



TOWN OF WATERTOWN
Conservation Commission
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MINUTES

Meeting Date: Wednesday, March 3 2021, 7:00 PM, Remote Meeting on Zoom

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

Absent:

Also Present: Laura Laich, Hugh Hahn, James Briand, Meredith Field, Marci Loeber, Mary Mackinnon, Glenn Howard, Amy Cruz, Valerie Moore, Ray Cruz, Marilynne Roach, Jacob Mirsky, Sonia, K. T. Perrera, Donna Pennino, Andra Aeppil, Janet Buck, Will Twombly, Susan LaDue, Donna Penino

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

Martin chaired the meeting.

- 1. Informational Meeting-** Presentation and discussion of the Whitney Hill Park Annual Report 2020 per Town Council Resolution 2013 for preserving Whitney Hill Park

Fairbairn began his presentation on Whitney Hill Park by discussing the Annual Whitney Hill Report. He explained that the report is prepared with information he tracks and synthesizes. The report is sent to Mr. Driscoll each year, and then shared by Mr. Driscoll with members of Town Council. He explained that the report is posted on the Town's website each year, and notices are mailed out to abutters of the park to invite them and all interested residents to share their thoughts and suggestions with the Conservation Commission each year.

Fairbairn pointed out the park's close proximity to the high school. He explained the location had led to the concept of this natural resource becoming an outdoor laboratory for field science for local high school students. Fairbairn discussed how this collaboration with the school has been as much a benefit to the students, as it is to the Commission, leading to very important determinations about the conditions at the park. Their work is supervised by both Fairbairn and the science teachers of the school.

Fairbairn said that unfortunately, during the Covid Pandemic no work was able to be accomplished at the park, and he mentioned that the teacher who had coordinated the field study program has since left his position. Fairbairn hopes to revive the program soon.

Efforts Now Under Way to reach goals of the Whitney Hill Park

- Improved Footpaths- Fairbairn said the major activity he was proposing in the coming year would lead to improving the foot paths through study, analysis and erosion control.
- Collaboration with the DPW- Fairbairn said he would like to develop more collaboration with the Department of Public Works, (DPW) to have improved communication around trail/path maintenance and other issues arising over time.
- Collaboration with the Tree Warden- Fairbairn is looking forward to a site visit with the new Tree Warden, Greg Mosman, to initiate him on Whitney Hill and find ways to support his work at the park.
- Student Conservation Association, (SCA) - Fairbairn is working on a preliminary survey to further define ways the SCA may be able to offer assistance at the park.
- Appalachian Mountain Club, (AMC)- Fairbairn is looking into ways the CC may be eligible to receive some volunteer time and resources from the AMC, as they have been able to support the Charles River Association.

Conservation Commission Comments

Martin thanked Fairbairn for his work that went into the annual report, for his presentation, and for all his community outreach with respect to Whitney Hill Park.

Martin mentioned that run off and revegetation are two topics at Whitney Hill Park he is interested in addressing. He said that more signage and barrels should be discussed. He mentioned recently speaking to a resident who said on a Saturday there was a noticeable build- up of trash. Martin contacted the DPW to discuss the situation and found this was an isolated incident that took place over the weekend, and that the DPW is now aware it occurred.

O'Connell thanked Fairbairn saying he did a great job on the annual report. She said she was in favor of re-doing the baseline of the park and they should wait and see how Covid goes as they proceed with rolling out official plans.

Bering said he liked the report made by Fairbairn very much. He said he anticipates as the town acquires more green space, there will be more opportunities to discuss the activities being talked about at this meeting.

Guest Speaker, James Briand, Member of Blue Hills Reservation Trails Program,

James Briand, a resident of Watertown who is also a member of the Blue Hills Reservation Trails Program, spoke extensively about his work with the partnership driven association, which is a collaborative process working with the Department of Conservation and Recreation, (DCR). He explained that the groups are accountable to a volunteer board, and their focus is on maintaining safety markers for trails, critical cleanliness and overseeing guidelines processes, and invasive species management, all aimed at enhancing the user experience.

Briand explained that in the process of their work, they track erosion, address illegal trails, and remove obstacles from the hiking trails resulting from wind damage.

He said that their work relies on corporate resources, which has enabled them to develop a trail maintenance program with group volunteers who contract to watch over assigned trails for 2 years. The groups report on the trail conditions to the DCR on a periodic basis.

Celebratory events are also held, such as Seasonal Fests. He explained that signage carries out the rules and messages for the trails and that public relations goes a long way in creating traction for the goals that are focused on from year to year.

