

53 River Street Committee Meeting Minutes

Acton Town Hall, Room 204

May 30, 2018

7:00 PM

Committee Chairman, Peter Berry called the meeting to order at 7:05.

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

1. The meeting minutes from April 18, 2018 were approved unanimously with corrections. Meeting minutes from May 2, 2018 were approved unanimously without any changes. Meeting minutes from May 9, 2018 were approved unanimously without any changes.
2. A possible Funding source from the Massachusetts Division of Environmental Restoration (DER) was explained by Peter Berry. Bettina Abe, Natural Resources Asst. is willing to fill out the grant application/Request for Response and she will submit the draft to the committee to discuss at next meeting June 13. Bob Whittlesey stated support for applying for this funding, but suggests keeping public housing as an option for potential use of the property. Bettina stated that all uses of the property originally presented by Janet Adachi at town meeting will be written into the grant application. Pete Hocknell voiced support for application because it would fund hydrological studies. Bill K. says the committee is supposed to be submitting a master plan of what the property will ultimately be so, he questions how could the committee apply for funding for property use before the committee has decided exactly what the design will be. Peter B. says certain technical information is needed regardless of the ultimate dispensation. One member stated there is no harm applying for the DER priority project status because it does not restrict or limit the committee to any one design. Peter Berry proposed completing an application, reviewing it, and deciding whether or not to submit at next meeting. The Committee agrees.
3. Conway School Students, Eliza Cress and Amanda Pebles presented their Masters in Ecological Design project, entitled *Restoration, Redevelopment and Recreation*. They reported that survey results were based on 160 responses. 60% of respondents said they would access the property by vehicle. 75% respondents want to see public park highlighting historical significance and 58% would like to see conservation. 13% would like to see public housing. Three conceptual, "rough" design alternatives were shown. First "Living Near a Flood Plain" shows public park space and senior housing, which would be located in northeast corner with 17 parking spots and 5 public spots. It would include a multi use recreational path to connect with Assabet River Rail Trail (ARRT) a 0.25 miles up the street. The apartment building is situated close to the brook. There is a concern about flooding in the design. Flood resilient design would need to be considered. Includes historical kiosk. Public access was not considered to the 5 acres above the dam in this design. The second design was called "Conservation Conscious." It would return the property and brook to as close to a natural state as possible. Six public parking spaces, ecological educational panels on site, all paved and disturbed areas removed and naturalized, including riparian buffer for wildlife. Design includes most trails of all 3 designs, including a seasonally used trail designed to be flood-resilient. The third design would be like a "Commemorative Park." Fifteen public parking spaces, River Street one-way; keeps old foundation of cinderblock building as a pavilion and platform to get close to water; boardwalks and trails; historical signage. There would also be public restrooms. Park elements would be flood-resilient.

Students requested feedback. Committee members' questions and comments:

- Why do you have any non-ADA compliant trails? Answer is pre-developed area is more conducive to ADA due to slope than the acreage above the dam.
- Have you considered costs? Answer: Selby suggested they not take a lot of their time preliminarily, but they will provide some cost estimates ultimately.
- If dam were removed, could there be a bridge to other side, and would it be beneficial? It was not advisable to put any trails in proximity to MBTA rail and steep slope for safety.
- Preserve all options.
- Presentation helps go forward with DER application.
- Excellent presentation and good to see 3 different ideas. It is a helpful resource for us.
- Great first pass for this project. It will give us something better than a blank sheet of paper to work from.
- Please put presentation on DocuShare and Committee web page.
- Is there any reason why there cannot be a western entry point to parcel? Answer: steep slope and access; delineated wetland makes any construction difficult to get permitted.
- Community feedback survey percentages for how people would arrive at the site seem confusing and misleading. Answer: it is out of 160 respondents.

Peter Berry asked: What's next with this process?

Amanda and Eliza replied: They want to know which plan to select to move forward with. They will present a final design to the town. Please provide them feedback by Friday. They would like the design to help inform a DER Application and any other grant funding in future. They will not be coming back to the town. They will provide the final design for the town to share and they really hope it is utilized going forward and "not collect dust somewhere."

Public comments:

- Will there be night time lighting? Concerned about light pollution and night time noise.
- Could the dam be restored to generate electricity? Answer: there is likely insufficient water to propel, but a hydrologist would answer definitively.
- Be sure to consider actual flooding as documented by residents, in addition to FEMA maps.
- Would like to see elevation showing houses relative to other buildings on site.
- Prefer the conservation options; please buy other brownfields for building housing. Please do not build housing on this property.
- Likes all options including housing; need hydrologist and funding for the study.
- Some cottages and villages for senior housing might be nice.
- What does getting rid of the dam mean? When standing on site, Anne Forbes saw some structures or partial structures remaining. Can you preserve parts of it?

*Bettina replied that DER study would include an historical analysis. Any elements found could be incorporated into future design. Conway students suggested that many stone elements of the dam can likely remain. It would be more of a partial dam removal than entire dam removal. That would be incorporated into final design.

