

Minutes
Watertown Conservation Commission
Town Council Chambers
Monday, March 12, 2018

Conservation Commission Members Present: Leo Martin, Marylouise Pallotta McDermott, Patrick Fairbairn, Maria P. Rose, Charles C. Bering

Commission Members Absent: Jamie O'Connell

Staff Present: Steve Magoon, Susan C. Jenness (adopted at 4.4.18 CC Meeting)

Martin Chaired.

1. **Review – Arsenal Park Planning Process** – review of draft plan based on the recommendations made by the Conservation Commission at the December 6, 2017 meeting.

Steve Magoon, Gideon Schreiber and Peter Centola were present as town staff.

Steve Magoon opened the review and explained he and Schreiber hoped that that the extensive planning that resulted in creating the Conceptual Plan would be reviewed tonight during the public process and conversed about after, so that a new and improved plan, if one were needed could be drafted and reviewed in one additional meeting that would be held in the near future.

Gideon reviewed the plan in concept that he created with Daniel Mellett from CDM.

1. **East End of the park** – Use combination of the Open Lawn Area and Knoll concepts
 - Could include sitting wall or other items.
 - designed to create informal amphitheater
2. **Hard Court Area- tweak Enhanced Passive Design**
 - Add back lights, tweak enhanced passivity, consider multi- purpose court or courts
 - Court area perimeter treatments: Consider long planters along the north side of the courts. Could add to the border of that area with flower/perennial plantings.
 - Basketball courts should be near skate park if possible
 - Existing restrooms, ADA compliance updates
3. **Entrances –**
 - Main Entrance- use the East Knoll Garden Scenario (with a goal to provide wide enough paths to separate pedestrians from bicyclists and make it safe)
 - Modify to remove paved areas on the westerly side of the old island (look to add green space where feasible)
 - Talcott Rd.- Consider a new pedestrian entrance to the north of playground
 - Enhance the existing pedestrian access point
 - Create an entrance where the opening is located for equipment access to the park

- Enhance the entrance near the North Beacon St Gatehouse entrance
 - East End of Park – connect into the pathway to be constructed by Arsenal Yards down to Little Greenough
4. **Recreational Fields- keep as is but look at beautifying backstop.**
 - Update irrigation heads in field
 - Look at backstop; look at options for softening perhaps with green wall/plantings?
 5. **Picnic Area/Splash Pad** - maintain and update but keep general location
 6. **Play Area (Tot Lot)**
 - Ensure there are more shaded areas available
 - Make it accessible
 - Fix sinking area
 - Update tables and add shade on the east side
 7. **Smaller open lawn area** – leave it as is
 8. **Paths**
 - Surfaces- can use asphalt for multi-use paths (does not need to be pervious)
 - Ensure path width is widened in areas shared with bicyclists (minimum of 12')
 - Lighting – consider options for lighting for safety
 - Concern about lights-look into options for path lighting and make sure it does not take away from night and darkness
 9. **Amphitheater- Allow this area to revert and not be maintained as an amphitheater**
 - Consider converting it into a natural play space, built in to 'ruins', different ideas for a play area
 - Make this a natural play area (example was from Fresh Pond)
 10. **Exercise Stations** – consider adding this as a single installation (ask consultants for good placement)
 11. **Parking Lot- Replace/Add lights**
 - Can consider slightly modifying parking area on north and/or central island to allow some additional parking on north side.
 12. **Wayfinding- Add to park and tie to sites beyond**
 - Look at pedestrian scale signage for paths
 - Look at interpretive signage for areas of the park

2. Commission and Public Comments – Arsenal Park Planning Process – review of draft plan based on the recommendations made by the Conservation Commission at the December 6, 2017 meeting.

Pallotta McDermott spoke about Tip O’Neil the former speaker of the house and the role he played many years ago securing this park under the permanent care and custody of the Conservation Commission. She said she was delighted with the space and the plans on how it would be used that were orchestrated by the Planning Department and CDM Smith, for many years to come.

Fairbairn said that he was inclined to think big and ambitious and more on the extravagant side. He said he felt with these plans, this would be a place where residents could come to relax and enjoy life. He also said he was happy to see the fence line had been broken up.

Bering said that Pallotta Mc Dermott should feel very proud of the role both she and her husband Tom had in the history of Arsenal Park. He said he hoped the space would be preserved exactly as she had always hoped for.

Rose asked to learn more about grading and Schreiber explained that they are still determining ways to have this site work well with Arsenal Yard. Rose pointed out that the splash pad could create erosion and she hoped that they will find ways the water would be recycled.

Martin inquired about ADA compliancy in the park and Schreiber assured him that both sites will be compliant with ADA standards. Martin reminded Schreiber that Community Gardens will need access to water. Martin said that he hoped that lighting for the basketball and tennis courts will be downcast, and he mentioned that the Middle School Park has a nice amount of swings and should be a model for this park.

Public Comments

Mark Elton 475 Arsenal Rd.- Helton said he thought the concept plan was very good and he felt that the town really listened to everyone’s needs and desires. He appreciated that while the park was kept the same the space was accentuated with landscaping, shrubbery and that a restroom was being added to the space for the children using the park.

