



TOWN OF WATERTOWN
Conservation Commission
Administration Building
149 Main Street
WATERTOWN, MASSACHUSETTS 02472

Leo Martin, Chairperson
Maria P. Rose, Vice Chair
Charles C. Bering, Member
Patrick W. Fairbairn, Member
Jamie O'Connell, Member
Colleen Egan, Member

Telephone (617) 972-6426
Facsimile (617) 926-7778
www.watertown-ma.gov
Susan C. Jenness, Assistant

MINUTES

Meeting Date: Wednesday, October 9, 2020, 7:00 PM, Remote Meeting by Zoom and Dial In

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

Absent: Colleen Egan

Also Present: Steve Engler, Katie Snyder, Jeff Black, Stan Sadkowski, Meredith Avery

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

Martin chaired the meeting and read the following.

The Town of Watertown (Conservation Commission) will hold a meeting on October 9, 2020 with the meeting starting time of 7:00 pm. In accordance with the Governor's Order Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law, G. L. c. 30A, section 20, relating to the 2020 Covid-19 emergency and to avoid group congregation, this meeting had remote opportunities for participation with public access provided by emailing the agent at lschwab@watertown-ma.gov.

Martin called the meeting to order and asked Schwab to take a roll call of members present. Egan was expected not to show as a result of loss of electricity due to the storm. Martin commenced the meeting without her presence.

1. Certificate of Compliance- 64 Pleasant St.

Steve Engler attended the meeting to report on the status of the site improvements that were made to the façade of the building, as allowed by the Conservation Commission in 2017. He said all work was completed in accordance with the Order of Conditions, and that erosion control measures were removed in 2019. He reported the dogwood trees along the parking lot and beside the DCR had been removed and replace with birch trees.

Fairbairn asked for a report on the condition of the new trees and whether they looked like they would be thriving into the future. Engler said they were looking good and that the river birch arrived somewhat small but are now very healthy and will grow larger.

Rose asked if it was correct the plans were drawn by Sasaki. Engler replied yes. She also asked if the project was filed at the Registry of Deeds. Engler replied it had been filed.

Motion: A motion was made by Rose to allow the Certificate of Compliance at 64 Pleasant St. Fairbairn seconded the motion.

Poll: A unanimous poll was reached to issue the certificate of compliance for the work completed at 64 Pleasant St.

2. Informational Overview- 57 Coolidge Ave

Katie Snyder of National Development gave an overview of the proposed development at the former Mount Auburn Tennis Club site located at 57 Coolidge Ave. She welcomed feedback and guidance from the Commission as the team works on filing a formal Notice of Intent in the coming months. Martin mentioned that he and Schwab had walked the site with the development team recently to get an in-person look at the site's natural features.

Snyder explained the existing conditions of the site, which include a perennial stream that runs through the site bisecting it into two distinct areas. She said they hope to pull back the excessive paving on the site so that it is further away from the stream. They intend to make the stream a central feature of the site's design, with public accessibility and ecological improvement. The use of the site will be as a lab building occupying the eastern side of the site, with a parking structure located on the western side. Snyder explained these would be connected via a new overhead pedestrian bridge and the existing ground-level pedestrian bridge, which would be maintained.

Snyder said they are aware of the resource area restrictions surrounding the stream, and have already adjusted the site plan to keep those in mind after early direction and feedback from the Conservation Agent. She said they have taken a lot of time to figure out how best to fit an efficient parking garage and drive aisle on the western end of the site while keeping the 50-foot no build zone in mind to the greatest extent possible. They are also prioritizing pedestrian pathways along both sides of the stream to create a pleasant nature experience. They have had initial conversations with surrounding property owners as well as with the DCR about potential future connections to other sites. The DCR property to the south is a particular focus, as the team understands the DCR doesn't currently have the funding to open that site up to the public but everyone recognizes it as a great opportunity. Snyder said they will continue to talk with DCR about what can be done to work together.

Meredith Avery from VHB discussed the project overview and goals from a wetland resource and stormwater management perspective. She outlined the resources on site, including the perennial stream, bordering vegetated wetlands to the rear of the property,

and a small intermittent stream. She said the impact to the wetlands is limited to restoration, with a goal of increasing species diversity through new plantings. Avery stated that there is opportunity to take stormwater that is not currently being treated and treating it to meet stormwater management goals, with a particular focus on phosphorus reduction. She noted that as the site currently exists, much of the area within the 50-foot No Build Zone is paved or disturbed. The top of bank is very well-defined because the stream is inside a steep channel. Avery showed diagrams illustrating the effort the team has made to de-pave the site, especially within the 50-foot No Build Zone, to provide a buffer to the stream. She pointed out there are certain parts of the parking garage that are within the 50-foot NBZ, and noted that maintaining that NBZ is a major goal of the local bylaw. She said they've tried to configure everything to respect that boundary as much as they could, and have achieved an 81% reduction in impervious area within the NBZ. Avery said they recognize it is within the Commission's jurisdiction to say whether anything can be built within the NBZ. She also briefly discussed the plan's stormwater goals and methods, which include employing permeable hardscape, bioretention areas, rain gardens, and potential subsurface infiltration. Other goals include erosion control, reduction in total suspended solids, phosphorus removal, reconstruction of an on-site drainage system, and restoration of the natural water cycle.

