

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
1 JUNKINS AVENUE
PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE
CONFERENCE ROOM "A"

3:30 P.M.

January 13, 2016

MEMBERS PRESENT: Chairman Steve Miller; Vice Chairman Mary Ann Blanchard;
Members Allison Tanner, Barbara McMillan, Kimberly Meuse,
Matt Cardin, Kate Zamarchi; Alternate Samantha Wright

MEMBERS ABSENT: Adrienne Harrison

ALSO PRESENT: Peter Britz, Environmental Planner

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I. ELECTION OF OFFICERS

Chairman Miller stated they would address this item later in the meeting.

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II. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. December 9, 2015

Ms. McMillan moved to approve the minutes, and it was seconded by Ms. Tanner. The motion to approve the December 9, 2015 Conservation Commission minutes passed unanimously (7-0).

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III. CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT APPLICATIONS

1. 53 Whidden Street
City of Portsmouth, owner
Richard Meyerkopf and Robin Lurie-Meyerkopf, applicants
Assessor Map 102, Lot 66

Robin Lurie-Meyerkopf of 53 Whidden Street was present to speak about the walkway in front of her house. It was actually City property, she said, but since it was the walkway to their house, they maintained it. Since it was a gravel walkway, shoveling it in the winter puts loose rocks everywhere and the walkway was deteriorating. She had submitted pictures depicting the situation. Her neighbors have complained about the gravel being scattered, and she said she was trying to make it a better working situation. Ms. Lurie-Meyerkopf proposed to make it a smooth permeable surface and a surface that would be easy to maintain. She said she planned to use the same materials as were used on her home patio. Subsurfaces and areas in between the bricks would allow for drainage, however, the bricks themselves would not be permeable.

Mr. Britz informed the Commission that the Department of Public Works had signed off on the application.

Vice Chairman Blanchard moved to approve the application for 53 Whidden Street, and it was seconded by Ms. Tanner.

Chairman Miller asked if there were any questions.

Ms. Zamarchi asked for clarification on the submitted sketch.

Ms. Lurie-Meyerkopf said that the sketch was of the patio, not the walkway, and that there would be plantings near the patio, but not around the walkway.

Ms. McMillan asked if she had received instructions regarding maintenance from the installer.

Ms. Lurie-Meyerkopf answered yes, and that the installer would go through all of that information with them. She also said that they try to be good stewards of their property and take the maintenance of it seriously.

Chairman Miller commented that there was some ongoing maintenance required with this type of design and advised that the applicant please be aware of those maintenance issues.

The motion to approve the Conditional Use Permit Application for 53 Whidden Street passed unanimously (7-0).

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2. 50 Andrew Jarvis Drive (Portsmouth High School)
City of Portsmouth, owner
Assessor Map 229, Lot 3

Dan Hartrey and Ken Linchey representing the City of Portsmouth School Department were present to speak to the application.

They presented their plan to replace the tower field lighting at the sports field complex at the high school. The existing lighting structures were constructed in 1988-1989, and it was now necessary to replace some of the structures.

They would like to install 15 poles with lights, and they would be on pre-cast foundations. The method would be to auger down larger than the diameter of the pre-cast foundation, then lower the foundations by crane into the ground. They would minimize impact to the wetlands buffer by using matting, and they referred to Attachment B, which showed a photograph of the area. The lights would be around the perimeter of the field, and the area was mostly surrounded by wetlands.

Vice Chairman Blanchard asked if this would be the same number of poles that existed now.

They said they are keeping the same number of poles. They are leaving 7 poles in place and are replacing 15.

They said the work schedule would tentatively begin in June and would be complete before the end of the school summer vacation.

Chairman Miller asked how big the diameters of the precast foundations were.

They answered that the largest diameter would be 42 inches. They referred to the supporting attachment, which showed that the yellow dots were scaled at 42 inches, which was an average, and so the impact would be 180 sf that they would be disturbing.

Ms. Tanner said she assumed that the shadows that were cast were cast by the poles. Mr. Hartrey confirmed that was correct.

Mr. Cardin asked for verification that this would be auger dug. Mr. Hartrey answered yes, and added that they would use the smallest possible equipment.

Mr. Cardin asked for clarification about the setback distances from the wetlands. Mr. Hartrey said that some were right on the edge, so the setbacks would be less than 10 feet in some areas.

Mr. Hartrey defined auguring as a process in which they drill down which provides a more precise mechanism than scooping out dirt.

Ms. McMillan asked for clarification on the matting and if it was intended to protect just the wetlands or the turf as well. Mr. Hartrey said the reason for the matting was to protect the buffer. They would not need to go into the wetlands at all, but that they would access the work areas from within the buffer.

Ms. McMillan asked for clarification about the lighting that would be used.