Thomas Michelle- 29 Winter St.- Michelle asked if the lower left hand corner of the park would be made accessible as a path to walk on. Martin said the CC did not have control of that and Gideon pointed out that the Commanders Mansion has a path that can be walked through.

Elodia Thomas of Marion Rd. recommended the town look into flipping around the Multi Sport Court in order to make more space for Community Gardens. She said she hoped that lights in the park would be on a timer so they would go off when the courts were not in use at night. She also brought up a hope she had for a water feature and mentioned a tulip design she had for seating.

Angie Kounelias Town Councilor for the East End said that the park is an oasis and a gem and the town never needed to start this process at square one. She said she was very happy with the concept plan that was revealed.

Eugenie Johnson 12 Green St- who is a member of the Community Garden said that she thought the garden spaces were sandwiched in between noisy activities that would be horrible for gardeners enjoying the meditative qualities of gardening. She said she did not want a highly urban noisy space and pointed out that it is hard to get water and equipment into the gardens from too far away from the parking lot.

Rose explained to Johnson that this space has always been known as an urban space. She asked Schreiber what options would be available for the gardeners once Grove St. is closed. She asked why Community Gardens were being moved out of Grove St. and wondered if they would consider eliminating the multisport court to make more room for the gardeners.

Schreiber said that Grove St. is private property and that they no longer want Community Gardens in the space.

Centola said that the Recreation Department is supportive of the Community Gardens people. He explained to Magoon and Schreiber that he thought this was a wonderful plan. He said the residents from the South Side of Watertown now must travel a distance for access to a park, and so he felt that this configuration met the needs of the South Side youth.

Thomas spoke again about the health and wellbeing of the species in the ecosystem and asked if Fairbairn could look into that for the town.

Libby Shaw, President for Trees for Watertown agreed that the eco-system is important and that the town should plan for the future health and wellbeing of all parts of the eco-system. Shaw also emphasized that the lights should be planned to work with the needs of the eco-system. She said he deeply appreciated the planning and thought that went into this plan.

Rose asked the Planning Department to confirm the space in the concept plan with organizers of Community Gardens.

Motion: Rose made a motion that that the CC moves forward with this Concept Plan as Designed. Pallotta McDermott seconded the motion.

Vote: A unanimous vote was reached that the CC moves forward with this Concept Plan as Designed. Pallotta McDermott seconded the motion.

Schreiber took notes on both the feedback from the CC and the public for integration into an improved concept plan to be drafted by Danielle Millett of CDM Smith.

3. Informational Meeting - Presentation and discussion of Whitney Hill Park Annual Report (2017) as per the Town Council's 2013 Resolution Preserving the Property Known as Whitney Hill Park

Fairbairn explained he had recently submitted a report to the Town Manager about the studies that took place at Whitney Hill in 2017 that also included some plans proposed for the year of 2018.

He said that members of the public who were abutters of Whitney Hill Park were invited to this meeting to have a chance to express their thoughts and concerns about the space, and also to make recommendations and suggestions on improving the space in the future.

Fairbairn explained that 3 years ago the CC was asked to develop programming at Whitney Hill Park which he took the initiative to design. Fairbairn's programming involves using local high school students, many of whom come into the program not knowing the difference between a maple and an oak. Fairbairn said that the park has a richly diversified ecosystem in which the students are able to have valuable learning experiences while valuable research is being done to learn about the ecosystem of the park which serves a greater purpose and benefits the entire whole town.

Fairbairn said he would introduce Andrew Joslin, a professionally trained arborist and tree climber who would make a presentation about Recreational Tree Climbing as a potential future activity for the lower level of Whitney Hill Park adjoining the Victory Field Basketball Diamond,

Joslin's presentation included a video slide show of programming he offered at Franklin Park Coalition in Boston. Joslin who met Fairbairn in 2016 said he met him through Paul Buck, a resident of Watertown when they were assisting with a research project on collecting oak leaf buds for a Watertown High School Students that Fairbairn was advising on.

Joslin said that recreational tree climbing was initiated roughly 30 years ago in Atlanta Georgia by an arborist named Peter Jenkins who founded Tree Climbers International. Jenkins began teaching people how to safely climb trees for fun which Joslin said is a wonderful exercise for the entire body and referred to it as a vertical hike in the woods. He said that up in the trees the climber can participate in the life available only up in the canopy of the trees themselves.

He said he is a current member of the Tree Climbers International had been specifically trained in safe practices in every facet of the activity including special training in tying safe knots, assessment of tree limbs, and use of protective measures for the earth around the trees.

He talked about protecting the trees during organized tree climbing. He explained an organized climb would include 8-10 ropes per tree that would only be tied by the facilitator on the strongest limbs with a rope sleeve paced over each limb to protect the trees from rope friction damage.

He said that all recreational climbs include following special safety protocol and that in 30 years there has not been an injury reported during a climb that required more than a band aid.

Joslin has also illustrated two books on trees, and is active in the national and international tree climbing community, and has designed new gear and technique for rope and harness climbing.

