

MINUTES
MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON
THE SAGAMORE CREEK LAND
7:30 A.M. – Thursday, October 1, 2015
City Hall – Conference Room A

1. CALL TO ORDER:

Due to illness, Chairman Spear turned the meeting over to Councilor Dwyer who called the meeting to order at 7:30 a.m.

Members Present:

Councilor Eric Spear, Chair

Councilor Chris Dwyer

John Mikolajcyk, Resident

Lennie Mullaney, School Board Representative

Alison Pyott, Resident

Kory Sirmaian, Recreation Board Representative

Allison Tanner, Conservation Commission Representative

David Moore, Community Development Director, City Manager Designee

Staff Present:

Peter Rice, Public Works Director (7:30 – 8:00 a.m.)

2. Consideration of Minutes – August 18, 2015

Ms. Tanner requested that discussion regarding the relocation of the fence/gate be added to the minutes. The change was agreed to Ms. Tanner moved to accept the August 18, 2015 minutes as amended. Seconded by Mr. Sirmaian and passed.

3. Introduction and Summary of Past Work – Chair

Councilor Dwyer gave a brief summary of the work done by the Blue Ribbon Committee beginning in January and explained that the complete report is to be submitted to the City Council by December 21, 2015. She stated she expects another working meeting of the Committee to be held as well as another evening public input session prior to finalizing the recommendation for improvements to the Sagamore Creek land parcel.

David Moore gave a brief slide presentation of various examples of site amenities and improvements, including picnic tables, enclosures, restroom facilities, signage, boardwalks, kiosks, trash receptacles, etc. used in similar settings as the Sagamore Creek land. He then reviewed a draft master plan which outlined the various recommendations made by the committee and where they may be implemented. Finally, he reviewed parking options A, A2, B and C and the various pros and cons of each option. In the scenarios presented, the parking is envisioned to be located within the site as opposed to the roadway itself. He concluded that the committee had previously indicated that choice A or A2, the “bulb shaped” options were favorable, as choices B and C required widening of the current road and represented further encroachment on the land.

Councilor Dwyer asked Public Works Director Rice for his suggestions and input.

Public Works Director Rice stated that the concepts presented are great and appear to be mostly

non-intrusive and passive which would require minimal services of the Public Works Department. He stated currently the area is mowed a couple of times over the summer, there is some removal of dead branches etc, and DPW provides wood chips for the trails for the cross country team. He stated that if the level of service of the department is expected to change, then the staffing level would be impacted as well as the budget. He stated as green spaces are created throughout the city, the level of services to be provided need to be part of the process.

Councilor Dwyer asked his opinion regarding providing trash receptacles or not as currently the area is carry-in, carry-out. Public Works Director Rice stated that garbage cans are provided in most of the city areas because people will dump trash regardless and feels that people expect those to be provided and that they be emptied regularly.

Councilor Dwyer asked about the dog bag dispensers. Public Works Director Rice stated he likes those as people do forget to bring bags at times.

Councilor Dwyer asked if the road would be plowed in the winter. Public Works Director Rice stated that that would be a City Council decision whether to plow or not and what type of material to use for the surface, but as people do use the property for sledding, snow shoeing, cross-country skiing etc., it probably should be plowed.

Ms. Tanner asked if there are any red flags that Mr. Rice can see going forward. Public Works Director Rice stated that ensuring the roadway configuration is coordinated with the cross country trails is important.

Councilor Spear asked if he had any preference to the bathroom facilities. Mr. Rice stated they will work with whatever option but feels that the Port-o-Potty is a tried and true option.

Mr. Sirmaian asked that assuming there are no changes to the topography, would the area be usable in the non-winter months, as the grass has been high. Mr. Rice stated that the goal of mowing these days is not to have short, perfectly manicured lawn areas but to maintain the woody feel of the area. He stated that again is a City Council decision as to the level of service and maintenance desired.

Public Works Director Rice excused himself at 8:00 a.m. to attend another meeting.