Mr. Linchey said they were proposing Musco lighting, which was the same system that was used on Granite Street. He said it was a more direct light and would result in less light hitting the neighbors, and less glow would be produced.

Ms. Zamarchi asked if anything needed to be cut down as part of this project. Both Mr. Hartrey and Mr. Linchey replied no.

Ms. Tanner cautioned that there is a lot phragmites in the area that could accidentally be carried off by the heavy equipment, and she suggested that they stay out of those areas.

Chairman Miller said he was always looking for opportunities to mitigate potential water issues, so he requested that they please look for opportunities to enhance buffers and to keep maintenance of water quality in mind in the future, without taking safety zones away from the edges of the fields.

Ms. Tanner moved to approve the Conditional Use Permit Application for the new lighting at the high school, and it was seconded by Ms. McMillan. There was no discussion.

The motion passed unanimously (7-0).

IV. WORK SESSION

- A. 332 Leslie Drive
Michael Lianza, owner
Assessor Map 209, Lot 45

Mike Lianza, the property owner was present to speak. He gave an overview of the property by way of a slide presentation. He said his goal was to get some early feedback from the Conservation Commission and to obtain guidance on the next steps that would be necessary for him to take.

He showed the Commission photos of the existing conditions on his property and addressed what he intended to do. He said it was 32 feet from the top of the hill down to the water line. Currently there was a 12 foot brick, cement and wood structure near the house, and from there the distance was 20 feet down to the water's edge. He showed both sketches and photographs.

He stated he wanted to improve the safety of what was there now and to improve the accessibility. He planned to make it safe to go down to the water's edge, because currently below the steps there existed loose soil which was dangerous to walk down. It was not his intention to put in a dock, rather, he just wanted to be able to get down to the water safely.

Mr. Lianza stated the hill has a steep 42 degree pitch which ends right at the water's edge. Aside from increasing the safety and the accessibility, his third goal would be to restore the environment, which has existing issues.

The current deck, he said, was in disrepair, and was 20 feet short of the water's edge. Unless the area was bone dry, the loose soil made descending the hill very treacherous. He showed slides of where the high and low water levels were as a result of the tidal changes.

He stated there was some erosion with the existing stairwell, and part of the existing structure was sinking, but that as it sank, the rebar was not sinking. So on each side there was exposed rebar.

Within the 20 foot section below the deck, he has discovered debris like roofing shingles. He said there was no vegetation there and thought it was because of all the debris in the soil. He verified that the existing stairs were not allowing water to pass through.

He showed a rendering of the proposed construction of a 3 foot x 32 foot stairway. They would remove the old steps, remove the debris, and build a new 3 x 32 stairway connected to the deck. They would then plant the proper vegetation to maintain the integrity of the hill.

He showed a photo of a similar example of his proposed structure that currently exists on Lake Winnepesaukee. The existing structure in the photo was a similar pitch and size. The proposed construction would be fairly simple and would not require any drilling or post and beam construction. Mr. Lianza stated that he welcomed feedback from the Commission.

Mr. Cardin asked if the steps would be footed at the top of the hill. Mr. Lianza answered yes, they would be footed at the deck.

Mr. Britz said he had previously suggested to Mr. Lianza that he request a work session prior to submitting an application.

Ms. Wright asked where the kayaks would be stored.

Mr. Lianza said everything would be stored at the house level near the garden.

Chairman Miller asked how deep they would plan to go to get the debris out of the hill, as he suspected that the debris penetrated down pretty far.

Mr. Lianza said he had not poked down too deep. He said that over the years, it appeared that leaves had been dumped, but he did not get the sense that the debris went down too deep as the hill's grade was fairly consistent. He thought it was a matter of how wide it was spread versus how deep it was.

Chairman Miller said the fact that the material was consistent, led him to believe it was not natural. He said the rooted trees are holding the area firm but are also shading the area preventing vegetation growth. He suggested that Mr. Lianza read the UNH Cooperative Extension Service publication "Landscaping to the Water's Edge", which described living on the water's edge and landscaping to maintain the ecosystems there. Chairman Miller added that he liked the proposed stairs because they would allow for the water to drain.

Mr. Lianza said that when they were ready to plant, they would plan to use the most appropriate plantings.

Ms. Zamarchi commented that Mary Tebo was one of the authors of the UNH publication.

Chairman Miller suggested to potentially use a diagonal stair, but that would make the structure more complicated.

Mr. Lianza said that design would require footings, and they had discussed water infiltration regarding the different stair design concepts.

Mr. Lianza commented that if they were to pull out debris, plant, and then build, in that order, they would not be able to get to the water during the summer. Instead they would like to come up with the plan to build and a timeline for pulling the debris out; then build the structure, and then be ready to go with the plantings plan. He reiterated that the current structure was 8 feet wide, and the new one would be 3 feet wide.

