

Minutes
Watertown Conservation Commission
Lower Hearing Room
Wednesday, October 7, 2015
7:30 p.m.

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

Commission Members Absent: Maria Rose, Louis Taverna

Staff Present: Christopher J. Hayward, Susan C. Jenness

1) Whitney Hill Park – Informational Discussion to aid in creating Annual Report for Town Manager-Pallotta McDermott elected to open the discussion on Whitney Hill Park as the first item on record for the evening.

Pallotta McDermott introduced Conservation Commission (CC) member Patrick W. Fairbairn. Fairbairn has been involved with Whitney Hill as the co-facilitator of a study program involving local high school biology students who are conducting a series of scientific studies of the biological conditions at the 15 acre plot of open space he characterized as an area of reasonably original vegetation left over from pre-colonial times having withstood a large degree of neglect over time.

Fairbairn introduced the area referred to as Whitney Hill as the town's back yard and explained that it has become the responsibility of the CC to advise the town what to do with. The CC in turn asked the abutters of Whitney Hill to participate in the public process taking place at this evening's meeting in order to collaborate with them in the process of what will become a report to town management for the purpose of making recommendations about the future of Whitney Hill.

Fairbairn made reference throughout the public process to the biology students' ongoing study of the mature, woody vegetated area that is uncovering important information about climate, soil and human effect on the hill over its years in existence. Highlights of the students work were brought into the discussion during the public process in order to create context around issues, in particular around environmental ones being raised.

Fairbairn invited attendees to ask questions about the student's work at Whitney Hill, to feel free to make comments on what they see as frequent users of the space and to make suggestions about what they think could improve the space, all of which could be integrated into the report to town management.

The CC, had invited abutters of Whitney Hill in a standard letter to attend the discussion scheduled as an agenda item within the regularly scheduled October meeting. The meeting was also advertised on the Town's Website. Recipients of the letter were urged to invite all other interested parties to attend.

Below is a list of concrete suggestions made by attendees at the public meeting.

Public Discussion:

- Post of the Manager's Report on line prior to the next annual meeting for abutters of Whitney Hill.
- Resist hanging plaques, markings and paving.
- Resist all notions of paving of any kind inside the park.
- Be aware that there seems to be drug activity going on inside the Marshall St. side of the park.
- Schedule a regular annual clean up each year.
- Agent Hayward offered to work with a resident by soliciting supplies for the annual clean up from Public Works.
- Addition of trash barrels should be considered but only if they would be checked with regularity and at a frequency which left them properly emptied.
- Positive signage was suggested at both ends of the park and including plaques detailing the historical significance of Whitney Hill.
- Members of the public were curious about whether or not dogs are required to be on leash when inside the reserve. It was determined that they are to be on leash at Whitney Hill as in all town parks.
- One member of the public stated that she felt unsafe about allowing her daughter to walk through the space on her own. She suggested a call box be installed. Multiple members of the public disagreed with her assessment and urged her to make protocols such as using cell phones and buddying up with other walkers to ensure safety to address the resident's concerns.
- A resident suggested signage at both ends of the park which would explain what the park is and he also suggested that an increase in usage would lead to a safer environment. Safety of the environment was not a reoccurring theme at this meeting.
- Post invitations to this public meeting at both ends of the park which would solicit greater attendance and participation in this well attended event.
- Benches overlooking Victory Field would be great so that people could sit and watch the activity at the town's beloved town playing field.
- An attendee wondered if DCR had jurisdiction of this area which it does not.
- A resident stated that they felt enormously comforted by the process of this public meeting. A number of others agreed that the process of the evening made them feel positive as well.
- A resident voiced being puzzled as to why the town took over the stewardship of Whitney Hill. It was explained that while the town has stewardship of Whitney Hill, the public was being afforded this process to have their own

public input to make their own recommendations to be delivered to the town management in the form of a report.