Abutters Comments and Suggestions and Dialogue

- Installation of dog waste stations was suggested. Martin explained that this is a bigger expense than perhaps can be afforded at this time as the bags and stations are expensive.
- Some furniture was recently left at Whitney Hill. K.T. Perrera responded that young people were seen sitting on the furniture, but it has since been removed.
- Jacob Mirksy said he loves walking Whitney Hill Park but would be interested in some seating areas for quiet contemplation and watching nature.
- Lisa Cole said that the rules signage for dog owners are placed facing the driveways of abutting homes. She suggested moving the signs to better inform the dog walkers of the rules of the park. She reported that people are taking it upon themselves to move downed tree limbs to create their own self delineated pathways. She also reported there is a lot of old granite curbing that was disposed of in the park, which might be considered in some way to enhance the park or another town space.
- Will Mr. Tremblay Twombly thanked the CC for arranging the installation of waste barrels at the east and west ends of in the 3 corners of the park over the last year. He said that adding another barrel to the third public access point at the top of Marshall St. would be an even better enhancement.

Public Comments Closed.

Rose commented that they ought to be cautious about adding seating to the park because it can be perceived as an invitation to hang out and loiter. She also cautioned about the possibility of graffiti being done in areas where seating is installed.

Fairbairn reminded everyone that it remains important for all users of the park to be responsible for policing themselves, making sure that conditions continue to be good within, so that improvements can continue at Whitney Hill Park into the future.

He explained that he and his colleagues on the CC will be looking for ways to get studies done over the course of this year and he hopes that some students might be interested in participating over the summer. He projected that some work could be done on the plots over the months of June through August or September.

2. Notice of Intent- 580 Pleasant St. To renovate the 2-story building for new lab and R&D office space located at 580 Pleasant St., including the addition of patio and parking space, an access path at the rear of the parcel, and stormwater improvements.

Laura Laich from VHB, a wetland scientist, Hugh Hahn, the civil engineer and project manager and Applicant, and Marci Loeber of Griffith Properties, owner, were present for the public hearing.

Laich began the presentation by explaining there was an outstanding OOC that was allowed by the Conservation Commission to go forward back in 2003, but the work was never done. The property has since changed owners, and the new owner of the property intends to execute the work from 2003 that was never done, bringing the property up to date with additional improvements as a result of this NOI.

She outlined the benefits of this project as the following

- Renovation of the Building
- Improved Stormwater Quality in Parking Lot
- Reduction of Impervious Space

Laich talked about the history of the project site.

There had been a renovation to the building in 1982 when an addition was built on to the existing building with a stipulation that they not allow parking at the river's edge. What is now being proposed would add stormwater management to the old stipulation from that time.

Laich explained that the order from 2003 was actually an enforcement order that was entered after the fact. She said that now the property had changed hands, and the new owners want to assume responsibility for the old order, seeing to it that the old work gets executed in the scope of this NOI.

The proposal includes the following work in the Riverfront Area

- Building Renovation
- Parking Reconfiguration
- Stormwater Management
- Site Improvements
- Addition of Infiltration
- Addition of Berms and swales to improve water quality
- Reduction in impervious area

- Stonedust path from one edge of the property to the other edge
- Riverbank plantings from 2003 order and additional planting around the property

Hahn talked about the following from the construction plans

- New Façade of the Building
- Mechanical Equipment on roof to be screened in
- Window added to the building

Martin began the conversation with Hahn saying he would like to see details of the planting plans from the 2003 order, and confirmed that they had considered the 100 year floodplain. Hahn explained the process used to identify and show they are well outside the floodplain. Martin asked for the exact amount of reduction to impervious area. Hahn said it was 7,460 square feet. Martin mentioned the catch basins in the corners. Hahn said they will be removed as noted in the construction plans. Martin asked if they could reduce the parking and take out the spaces closest to the river altogether. Hahn answered that they had moved parking an additional 12 feet away from the river outside the grass area already from existing conditions.

Rose inquired about the decibel levels anticipated from the rooftop equipment, mentioning concern for the eagles who frequent that area in the winter. Hahn explained that the plan is for a mechanical penthouse with a screen wall around it that meets the Town's noise ordinance requirements.

Rose said that the planting schedule in the plans was too vague and that she did not understand how the public was going to be benefitting from the path that is proposed in the rear of the building. Hahn explained that the path would lead to the DCR Park and skating rink and that it is a connection along the river. He said it was discussed at meetings with Planning and DPW staff.