Vice Chairman Blanchard asked Mr. Britz who it was that handled these kinds of planting issues and debris.

Mr. Britz answered he believed it was just a matter of property maintenance.

Chairman Miller said asphalt shingles needed to be separated from other trash.

Ms. Tanner said there may be a lot of fill there, and not clean fill, which would present a big problem. She said she was concerned about erosion, and suggested they first stabilize the area. She added that once an area on that steep of a slope was disturbed, one heavy rainfall could wash it all away.

Mr. Lianza said that he expected that once construction began, he would have in place a strict timeline start to finish which would include stabilization throughout the process. Based on past experience, he said he would expect the project to be completed in two days.

Chairman Miller asked if they would plan to pull debris by hand or by machine. Mr. Lianza answered they would pull debris out by hand, as there was no way to get big equipment down there. He added that if they did nothing, water runoff would continue and the shingles and debris would continue to get exposed, and nothing would be able to grow in the area.

Ms. Tanner asked if they had thought about terracing the area. Mr. Lianza thought it might require heavy machinery to accomplish that. Ms. Tanner said not necessarily. Mr. Lianza said he did not know enough about terracing to be able to answer. Ms. Tanner said it would not need to be anything formal.

Ms. Zamarchi said it would be preferable to make it a more natural walkway.

Mr. Cardin said he thought the straight stairs would be less invasive, and that they would function well. However, he expressed concern regarding the two-foot drop at the bottom of the stairs. After jumping down the two feet, how would a person get back up that two-foot rise, he asked. His other concern was that erosion would occur at the bottom of the stairs where people would typically hang out. He said the increased foot traffic would cause more facilitated erosion, especially during high tides, and that he thought this was a flaw of the design. Mr. Lianza said the two foot drop was not as drastic as it sounded.

Mr. Cardin said if Mr. Lianza were to put in riprap, his neighbors would experience more accelerated erosion.

Chairman Miller added that with the new bridge going in, there would be some erosion issues.

Mr. Cardin suggested that maybe the bottom section of the stairs could be hinged.

Mr. Lianza said that was a good idea. He added that what was proposed was safer than what he was doing now, and that a hinged bottom area would be a good idea.

Vice Chairman Blanchard said that the less the area was disturbed, the healthier it would be. She liked the straight stairs idea, as long as the issue that Mr. Cardin brought up regarding the base of the stairs was addressed.

Chairman Miller said it would be nice to get something growing on that hillside, but that would be a challenge with the lack of light in the shaded area. He suggested that some thought be given to that.

Mr. Britz suggested they lay some mats to protect the hillside while the plantings were getting established.

Mr. Lianza commented that the need for the project did not become evident until after they had purchased the property. The previous owner did a lot of work 12 feet down the hill. Below that nothing had been done.

Mr. Cardin asked what the soil was like. He thought it might be fill and that it would need to be improved with some loam.

Mr. Lianza said he wanted it to be functional, to look good and to have strong growth. There was currently very little growing in the area, but once the stairs were installed, they would be able to get down there more often to tend to any landscaping that would be planted.

Mr. Cardin suggested they consult with landscape architects to choose the right plantings.

Mr. Lianza asked if he were to get a professional drawing on the design, address the issues and come back to the Conservation Commission to present the details, along with the proposed plantings, would he have a better chance of gaining approval for this request.

Ms. Tanner said that the Conservation Commission reviews a Conditional Use Permit. She added that he would have to then go to the State to get a Shoreland Permit.

Mr. Britz said he would also need to speak to the Building Inspector to make sure the plan meets all codes.

Ms. McMillan asked if his neighbors all had steep slopes as well.

Mr. Lianza said one neighbor had a similar slope, and the neighbor on the other side had a slope that dropped so dramatically it was not usable to get to the water edge. One neighbor had a buffer of seagrass, and one neighbor on the corner appeared to have a ramp made of mulch.

Mr. Britz said there was a storm water pipe under that area, that it was a City easement.

Ms. McMillan said she would prefer the stairs, and that debris should only be removed by hand, but in reality, it should probably be left alone. If too much of the material were removed, it would be like opening a can of worms. She suggested maybe to just bring in some soil, since what was underneath was uncertain.

Vice Chairman Blanchard commented that in the South End when they have built, they have found all sorts of unexpected items.

Mr. Lianza asked what his next steps would be.

Mr. Britz suggested that he talk to a landscape architect first to address some of the issues they had discussed. He said there might be ways to stabilize the slope first. Then Mr. Britz suggested that Mr. Lianza speak to the State and then the City Building Inspector to see what he might be able to secure a permit for. A 30 foot long steep stairway looked scary, and he was not sure if the inspector would approve it. He also suggested that Mr. Lianza look at that UNH publication and said that is was online.

