

MINUTES  
MAYOR'S BLUE RIBBON COMMITTEE ON THE  
SAGAMORE CREEK LAND  
6:30 P.M. – Wednesday, March 18, 2015  
City Hall – Conference Room B

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**1. CALL TO ORDER:**

Chairman Spear called the meeting to order at 6:30 p.m.

**Members Present:**

Councilor Eric Spear, Chair  
Councilor Chris Dwyer John  
John Mikolajczyk, Resident  
Lennie Mullaney, School Board Representative  
Kory Sirmaian, Recreation Board Representative  
Allison Tanner, Conservation Commission Representative  
John Bohenko, City Manager

**Member Absent:**

Alison Pyott, Resident

**Staff Advisors Present:**

David Moore, Community Development Director, City Manager Designee  
Peter Britz, Environmental Planner/Sustainability Coordinator

**2. Consideration of Minutes – March 4, 2015**

Ms. Mullaney moved to accept the minutes as presented. Ms. Tanner seconded the motion stating that she has noted several revisions to the recording secretary. Motion to accept as amended passed unanimously.

**3. Meeting purpose and Introduction**

Chairman Spear welcomed everyone and thanked them for attending. He provided a brief background of the formation of the Sagamore Creek Land Blue Ribbon Committee and the charge issued by Mayor Lister to develop a plan for public usage of the 66-acre city-owned parcel. A report back to the City Council shall be completed on or prior to September 21, 2015. He stated a preliminary report to the Council will be made late spring so that consultants can be hired to go forward. He further reviewed that the Committee has met several times and have reviewed the history and legal restrictions as well as a recent presentation on the landfill portion of the property. All of the presentation materials and reports are available on the City website. Finally, he stated that although there are already members of the committees/boards who represent them very well, the purpose of this meeting is to get input from other members and users of the property in terms of issues and concerns to be considered in developing a plan for public use of the parcel.

## 4. Comments from City Boards

### A. School Board

School Board member Lennie Mullaney introduced Dee Barrett, Head of the Portsmouth High School Science Department and teacher, Maddison Morris, PHS student, Stan Lyford and Michael Lyford, co-coaches of the PHS Track team.

Ms. Barrett described a multitude of activities that she and other teachers utilize the land as an outdoor classroom to study qualitative data, vernal pools, plant and insect identification, water quality analysis, climate change, invasive species, etc. She concluded that she would like to see this area remain available to the high school to continue this course.

Madison Morris, Junior class, Portsmouth High School, representing the Ecology Club, stated that the Ecology Club has met with a PHS alum who educated them on solar panels. She stated that a recent change in State law would now allow the panels to be located at a location such as the capped landfill and they feel it would be an ideal location as it is an east facing parcel. She concluded that these panels could generate power for the high school and possibly middle school as well.

Chris Rose, 8<sup>th</sup> Grade Science Teacher and Portsmouth Middle School commented from the audience that the preliminary analysis of the location for solar panels show it has the potential to power all of the schools from what is currently dead space. He stated that it is also a phenomenal learning environment for alternative energy.

Stan Lyford, retired teacher and current track coach and his son Mike, co-coach, stated they use the trails daily except during winter and they also do a lot of maintenance on the trails and would like to see the trail system stay in place.

Ms. Mullaney read into the record comments from Kathy Birse Siegel, head of the Health and Physical Education Department, Portsmouth Middle School, regarding the mountain bike program at the Middle School stating that they share the trails with the track team and have had no problems and would like to see the trails remain.

Ms. Mullaney read into the record comments from Athletic Director Rus Wilson who expressed the need for more athletic fields and would like to see 3-4 multi-use fields on this property or elsewhere. She distributed excerpts from the 2010 Recreation Needs study as background to his comments.

Finally, Ms. Mullaney read into the record comments from Special Education Coordinator Jeffrey Martel who would like to see a community garden space.

Chairman Spear asked if there are any deficiencies or any “dream” use they would like to see on the property or are there any accessibility issues to be addressed.

Consensus was that for the most part the teachers and coaches would like it to remain status quo with the exception of adding solar panels which would save the city money.

### B. Recreation Board

Recreation Board member Kory Sirmaian began by reading into the record letters from Athletic Director Rus Wilson and Recreation Board Chairman Carl Diemer both request consideration of 3-4 multi-use athletic fields requiring less than 10% of the property and no access via Jones Avenue.

Nancy Novelline Clayburgh, School Board representative to the Recreation Board stated that the Recreation Board unanimously voted to recommend requesting 2-3 athletic fields using 6-7 acres, less than 10%, as the City of Portsmouth is greatly lacking in fields for the demand. She stated that Portsmouth has 17 fields, Dover has 25 and Rochester has 44 fields.

Todd Henley, Recreation Board member, read excerpts of the Recreation Needs Study which cited that the current fields lack services, restrooms, are too close to roadways, etc. He continued that he is the head of an adult recreation league and many of the teams have moved out of Portsmouth due to lack of room or time for the fields. He stated that on page 23 of the report there is a layout for 3 multi-purpose fields and feels that everyone can work together to get this accomplished. He concluded by stating that the upgrade of the trails would be a part of the upgrades to the fields.