Councilor Dwyer stated that the committee needs to establish a policy and map out the locations to help identify the money expectations. She stated this area is similar to the Creek Farm as it will be low maintenance with passive use and not Peirce Island/Prescott Park usage. Ms. Tanner stated Vaughan Woods in South Berwick is also similar to this piece of land.

Councilor Dwyer stated that the committee should also decide on the Parking plan preference. Mr. Moore explained that the current plan is rudimentary and that there are certain engineering levels that need to be met. After some discussion, the committee consensus was Parking Option A as it is the least invasive and removes the parking from Jones Avenue.

Mr. Mikolajcyk asked about closing the gate at night so that people cannot party on the property after dark. He stated there is also an ongoing problem with people parking on the Elks Lodge property and feels that a powered gate with a timer would be a good solution. Ms. Tanner suggested stanchions. Councilor Dwyer stated this would need to be a policy decision in terms of access to the property and when.

Discussion ensued regarding the level of amenities to be provided on the property as the examples shown in the presentation varied from basic to elaborate and it was decided that basic was a better fit for the property but that any accommodations should be handicap accessible and

accommodating.

Some suggestions to bring forward included:

- Maintain openness of the property
- Mowing 2 – 8' passes around the perimeter a couple of times a year
- Simple picnic table
- Gravel walkways
- A covered pavilion at the top of the hill to provide shade, but no others
- Natural benches of stone, lumber at various resting spots throughout
- non-railing boardwalks and only have boardwalks near the vernal pools to keep people on the trail
- connectivity to the Urban Forestry Center
- Access near the adjacent housing development and Route 1
- Determine night time policy as there are some legitimate uses i.e., star gazing, etc.
- No open fires/camping
- Dogs allowed w/leash
- Bicycle usage

Mr. Moore stated he will find out what other similar parks have for policies for night time usage. Councilor Dwyer stated there was a huge outcry by the public when the Council was going to limit hours at public parks 4 years ago.

Councilor Dwyer stated that the Committee should hold one more working session and another night time public comment session by the end of October so that a final report can be drafted for final Council presentation. She stated that the report will be written and visual and it is important that the report state what the Committee doesn't recommend as well.

4. Public Comment

Bill Downey, Bow Street resident – asked about bicycle riding on the property.

Beth Cole - stated she lives at the end of Jones Avenue and they bear the brunt of the traffic and speeding cars and she would like to know how the new parking policy would be monitored once put in place.

Paul Houlares, Jones Avenue resident – stated he is pleased that this is going to be kept simple and urged the committee to continue with that thought going forward so as not to disturb the wildlife and vegetation on the property.

Roger Pittroff – Jones Avenue resident - stated that Public Works Director Rice spoke about plowing but is concerned with the salt as there are at least 5 endangered species that could be harmed. Next, he stated that the City needs to get permits from the Dept. of Environmental Services if anything is done to the cap area. Ms. Tanner clarified that a representative from the DES attended a meeting in March so they are aware proposed work will need to be coordinated with the State. Mr. Pittroff reiterated that there is a procedure and laws that need to be followed and they cannot move forward without the permits and no holes can be punched in the cap.

Mr. Pittroff continued stating that there is also a large problem with people doing drugs on the property and he has to call the police department quite often and he goes down with a flashlight and sees the people there.

Linda Bergeron, Jones Avenue resident – stated she doesn't know how much traffic this will attract but currently with the retirement home, rehab unit and nursing home there is already a lot of traffic and there is also truck traffic that goes to the junk yard, which is not longer a "clean" junkyard. She stated that events at the Elks Lodge also creates a traffic issue and anyone who wants to walk in the neighborhood is thankful when they make it home.

Mr. Houlares concurred with the issue regarding walking as there are people from the assisted living facility who like to walk the area and it is dangerous.

Councilor Dwyer addressed the bicycle riding question stating that there is already quite a bit of bicycles that use the trail and the Middle School has a group that ride as well. She stated that we aren't encouraging that particular use but we do want it connected with the City's Bicycle Route Master Plan.

Ms. Pyott stated that Mt. Agamenticus is an example of the balance of traffic and activity to maintain openness and character of the property.