Ms. McMillian said the UNH Cooperative Extension Service lists the landscapers online that have taken the course.

Mr. Britz clarified that there was an inspection department in the City, in response to a question from Mr. Lianza.

Ms. McMillan said the Conservation Commission would prefer as much natural landscaping as possible.

Mr. Lianza said he is okay with native species rather than primarily pretty things.

Mr. Cardin said that in addition to just talking to landscape architects, he suggested that Mr. Lianza also speak to some landscapers who can bring in a real world experience.

Mr. Lianza said it sounded and looked steeper than it really was.

Chairman Miller asked if there were any other comments for the work session.

Mr. Lianza thanked the Commission and said it had been an informative session.

Agenda Item I. Election of Officers was discussed at this point in the meeting.

Chairman Miller said this was for the Chair and Vice Chair elections. He said they were open to anyone else was interested in filling either of those two positions, and that it was good for everyone to think about. He said he really enjoyed the position, but it was always good for new people to serve.

He added that the Chair position included preparing the agenda, running the meetings and signing paperwork, and that it was a good opportunity.

Mr. Cardin nominated Steve Miller and MaryAnn Blanchard to continue in the positions of Chair and Vice Chair, respectively for the Conservation Commission. This was seconded by Ms. Tanner.

Mr. Cardin asked if there was a timeline or if this was a year-to-year position.

Chairman Miller said it was year-to-year.

Vice Chairman Blanchard said that she enjoyed serving. She said has been in the town for a long time, and that it was important that they continue to maintain a friendly environment.

Chairman Miller said they had a good Commission with diverse views and good perspectives, and he appreciated that.

Ms. Tanner said she has served on the Commission for a long time. She said she felt that this was a good opportunity to protect her home and City, and that the Conservation Commission helped to educate people and that serving was a worthwhile cause.

The vote passed unanimously (7-0).

V. OTHER BUSINESS

1. Report on the first Stewardship Subcommittee work session.

Mr. Britz reported that the subcommittee met on January 6th. Vice Chairman Blanchard, Ms. Zamarchi, Ms. McMillian, Ms. Tanner, and Ms. Harrison were there and they discussed the Public Undeveloped Land Assessment (PULA) study. He said there was a lot of information in the study and suggested that everyone review it. He printed out only the recommendations as a starting point.

The two big focus areas were (1) looking at a set of priorities for future open space acquisitions, and (2) reviewing a set of needs for managing passive recreation activities.

He said at their next meeting, the subcommittee would talk more about the specific priorities for acquiring open space within the City. They looked at the recommendations in the PULA study to get a sense of what they had and what they were missing in order to get a sense of what to look for in a piece of property as they prioritize acquisitions. Mr. Britz gave the example: if someone were to come forward to sell the City a piece of property, the subcommittee would already have determined if the City had a need for that type of property, e.g., if the City was missing large deciduous forest tracts of land.

There was also an ongoing need of the management of properties that they already have.

For passive recreation, Mr. Britz said that one of the needs identified in the Sagamore Land was a need to provide more places for people to walk their dogs or to walk in the woods that would have parking and accessibility. He showed a map of all the conservation properties that he knew of and where there were clusters of properties. He said it would make sense to try to tie these together. They would want to protect areas for wildlife too so making connections for wildlife protection and preservation and not just for passive recreation activities would be a goal.

He said the subcommittee would plan to come up with a first cut of locations and types of passive recreation activities they would want to seek: they would identify an area; identify if there was access to it; and then determine what the needs would be to assess it. They would pick the top three areas and bring that back to the Conservation Commission. They would then determine what resources would be needed to go further with those projects.

Regarding the management piece, Mr. Britz said they would come up with a checklist and look at properties that needed work, so when organizations offer community service help, the projects lists would already be identified.

Mr. Britz said the next steps would be to set up another meeting with the subcommittee group. They would continue to work on a checklist and the subcommittee would set up a field meeting to go out to test the checklist to see what worked and what would need to be added to the checklist. They would also address the prioritization of existing properties. After that, they would do a needs assessment to see what would be required from other departments. He said he believed it would come together nicely.

The next subcommittee meeting was tentatively scheduled for January 27th at 3:30. Mr. Britz said he would send out an email to confirm and he would determine how many can make it. He said that five or six attendees was a good number. He asked the subcommittee to take a look at the PULA recommendations before the next meeting.

Ms. Zamarchi asked if the map could be put on a pdf. Mr. Britz said he would do that.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

At 5:00 it was moved, seconded and passed unanimously (7-0) to adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully Submitted by

Marian Steimke
Acting Secretary for the Conservation Commission

These minutes were approved at the Conservation Commission meeting on February 10, 2016.