Rick Becksted, Recreation Board member stated he played on these fields all of his life and stated that we recently recognized 2 State championship winter teams at the City Council meeting and we need to support all of our athletes. He concluded that some of the fields used for practice are almost dangerous due to rutting, etc.

Kathy Lynch, Recreation Board member and President of Portsmouth Little League stated that Portsmouth Little League is in good shape comparatively because their fields are built to Little League regulations, but feels that Leary Field is incredibly overused. She stated she would also like to see wheelchair accessibility to the property because of the proximity to the Clipper Home on Jones Avenue.

Discussion ensued regarding amenities such as lighting, restrooms, concession stands, artificial turf, parking needs and the affect of other uses on the property.

Chairman Spear suggested that this group of fields could be located elsewhere within the city. Mr. Henley stated there is an area on Peverly Hill Road which could support 4-5 fields but the property would need to be purchased.

Ms. Tanner asked if there were figures breaking down the per capita of the fields as Dover and Rochester are larger cities than Portsmouth. These figures were not available at time of meeting.

Mr. Henley concluded stating that there are fields included in the count that cannot accommodate the need such as Sherburne Field, which has no parking and other fields that are not safe to play games on and are used for practices only.

### **C. Sustainability Committee**

Bert Cohen, Chairman of the Sustainability Committee introduced fellow member Wes Tator. He stated the committee began in 2007 and explained that sustainability is important for the kids and their future. He explained that we need to do things now to impact change for the next 50-100 years and was moved to hear from Madison from the High School and the ideas coming from the school. He then discussed the solar array integrating technology in a positive way with the environment and cutting down the carbon footprint. He stated that the law used to limit solar panels to being attached to buildings, but with the recent change, they could be placed on the landfill site. He stated there are upfront costs that are often hard to come but there are long term benefits. He concluded by stating he would like to reinforce the idea to consider the solar array and urged that a study be conducted and to keep the kids involved.

Chairman Spear asked if the solar array would need to be fenced off and would we need to worry about vandalism and graffiti etc. Mr. Cohen first clarified that costs have come way down and the generation of electricity has gone way up and is why we need to do a study. He then stated that he has seen barbed wire around a solar array at a university. Mr. Tator stated that technology is changing so quickly that it is difficult to answer that question.

## **D. Conservation Commission**

Steve Miller, Chairman of the Conservation Commission, introduced fellow members Barbara McMillan and Peter Vandermark. He stated that they had been motivated to do the Public Undeveloped Land Study as stewards of a lot of land in the City and wanted to find ways to connect citizens to the land or risk losing it. He stated regarding this particular property, he sees many people walking the trails, sledding etc and it is accessible via the trails and the school. He continued that there is a lot of mature growth on the property, in particular oak trees, which they would not want to see removed. He stated there are many qualities of the property that allow for passive recreation and he is excited to hear about the solar array idea. He discussed the idea of the fields stating the landfill area is a great place for fields but he wouldn't want to see them diminish from that naturalness of the rest of the area.

Barbara McMillan stated that this parcel was valued very high during the land study process as 60% is forested, its on water, is a wildlife corridor, vernal pools, etc. She continued that they are also aware of the affect on wildlife from land-use changes and this area has been untouched for so long and is a thriving wildlife habitat and once it is gone we can't get it back. She urged that fields be kept to a minimum and feels that lights would be a concern.

Peter Vandermark stated that he would like to see the connectivity of the forest to the Creek completed and also need to think about how the property will be accessed.

## **5. Plan for Public Input Meeting hosted by Blue Ribbon Committee**

After some discussion, the committee will hold a regular meeting Wednesday, April 8<sup>th</sup> at 7:30 a.m. and then will hold the Public Input Meeting on Wednesday, April 15<sup>th</sup> at 6:30 p.m. in the City Council Chambers so it can be recorded.

## **6. Public Comment**

Chairman Spear asked if any member of the public wished to speak:

Ania Rogers, 579 Sagamore Avenue – stated she appreciates the sustainability and conservation aspects of the land and would like to see it preserved although she knows there needs to be a middle ground. She also asked if any consideration had been given to placing windmills on the property as another alternative energy source.

Jeff Kisiel, 21 Wallis Road - stated that regarding the comparisons of the number of fields to other cities, Rochester has 44 fields because they were privately donated and not city-owned. He stated he also feels that any fields should have artificial turf. Secondly, he stated he is glad that solar panels are being discussed as one acre will produce 1 megawatt which powers 400 homes.

Margot Doering, owner of Jones Avenue property – asked for clarification of the restrictions and that a large portion of the 66 acres cannot be developed. Mr. Moore stated that approximately ½ of the land was purchased through the Land/Water Conservation Fund in the 1970's; through this grant program the City agreed to use the land purchased through the program for recreational purposes in perpetuity. Ms. Doering then asked if that means that trees could be cut down to make athletic fields. Mr. Moore replied yes so long as the property remained as a recreational use.

Kim Rogers, 579 Sagamore Avenue – stated that the topography of the land would not be good for fields other than the landfill portion. He stated that in Seattle, they reused a capped landfill for a golf center with revenues paying for the maintenance. He stated this would still allow the area to be used in the winter for other uses.

## **7. Adjournment**

Meeting adjourned at 8:00 p.m.