Public Comments

Comment by Email- The first comment was made through email by Howard Schmuck of 55 Everett St. who explained that over the recent years he is seeing more and more dogs running off leash and that the owners appear to be ignoring the signs posted in the park. He also said that in the twenty plus years he has lived adjacent to the park he is not aware of any planting or maintenance of the woods. He believes that care for the trees and planting for the future is necessary to maintain the park as a long term resource for the community.

A resident Jack asked how Joslin would be able to determine if a tree branch was suitable for climbing on.

Joslin explained that the Tree Climbing program has more than 30 years of history that all programs are facilitated by Tree Climbers International trained instructors, who are well trained in all aspects of Organized Tree Climbing.

Davide Mesoulan of 49 Oliver Rd. said that he would like to explore the Teens for Trees program in Watertown collaborating with Joslin about a pilot program for organized tree climbing in the summer.

He also said he is concerned with off leash dogs who are allowed to run through the park. He said he feels that owner's do not honor the signage that off leash practices are bad for the residents and also for the environment.

Linda Cocca of 84 Marion Rd. said that Whitney Hill Park is the only natural wild life environment in Watertown and town needs to keep that in mind when speaking about recreational use.

Thomas said that she thought the tree climbing was a great activity but felt that the town needed to be aware that this was a natural wooded area first. She suggested updating the signage, looking into removing invasive species and adding vegetation that would have a positive effect. She concluded that the path through Marion Rd. is a mud hole.

Fairbairn said he felt a need to have a down to earth discussion with town people to make sure the town is following up on the Whitney Hill Annual Meeting.

Thomas said she feels there is communication block in this process as there are suggestions made at this public meeting that do not seem to get implemented.

Councilor Piccirilli spoke about the Whitney Hill Annual Report and also commented on the public process for the Annual Whitney Hill Abutters Meeting.

He explained that in 2013 Town Council had agreed to classify Whitney Hill as Parkland and at that the Conservation Commission was directed to develop the plans for Maintenance and Educational pursuits at the park on an annual basis.

He explained that the Whitney Hill Park Annual Report communicates to the town manager and town council what occurred during the previous year at Whitney Hill, while also including suggestions about the activities proposed by members of the CC. He said that some suggestions might require funding such as improvements to the signage, trash systems and items in the upcoming year, and that financial issues would be discussed by town council who could allocate money for items such as trash barrels, signage etc....

Piccirilli also explained that the suggested that are being made at the Whitney Hill Abutters Meeting could be supplemented into the Whitney Hill Report that went to the Town Manager and Town Council back in February.

Motion: Rose agreed to work with Fairbairn to create a supplement to the 2017 Whitney Hill Annual report by synthesizing the public comments made at the public meeting to improve Whitney Hill.

Vote: A unanimous vote was reached adopting the motion made by Rose that she work with Fairbairn to supplement the 2017 Whitney Hill Annual report with the comments and suggestions made at the Whitney Hill Abutters Meeting.

4. **Discussion Item-** House Bill 2777- National Pollutant Discharge Elimination System is a water quality program mandated by the federal government that includes permitting compliance and enforcement activities relating to the discharge of pollutants.

Rose explained that 47 out of 50 states have their own programs for water quality and she did not feel a need for oversight by the federal government. She said that she was not in favor of the bill and Bering said he would abstain from supporting it.

The CC took no action on this item.

5. **Informational Item-** National Grid Line Replacement on Hunt St. within 220 ft. Buffer Zone

Magoon read from a written notification form that was submitted to the CC by National Grid. The notice explained the proposed work being done on Hunt St. is exempt from regulatory action under the provision of the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act.

There were no comments on the written notification form by the CC or the public.

6. **Minutes from the December 6, 2017**

Motion: Pallotta McDermott made a motion accepting the minutes of the December 6, 2017 meeting. Bering seconded the motion.

Vote: A unanimous vote was reached accepting the minutes of the December 6, 2017 meeting.

7. Agent report-

- a. **Bridge Replacement Project-** Martin reported that the Pedestrian Bridge Replacement project is still on hold. He said that the bridge is under fabrication.
- b. **Search for new Conservation Agent/Tree Warden-** Magoon reported that the search for the new Conservation Agent and Tree Warden is ongoing. Members of the CC inquired whether or not the job announcement was the same as the description of the position held by Hayward the former Conservation and Historical Preservation Agent and Tree Warden. Magoon explained that it was the same description but that he has delegated the duties of the Historical Preservation Agent to Gideon Schreiber and Andrea Adams, the two Senior Planners for the town. He said that he hopes to continue that practice.
- c. **Does the Conservation Commission want to elect a new Vice Chairperson-** The CC discussed electing a new Vice Chairperson. The CC decided to hold a discussion at their next meeting when all members of the CC are present. The clerk said she would add that item to the Agenda for the April 4, 2018 CC meeting.

Motion: Pallotta McDermott made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:20 PM. Rose seconded the motion.

Vote: A unanimous vote was reached to adjourn the meeting at 9:30 PM.