

53 River Street Master Plan Committee
Meeting Minutes
May 2, 2018

Agenda was provided in advance by Selby.

Members present: Bill Klauer, Peter Berry, Pete Hocknell, Bob Whittlesey, Cami Duquet, Lou York, Bill Alesbury, John Cook, Don Boyle. Absent: Michele Holland.

Guests: Paul Malchodi, Corey York (DPW Dir.), Bettina Abe (Natural Resources Assistant)

1. Acceptance of 4-8-2018 Minutes was deferred until the next meeting on May 30. There will not be a meeting on May 16.
2. Amanda Pebler from Conway School of Landscape Design was put on speaker phone to attend the meeting via conference call.
3. Corey York, Town of Acton DPW Director, attended today's meeting to provide feedback on the possibility of making River Street one way in order to fit a sidewalk onto that narrow road. Corey said there is just barely enough room for a sidewalk and two lanes now. Either the northern slope would need to be excavated with retaining walls built (as on High Street in some sections) or a widening of River Street beyond the guardrail and into the floodplain would be possible. The Sidewalk Committee has a sidewalk on River Street listed rather high on priority list. Speed has a concern on River Street, so traffic counter was set up. Some cars were going 55. If River St. were one-way, design would provide the church more on-street parking. There are many ideas, but there is no design yet, as there are many factors to consider. Peter B. asked what's needed legally to convert a street to one-way. Corey replied that an amendment to traffic rules and vote of acceptance by Board of Selectmen (BOS) would be required. He does not think State (MA DOT) needs to approve it. There are no significant accident statistics to inform a decision one way or another. There is ledge under the streets in the neighborhood that might require blasting for widening River Street. The State is looking to improve Piper-Taylor crossing of Route 2, to possibly mitigate huge lines of traffic. DOT is limited to the scope of that intersection. Could it be one way just from River/School to the Lazaro/Park site. Corey says the State will get involved at that point since it is a "mid-block" stop. Any proposed change would require a public meeting for neighbor input and preclude creating worse traffic problems. River St. could use a speed signage or perhaps a speed limit change. To legally change speed limit, must do traffic study; determined by speed of 85% of drivers, and that's considered safe and reasonable. All new posted speed limits have to go to Mass DOT, then back to town for approval. Part of the ***Modernization Act*** allows communities to determine safety zones. Gov. Baker had promised lower speed limits in Boston. Examples of High Street sidewalk project were given along with costs. River Street would need about 5-6' wall. Factors are time and money, but would not be prohibitive to build and fit a sidewalk into a 2-way River Street. Peter Berry says sidewalk funding is not an issue. Rather, it's getting easements from property owners to fit a sidewalk partially on his/her frontage. Each homeowner approves landscaping as it affects their home value. What about building the sidewalk below the guardrail, rather like a trail along the brook? Corey attended a FEMA event where they built sidewalk in flood plain and sometimes it is under water. If there's heavy wet season it may be under water. If dam were taken down, would that change things? Corey said it depends how it plays out. If dam is taken down, it could change the dynamic of the flood plain, yes. What about snow plowing? Now pushing snow both sides. If one way street, then you would have more room for snow. Water has never come up to guard rail, maybe only 12-18" below. There are many culverts directly stormwater from School Street, under River Street and into Ft. Pond Brook. Do we need to be mindful of cost differential? Corey says it will be expensive either way. It has been surveyed including 15' off the edge of road on both sides. Corey has not yet initiated a one way designation in his experience. Updated traffic study would come first.

There are 1,400 cars per day traveling on River St., which is on the lower end. Parker St. has 5,000 trips per day. It may be better to consider a sidewalk on the Ft. Pond Brook side of the road requiring less easements/less houses on that side. Amanda asked if speeding is caused by commuters hurrying to train station. Corey says yes, mostly the morning commute if running late for train. Fire and Police will have to provide input. The committee thanked Corey, and he departed.