[Rose commented that stormwater sand filters can clog. She said she was happy the sand filters would reduce phosphorus by 65%. She inquired about access to the underground sand filter tanks given their proposed location beneath a deck. The applicant indicated the deck panels are removable for maintenance, as needed. She said that she was concerned with the invasive species being removed, and whether they would receive follow up care in the future. She also said she would like to see an updated planting plan that would feature species diversity.](#)

~~Rose commented that a standard stonedust path can clog. She said she was happy the sand filters would reduce phosphorus by 65%. She discussed the removable deck panels that may get a build up on them over time that needs to be scraped off. She said that she was concerned with the invasive species being removed, and whether they would receive follow up care in the future. She also said she would like to see an updated planting plan that would feature species diversity.~~

Fairbairn commented that after removing the invasive species, the best thing they could do was add enduring trees. He said that he would be happiest with the outcome being a generous tree canopy protecting the environment for years to come.

O'Connell asked Hahn what he thought of putting some parking spaces in the front of the building, to move parking away from the back, and increasing green space. She pointed out that would remove parking from the 50 foot no build zone. Hahn explained that they are currently below the number of parking spaces required by zoning.

O'Connell spoke to the fact that the applicant considers this a redevelopment project, and said that if there is currently topsoil it is not considered degraded. She explained that removing the topsoil would be considered degrading the riverfront area.

O'Connell pointed out that the Order of Conditions was an enforcement order from 2003 and should be documented with the actions being taken to fix what is wrong. She pointed out that invasive species should be taken care of and that the letter to Marylouise Pallotta McDermott from that time did not provide enough information to move forward with.

O'Connell asked about the outfalls from the old Order of Conditions. Hahn clarified that there will now be roof drains to deal with water from the roof. He explained that there will be floor drains that go out to the sewer.

O'Connell said she would like to see something that goes into the O &M Plan pertaining to de-icing the porous pavement, as using salt on that material is not recommended. Commission members agreed they needed to have clear orders in the O & M Plan to take care of de-icing porous pavement. O'Connell said that they should be conscious of this issue moving forward on all future projects.

Motion: Rose made a motion to continue the public hearing until the April meeting. Fairbairn seconded the motion.

Poll: A unanimous poll was reached to continue the public hearing on 580 Pleasant St. until the April meeting.

3. **Informational Update-** Arsenal Park Phase B- Glenn Howard was present to make a report to the commission. He said there was a stakeholder meeting for the skate park that week and it was attended by 7 parents of children who would likely be users of the skate park. He reported there were several suggestions discussed and that he would need until the 17th for the new information to be integrated into the plans.

The current grand total of the project at this time, without the stormwater included is at \$6,650,000.00.

Martin said he participated in the skate park meeting and that it was well attended with good interaction and feedback.

It was confirmed that members of the Conservation Commission would let CDM Smith know when they should file the Notice of Intent for the issuance of the Order of Conditions for the construction of the park. Howard reported that Magdalena, the permitting expert at CDM Smith, already had a lot of the material assembled for the NOI so that it could be ready very quickly.

4. **Minutes-** January 6, 2021 and February 3, 2021

Motion: Fairbairn made a motion to accept the minutes of the January meeting as amended. O'Connell seconded the motion.

Poll: A unanimous poll was reached to accept the minutes of the January meeting as amended.

Motion: O'Connell made a motion to accept the minutes of the February meeting. Rose seconded the motion.

Poll: A unanimous poll was reached accepting the minutes of the February meeting.

5. **Agent Report**

- a. CPA update- O'Connell reported that in March, the plan was finalized. Forms will be worked on throughout the spring. By the fall they should be ready to accept applications.
- b. Climate and Energy Plan- Schwab reported a consultant had been chosen, but that it couldn't be made public yet until contracts are signed.
- c. Pollinator update- O'Connell reported that there is a good planting list now available. They are waiting for Bob Dirico from the DPW to respond with the next steps. Martin reported that Dennis Duff will be available to assist with the design.
- d. Ongoing Orders of Conditions
 - i. 650 Pleasant- Schwab reported they are working on relocating the chiller and generator. The slopes on the western edge of the site are showing some erosion from the winter's snow so she will request they re-seed that area when the relocation work is complete.

Motion: Fairbairn made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 9:55 PM. O'Connell seconded the motion.

Poll: A poll was taken, and all members agreed to adjourn the meeting at 9:55 PM.