O'Connell asked whether the proposed solar canopies on both rooftops and above the surface parking would have gutters or other drainage mechanisms. Snyder responded that they are just beginning to evaluate the solar potential of the site. Jeff Black of VHB noted that they are looking at opportunities both to infiltrate where it is possible and surface-level retention where necessary. O'Connell said that people often underestimate the stormwater benefit of parking lot solar canopies because they help cut down on salt and other pollutants that can get washed into resources from parking lots. She also pointed out that, even with this project including a parking garage, there are still a lot of surface parking spots, and she wondered whether they were all necessary or if there is opportunity to further de-pave the site. Snyder responded that they've strived to keep some parking near the building for visitors while employees would utilize the garage. She feels from a market perspective this is the ratio that tenants will look for, but they'll continue to look at it and see if there are ways to be more efficient. Schwab noted that after an initial conversation the team did pull the parking further from the stream on the right-hand side of the site, and she expects the conversation will continue to evolve as the Town transportation planner gets involved.

Bering said he's generally concerned about the stream and wonders whether they have any data about the water quality, because the two ponds on the adjacent sites have historically been contaminated. He also wondered about the volume of flow during storm surge, given that this is a large municipal storm drain area. Stan Sadkowski of VHB stated they are very familiar with the Sawins Pond history and drainage area, and they are doing what they can to minimize risk to human health and the ecology of the site. He noted there is currently no risk to human health. Avery noted that there is no evidence of flow all the way up the stream bank, as it is quite steep and several feet deep. Black stated that they would be disconnecting the existing connection to the municipal storm system. Bering asked about the ownership and condition of the outfall and the stop logs. Martin said that

they are owned by DPW so they control the height of the pond, but that Schwab could check on the condition of the logs. Schwab said she would be happy to do so.

Rose said she felt the rendering make it look like an inviting space with good connectivity to green space. She suggested that perhaps as a tradeoff for some intrusion into the 50 foot no build zone, the team could look to strongly mitigate peak flows in the stream, given that we are expecting to see more high-intensity flashy storms with climate change.

Fairbairn inquired about the tree canopy of the site, noting the strong desire of Watertown residents to improve the town's tree canopy in order to meet climate resilience goals. He also encouraged the team to consider the future of transportation and the potential for rehabilitating the parking garage into another use if private car use drastically reduces in the more distant future.

Martin said he appreciated how much of an improvement this would be over current conditions and echoed other comments about looking at potentially reducing the amount of surface parking. He also asked for confirmation of the public accessibility of the entire corridor. Snyder responded that the entire stream corridor and related pathways will all be fully accessible to the public.

Rose asked about the use of the building, specifically whether there is any retail planned for the ground floor. Snyder responded that it will be strictly office use for life science tenants. Martin and Schwab thanked the development team for a helpful conversation.

3. Minutes- September 8, 2020

After minor modifications, a motion was made to accept the minutes from the September 8, 2020 meeting.

Motion: Bering made a motion to accept the minutes as modified. Rose seconded the minutes.

Poll: A poll was taken and the motion to accept the minutes as modified was accepted.

4. Mount Auburn Cemetery vernal pool reporting

Fairbairn explained that since he is going to be stepping down from his seat on the Conservation Commission at some time in the near future, he has begun an initiative to carefully plan the legacy he intends to leave when that time comes. One of the legacy projects chosen by Fairbairn is to leave in place is a template for an annual report to be used to inventory selected amphibian populations at the vernal pool and at other wetlands in the Mt. Auburn Cemetery, for completion each year by the Cemetery. Fairbairn explained that the report will enable members of the CC to depend upon the compilation of a standardized record each year, at a comparable time each year. Members of the CC thanked Fairbairn for his efforts.

5. Whitney Hill Park Update

Fairbairn explained that at the annual meeting last spring, it was reported by an abutter that dog walkers are parking their vehicles on the corner of Marshall St. and Oliver Rd. where there is a lack of signage to state the rule that dogs are to be on leash in Whitney Hill. Fairbairn recommended that members of the CC have a sign made to hang at that location of the perimeter of the park for dog owners to see before entering the park. Fairbairn also expressed a desire to create a map of Whitney Hill to be made available at the other two kiosks that have been placed at either end the park. The group discussed that they could ask members of Town Council to fund the signs as basic improvements made to Whitney Hill.

Rose expressed she would like to reach out to a member of the Newton Conservation Commission who created very attractive wayfinding maps that are in use in Newton. She volunteered to look into this connection to help Fairbairn with his vision of creating a map for Whitney Hill.

6. Agent Report

- a. **CPA update-** Rose reported that Martin and Fairbairn have stepped up to assist the CPC with the draft plan, which is divided into the three sections: Historic Preservation, Affordable Housing and Open Space. Rose reported there were site visits to the Arsenal Park and the Commanders Mansion to view some of the assets held by the Town.
- b. **Recap of MACC Environmental Law webinar (Maria Rose)-** Rose reported that she attended a few webinars given by the MACC to learn about legal issues related to Conservation Commissions business. She explained that numerous case studies were reviewed during the program for attendees to learn how legal issues may arise as a result of mistakes being made in the determinations made by the members of the Commission. She said it was a lot of information and that she felt a need to go back and review the webinar in the future to be certain she got the most out of the program. She said she would be happy to share more information with any members who were interested.

c. Ongoing Orders of Conditions

i. Arsenal Park- Phases A and B

Phase A- Schwab reported that excavation has been completed for the rain gardens, and that the catch basins have been installed. The trees for the landscaped “bosque” area have been shipped up and will be planted shortly.

Phase B- Schwab reported that members of the Community Garden group met on site to view the planned garden area, and they will be working on a list of their needs.

CDM Smith will attend the Conservation Commission meeting next month with an informational update about Phase B.

- ii. **Arsenal Yards-** Schwab began reporting on Building F and Building G and then cut out due to technical difficulties resulting from the storm.
- iii. **330 Pleasant-** after reconnecting for a brief minute, Schwab reported that pruning and planting is mostly completed. Schwab continued to experience technical difficulties so her updates were brief.

Motion: Fairbairn made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:50 PM. Rose seconded the motion.

Poll: A unanimous poll was reached to adjourn the meeting at 8:50 PM.