4. May 9 Conway School Public Forum: Amanda reported their preparations are on schedule, and she and Eliza are enthusiastic. They plan a brief presentation at first. Amanda requested feedback on committee's main goals they want to gain from the forum. The committee asked several questions: Do we want to prioritize features within confines of park/parcel space? Will you gauge what participants want in the public space and progress from there? What questions do you want answered by community members to push design forward? Bill Klauer says problem is property is a maze of clutter and it's hard to envision a park. If it were cleaned up first, would we see it differently? Amanda says it sounds like the people have had no access to the site. Introduce people to the site who have never seen it. Please include "existing conditions" photos for the forum participants during introduction.

Committee suggests Amanda and Eliza propose a few general parcel design concepts. Amanda replied that she and Eliza want to hear wishes and concerns prior to proposing set plans in order to up with something that people feel they listened to. Amanda says there are a few goals the town came up with in its warrant article town meeting presentation: park, housing, river-walk; but none of these are legally fixed, so theoretically it could be modified. However, committee feels Amanda and Eliza have to come in with something people can react to. Amanda says she could bring several 5,000 sq. foot plans with some conceptual designs and some combinations of layouts. Committee says yes, bringing several options is a good idea. There can be table groups with base maps with ideas and elements to produce own ideas.

Indicate to attendees that this park/parcel is a blank page, and neither the committee nor the Conway design process is trying to force any one concept; and we want people to help fill in details. Should be pretty open process. Some water feature/park ecological feature, whether or not to include housing. Process will be 15-20 mins presentation to orient everyone to the site, then break-out session. Many folks don't know anything about the site/parcel. Please show Google Earth shots, and assume folks don't know where it is. They have the AUTO CAD and photos.

Dam removal is hard to conceptualize and reducing the floodplain is an interesting ramification of that. Has a hydrologist or engineer evaluated the site yet? Peter B. says no, we need to find money to do that. We need to tell people that we do not know what the hydrology will be. The State likes dam removal. We have people who can share the history of the park. Set up selectmen's table. Then break-out groups. Want to get people engaged. What about people coming in highly opinionated about the site? Can people express their opinions for the record? Amanda says they do want to gather the opinions. Eliza and Amanda will distribute questionnaires for participants to fill out to provide feedback. This will endure in the public record of the forum. There will be another public forum towards the end of the month. Usually the second meeting is presenting some design alternatives as a result of the community feedback portion. Amanda says we could have another way to get input, such as publicizing a town-wide online survey. She has conducted a community survey at another project, which proved effective in eliciting ideas.

Let Amanda and Eliza know if the committee wants her help setting up a public survey. Peter requests Amanda and Eliza prepare a draft agenda for structure of the evening and provide to the committee in advance. Amanda and Eliza plan to get out to the site next week. There will be one final design proposal by the end of June. But at the May 25 meeting, they sit and have 3 different designs coalesced with the committee. If people can't come, then Amanda and Eliza have to come back here to get enough input to make final design. Their email is acton2018@csld.edu. Amanda and Eliza will send the committee a video of their May 25 presentation. Then committee could watch video of 3 design alternatives.

Next meeting will be May 30 in Acton, which is the Wednesday after the 25th. Amanda and Eliza will confirm attendance on May 30 after they check their schedules.

In the meantime committee requests that Amanda and Eliza let them know asap what time their presentation will be on May 25th (this is the Friday of Memorial Day Weekend) so members may plan to attend if possible.

Peter Berry will ask Lisa Tomyl to send out the flier again to all Boards and Committees and ask everyone who has a bulletin board in their office/department/library to post it.

5. Historical Study: we will need a study before any work can be done. So funding will need to be sought for that. David Honn estimates it may cost approximately \$10,000.00. Does the committee want to get some quotes from an archaeological company to do the study? Peter says at next meeting the committee will create a list of all the different phases of park development (eg. Hydro and engineering study, archaeology study, dam integrity study, demolition and site prep., park construction, housing construction, roadway updates, etc.) and prioritize the elements required in order to build up all the back ground info. This will enable grants to be sought for the phases. Bettina will send out Docushare information to all committee members.

The Committee thanked Amanda for her participation.

Meeting adjourned 8:50PM.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Bettina D. Abe, Natural Resources Assistant

babe@acton-ma.gov

978-929-6634