- Likes access to the water via Commemorative Park design keeping foundation of old building so one can get close to the water. Encourage the natural park. Please be sensitive to light pollution in the neighborhood.
- Thank you excellent and creative job. Question: where would a bike path begin from and where would it end so it is not an isolated segment? It's a popular road for cyclists. Really likes access to waterway as this is rare opportunity in town.
- Suggest housing be put back in with boardwalk upstream. Question: if housing is included will there be less pavement than there is now? **Yes; Students will send that data.**
- Question about accessibility. It is likely that all features will be required to be fully as accessible as is feasible.
- Request percentages of pervious to impervious. **They will provide that data.**

- Like to see combination of Commemorative and Conservation models. De-couple the one-way or two-way street conundrum because all models could be one or the other. Concerns about one way east to west.
- The first mill was actually 1750. Thank you for the schemes and background work. As an abutter it would have been helpful to show a Google Earth scale, including abutting houses. Favors #2 and #3 and not public housing. There is already lots of public housing, 40B's and Habitat for Humanity in the area. It is a rare ecologically-sensitive site and should have most of the acreage be devoted to ecology, not housing. Wants access to the water.
- Peter Berry asked about accessibility in wetlands and believes accessible trails and features are required if feasible and not precluded by geo-physical or financial constraints.
- Students replied that ADA accessibility is not ruled out for any element.
- Peter B. says the town is light-sensitive and has converted streetlights to LED. Conservation land in Acton is closed at dusk. If it were a Recreational park like NARA, would we light it? Lower lumens are more friendly to animals/wildlife. The committee will look at that.

Period of Public comments ended.

Request for show of hands from attendees

Peter Berry asked, should we do a show of hands/informal survey which option the attendees like best? He stated that in addition, what the committee decides could also be a combination of elements.

The audience was asked how many would choose the following design:

Plan 1. Living Near the Flood Plan: 3 hands raised.

Plan 2. Conservation Conscious: 14 hands raised

Plan 3. Commemorative park: 11 hands raised

Committee Discussion and Committee Comments:

- The numbers tell us that a combination of conservation and historical elements is most popular, leaving out housing.
- Leave housing to another time and place.
- Bob W. Wants to keep housing option. It would be a great advantage to people living there to have lovely park next to them.
- Proposal is for affordable senior housing, by Housing Authority. There is a waiting list for seniors waiting on list. Can you prioritize for populations like retired teachers? How far is it a walk 0.4 mi. to the T.
- Mr. Cook is concerned having housing will be too much of a convoluted design. Do not think it makes sense to keep working on all 3 concepts. The May 9 public forum, the public survey and now this meeting all prioritize conservation and historical models. It would be a mistake at this point to try and move ahead with all 3.
- Bill Klauer – adamant against anything that would get rid of ecological balance. Let's not ruin it and put something different in there. Look more closely. He is for the second and third proposal and a balance of that.
- Peter B asked Bill K. : was there a dam there in 1700's? Bill K. says the earliest mill is down at intersection of Parker and River from late 1600's.
- A committee member stated that we are not looking for a final design to present to BOS; we are looking for what Conway students can create. Housing is not gone forever. Still could have housing. Let Conway students finish their project and graduate!
- What about the condition of the dam in all 3 scenarios? Eliza and Amanda replied that Selby told them to assume dam would be breached. After speaking to an ecologist, Eliza and Amanda were told to consider a partial breach. They think any funding will depend on opening the dam because there is scarce funding for maintaining old dams and cost must be borne by owner. For the Conway students they assume dam will be partially breached.

Peter Asks: If dam were to stay and be restored, could all 3 be built? Conway students are uncertain. The upstream portion would submerge trails and it would be hard to build and maintain due to inundation. So likely no trails upstream of dam.

-Removing dam is more consistent with conservation concept. But the two other options may not need to be mutually exclusive by having housing and a park.

-Can all 3 of your plans be combined? Conway students want "one phenomenal design." They think it would muddle things. They could cram all onto one site; but think it would be more compelling as one cohesive design.

-Michele Holland makes the following motion:

Let move forward with a design combining both "Living in the Floodplain" and "Commemorative Park. "

The motion is seconded.

Discussion:

-Need dam assessed.

-Keep a small portion of property for housing going forward.

Vote:

- In favor of the motion: 5
- Opposed to the motion: 2
- Chair abstains.
- Associate members Pete Hocknell and Cami Duquet both voted "NO" as they were opposed to the motion, but their votes were not counted.

Motion carries.

Chairman asks Eliza and Amanda, do you have enough direction to proceed? Students replied in affirmative.

Peter Hocknell stated for the record that this decision does not take into consideration the public input that ecological conservation was by far the most popular design scenario.

Meeting adjourned 9:05

Next meeting will be held on June 13, 2018 at 50 Audubon Drive (Recreation Dept.)

Respectfully submitted by Bettina D. Abe, Natural Resources Assistant