeting, in order to move the project along for an information meeting with Town Council.

5. Informational Meeting - Presentation and discussion of Whitney Hill Park Annual Report 2018 per the Town Council's 2013 Resolution Preserving Whitney Hill Park.

Martin turned the floor over to Fairbairn who has taken the lead regarding Whitney Hill over the years.

Fairbairn summarized the Whitney Hill Annual Report, which was served to the Town Manager and members of Town Council on February 14, 2020. He explained it was available on the CC Website, and that an annual letter had gone out to the abutters of the park recently notifying them of this meeting. He thanked members of the public for their participation.

Fairbairn explained that due to a change in teachers at the high school, over the last 2 years there has been very little activity in his work with the students at Whitney Hill. Fairbairn said he hopes that work on the test plots will continue in the near future when there are teachers available to resume work with the students.

Fairbairn explained that as a result of a synthesis of the comments that were taken at the Whitney Hill meeting last year, a follow up memorandum was sent to Town Council asking for assistance with some requests made by the CC. He reported that 2 new information kiosks that had been discussed and agreed upon at last year's meeting had been installed at the park just over the last week.

Fairbairn said he is still concerned with the erosion control problems at the park and that he would like to collaborate with some local experts about ways in which to address that issue. Fairbairn would also like to address the invasive species that appear around the perimeter of the park. He said he hopes to enlist the assistance of the public with clearing away the invasive species once a proper plan had been put in place.

Fairbairn said he is looking forward to future collaborations with local experts to expand the usage of Whitney Hill, in ways that the public and the CC agree are good for the environment and the natural habitat.

Public Comments

Martin read excerpts from an email sent by Barbara Russkin who was unable to attend the meeting. Russkin asked that poison ivy be monitored at Whitney Hill and eradicated in a way that does not include Roundup. She reported that the upper path along the width of the property might be delineated and cleared a little and mentioned that neighbors had dropped off in their efforts of taking care of that area over the last couple of years. Russkin said the consensus among her neighbors is that residents want the area to remain as wild and natural as possible. Russkin expressed her appreciation of the research efforts and collaboration with the schools and said she hoped the area retains its natural state as much as possible.

Paul Tamburello inquired as to the location of the message boards which are located at Marion Rd. and Oliver St. Tamburello said he lives near the apron in the roadway and has noticed there is remarkably little trash located there. He said he has been contributing to the community by passing out information on the leash laws when there is a need to do so. He offered to volunteer to help out at Whitney Hill in the future as the needs are identified.

Lisa Cole spoke about signage for dog owners and said that it should appear before people enter the park. She mentioned many let their dogs out of the cars at Oliver St. and signage in the parking area could help establish the norms before the park is entered.

William Tremblay expressed his gratitude to the CC for caring and nurturing Whitney Hill for Watertown. He mentioned there could be another trash receptacle at the 4th entrance where there is currently none. Tremblay pointed out that a well-meaning neighbor has been leaf blowing along the paths in the park, which is not good for erosion control. He recommended an educational sign should be posted regarding leaf blowing to inform well-meaning residents of the reality.

Peter Deltredici said that based on his experience it is only about 5% of people who do not follow leash laws and, he also thought that trash barrels might actually attract more trash. He requested that erosion control measures at Whitney Hill be handled in an ecologically sensible way.

Martin thanked the public for attending the Whitney Hill meeting and called on Schwab to make an agent report.

6. Agent Report

- a. **New Members-** Schwab reported that there are two candidates who are being scheduled for an interview in the office of the Town Manager and that more should be known fairly soon.
- b. **Tree and Climate Change Symposium-** Schwab reported that on April 4 from 10-12 noon there will be a Trees and Climate Change Symposium at the Watertown Free Public Library. She told members of the CC she would be happy to brainstorm with them about staffing the table that day so that they could participate and also network with the public they are welcome.
- c. **Pollinator activity update-** Schwab has spoken with the Watertown Public Schools Garden Coordinator, Judy Fallows, about her existing efforts and opportunities for collaboration. Schwab reported that Fallows is eager to work together. Schwab also spoke with the horticulturalist on staff at the Mt. Auburn Cemetery and said she has more plans to speak about the current efforts and ways they can all work together.

Martin said he recently spoke to Bob Dirico, who is interested in planting a pollinator friendly garden at the DPW. Martin also said that Dirico can help with the possibility of pollinator friendly gardens being developed on traffic islands and other locations around town.

O'Connell offered a list of upcoming events that had been sent to her by Pam Phillips of Friends of Bees.

- d. **MVP Update-** Schwab reported that a survey will be made available to the public next week. She will send a link out by email. She requested that members of the CC let her know of any upcoming events where she could share word about MVP and encourage people to take the survey.

Motion: O'Connell made a motion to close the meeting at 10:05 PM. Rose seconded the motion.

Vote: a unanimous vote was reached to adjourn the meeting at 10:05 PM.