Margot Doering, Jones Avenue resident – urged people not to get bogged down on details at this time and to focus on general concerns.

Councilor Dwyer addressed the traffic concerns stating that the Parking and Traffic Safety Committee could possibly meet with the committee to discuss sidewalks, long-term planning, etc. She also suggested that the Police Department weigh in on enforcement of the traffic as well as the drug issue and what types of signage should be posted.

Discussion ensued regarding various incidents that have occurred with speeding in the area of Broad Street as it is used as a short cut for employees of the nursing home and others and these issues were also brought up when the Middle School was proposed for the property, but nothing has been done.

Unidentified speaker – stated she supports keeping it simple and feels that kiosks and covered pavilions would be intrusive.

Councilor Dwyer asked about the salt issue. Ms. Tanner stated that there is no way that salt would be used in the area because of the vernal pools and wetlands, etc. She stated that there is a full assessment of the wildlife and wetlands of the City of Portsmouth that was conducted and is available in the Planning Department and on the website for the Blue Ribbon Committee. She stated she is the Conservation Commission representative to this committee and she is here to keep these issues in the forefront.

Mr. Pittroff asked how this can be approached without disturbing the habitat and vegetation. Councilor Dwyer stated it is important to add the educational portion to this. Councilor Spear stated that the boardwalks will help protect fragile areas.

Mr. Pittroff stated he is concerned that part of the berm is exposed to the river. Mr. Moore stated that back in March the City staff updated the DES on the Committee's work and learned about the process for making changes at the site. He advised that DES would work with the City to

see what changes might need to be made existing groundwater monitoring permit depending on the master plan goals. He stated that the DES stated that we can do no harm so we know we can't remove anything or dig down and must maintain safety and grades.

Mr. Pittroff asked about the boat launch and why this is being added when there is already one at the Urban Forestry Center right across the street. Councilor Dwyer stated that people are confused on what can and cannot be done. Mr. Pittroff stated he has a report from the State regarding the Sagamore Creek water stating it is a level 5 pollution which means no swimming is allowed and although boating is allowed, the high level of contaminants and bacteria means there should be no contact with skin. He feels that parents should be aware of this as the kids are taking water samples from the creek and does not want a boat launch added.

Mr. Moore thanked Mr. Pittroff for the information and asked if he could provide a copy. He continued that we do test the water as part of the groundwater permit monitoring requirements and coordinate annually with DES on the testing.

Councilor Dwyer stated this is low on the list because of the tidal limitations and that it is meant to be a rest area more than a boat launch.

Mr. Moore asked Mr. Downey if this area is of interest to the kayaking community. Mr. Downey stated this area is very rarely used by kayakers as there is not much to see and it is limited by the tides. He agrees that more testing needs to be done.

Margot Doering stated she would like to give her opinion on a few points; she is in favor of compost toilets, she does not want a gate because if she drives into the property, she wants to be able to get back out if stays past the allotted time; no picnic tables, but yes to natural benches.

Don Weeks, Jones Avenue resident – stated he has lived there many years and he is in favor of leaving the property as it is now.

Mr. Pittroff stated the consensus of the neighborhood is to leave the property as is.

Mary Jane Beckwith, Jones Avenue resident – stated she is offended that she was not notified at the beginning of this process and feels that there are already a lot of people who use the area and any more will only increase the traffic and become more dangerous for the children of the area. She stated that if there is a boat launch they will have to come on motorized vehicle and then have to walk a significant way to the waterway. She stated that the flora that is lost due to foot and bicycle traffic will be gone forever as they cannot be replaced by a trip to the nursery. She also is concerned with the level of contaminants in the water stating it is nice to look at but not to be in.

Discussion ensued regarding the parking area and distance to water with Councilor Dwyer clarifying that there will be no widening of the road.

Mr. Dowling stated that kayakers will not walk the distance from the parking area to the water in that area. Mr. Mikolajcyk clarified that it is only meant to be a stopping place and not a launch area.

5. Adjournment

Meeting adjourned at 9:00 a.m.