- It was suggested that the annual clean up being considered at Whitney Hill should be incorporated into the Biology Student Program being co-facilitated by Patrick Fairbairn as a step in the education process.
- A resident asked Fairbairn if the ongoing study at Whitney Hill included the study of animals and other species. He replied that it had not yet but there are intentions to expand the areas of study in the future. In the meantime he offered statistics that some 57 bird species have been noted at Whitney Hill by a town resident who worked for the Audobon Society.
- A member of the public was interested in obtaining a copy of the report to the town council and the town manager when it is officially submitted. The Agent stated that as a service of the Conservation/Preservation Office, a copy of the report will be posted on the web site, and also sent out by the “notify me” function.

Pallotta McDermott thanked members of the public for their enthusiasm and willingness to participate in this collaborative process with the Conservation Commission. She was pleased that the event was so well attended. She assured all residents that once the report is officially submitted to the town manager a copy will be made available on the web site and for all subscribers for “notify me”. She asked members of the public to sign up for “notify me” and to be in touch with Christopher Hayward, the Conservation Agent with any further comments, suggestions or to volunteer to help with the clean-up activities expected to take place as a result of the public’s input in this public forum.

Public Hearing Closed

- 2) **Public Hearing-Extension request for Order of Conditions -DEP 321-0133, WWO-08-02 DCR, Watertown Riverfront Park Restoration Project, Charles River Road.** Dan Driscoll - Director Recreational Facilities Planning, representative.

Rick Corsi represented the DCR for the purposes of the request for a three year extension On the Order of Conditions for the Watertown Riverfront Restoration Project.

Corsi stated the Phase II of the project was turning out quite well and that DCR would like to extend the contract until the spring for planting and also to improve some of the paths along the river.

Public Comments

Maureen O’Sullivan of Franklin St. voiced her concern about erosion control issues and she wanted some clarification about how the trees are being selected that she has seen coming down.

Hayward, the Conservation Agent and Tree Warden responded that there have been some questions about funding for getting the work done. There are no new trees being taken down, only the trees that were previously marked for removal.

Elodia Thomas stated that she feels she is looking at Watertown and seeing what has been happening in Cambridge along the river and that this is not making her happy. She requested immediate education about what is happening with the trees and concluded that Watertown needed to do a better job.

O'Sullivan asked if interested parties could be taken on a walk through with DCR before there is a part of a project where trees will be taken down.

Corsi explained to Pallotta McDermott that what is happening is DCR is trying to create scenic vistas along the river.

O'Sullivan and Thomas both agreed that there was a disagreement on what a scenic vista is, and what needs to be happening is more open discussion on what is wanted.

Pallotta McDermott directed members of the public present with ongoing concerns about the trees and the spaces along the Charles which are part of Watertown to contact Mr. Corsi directly to receive an explanation.

Martin assured the members of the public that the CC was reviewing all the work being done on the river by the DCR. He stated that these projects had been reviewed and were approved by members of the CC. He gave her a detailed description of how the CC goes through reviewing a project, including also individual site visits with the agent and staff of DCR.

Motion: Martin made a motion to extend the Order of Conditions DEP 321-0133, WWO-08-02. DCR, Watertown Riverfront Park Restoration Project, Charles River Road. Fairbairn seconded the motion.

Vote: A unanimous vote is reached to extend the order of conditions.

Public Hearing Closed.

Agent Comments

Agent Hayward asked Pallotta McDermott if he could take an opportunity to address members of the public present who were seeking education and further information about the work being done along the river. Hayward took over the discussion and offered a briefing of each project now scheduled to happen along the river and around town that concern the CC. In addition to the briefing Agent Hayward agreed to take members of the

public on a walk- through of the Greenough Boulevard to explain all the details of the project as a response to communication being asked for by O'Sullivan and Thomas.

Public Meeting Closed

3) Old Business

The Agent reported that a new tree had been planted at 600 Pleasant St. right at the lights next to Russo's.

Elodia Thomas asked if it would be possible for CC members to write a brief biography of their professional experience and make it available to the public. She stated that it would be very helpful so that she could best determine who she should direct her inquiries to. Pallota McDermott said that she would discuss that request with the Agent and that the commission would get back to her.

4) Agent Update/New Business

- a. Community Gardens group – Discussion on possible Community Garden at Arsenal Park-**The Community Gardens Discussion was continued to the following CC meeting due to an unexpected death in the family of a presenter. The members of the CC wished condolences to the family and said they would look forward to seeing them at the following month's meeting.

Meeting Adjourned