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Conservation Commission Minutes 11/06/2008

ARLINGTON CONSERVATION COMMISSION
 MINUTES
 NOVEMBER 6, 2008

Mr. Stevens called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. in the second floor conference room of the Town Hall Annex. Present were Nathaniel Stevens, David White, Charles Tirone, Ellen Reed, William O'Rourke of the Commission, as was Associate Member Ezra Benjamin. Catherine Garnett of the Commission was not in attendance. Jason Lederer, Beth Fenstermacher and Isabelle Montesi from Bioengineering Group, Dan Driscoll of the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), and Cathy Bradford of Carol Johnson and Associates presented the project. Also present were Joey Glushko of the Arlington Planning and Community Development Department, Jeff Roth of the Arlington Bicycle Advisory Committee, Clarissa Rowe and Annie LaCourt, Arlington Board of Selectwomen, and Sean Garballey, State House Representative. Also present were Eugene and Doris O'Neill, Krystina Bralach, Steve Revilar, Stuart Cleinman, Susan Janowitz, Geoffrey Kuesters, Barbara Natke, Lorraine Barra, Vern Schaejbe, Mary Keefe, Dave Dougherty, Chris Scypinski, Julie Rioux, Xiao Lan Ruan, Robert Smith, John Tortelli, Anne Thompson, Twiggy Chan Tipton, Richard and Maureen Title, Kim Alexander, Susan Hoey, Elsie Fiore, Helene Salsbury, Adam Ostrum.

7:45 p.m. – NOTICE OF INTENT – ALEWIFE GREENWAY

Mr. Stevens opened the meeting by clarifying procedures and guidelines for the meeting, including the restriction of comments to wetlands issues as much as possible. Ms. Scypinski asked how to direct questions directly of DCR. Mr. Stevens said to direct the questions through him to keep the discussion to single comments at a time and its the option of DCR to respond to questions beyond the scope of environmental review.

Selectwoman LaCourt offered to coordinate a public meeting to respond to other issues beyond the scope of this hearing. She also formally asked the Conservation Commission to continue this hearing, in order to allow for the submission of comments from the Board of Selectmen.

Mr. Driscoll presented the project to redevelop the section of the Alewife Reservation from Rte 2 to the Mystic Valley Parkway. The project includes the development of a continuous pathway, invasive plant removal, replanting native species, stormwater controls (swales), wetland construction.

Mr. Driscoll described that the level of interest in this project is high. The historic context of this project includes that it is a spin-off from the Alewife Master Plan which is a concept plan. The two large initial initiatives of this work were 1) to reclaim the ADL parking lot (located south of Rte 2, adjacent to the T access road and 2) create a path system to connect this to the Mystic Reservation.

Pathways are proposed for both sides of the Alewife Brook. The faster path will be located along Alewife Brook Parkway. The Reservation is a natural corridor, provides connectivity to wildlife, which is in great need of enhancement.

The pathways near Dilboy stadium are going to be installed soon, as there currently are no sidewalks at all in this area. The path system on the Arlington side will provide access to the facilities at the Dilboy area. The footbridge over the Brook was removed from the design, per the response from the Sunnyside St. neighbors.

The design includes a boardwalk through the Sunnyside St section of the project, which is elevated 6 inches off the ground to remove the path from exposure to the flood waters. If more stabilized aggregate walkway were replaced for boardwalk, there would be a considerable cost savings to the Commonwealth.

Ms. Beckwith asked if the stabilized aggregate pathway is stable in flooding conditions or wetland areas. Mr. Driscoll responded that it resolidifies fine after being flooded, but needs to dry out, therefore is not good for wetland areas, which are always wet.

Part of the area behind Sunnyside contains two small wetlands and a newly proposed constructed wetland, through which the pathway would remain a boardwalk.

Mr. Lederer, presented the plans to enhance the recreational, ecological and educational aspects of the parkland. The area is currently degraded Riverfront Area. The Alewife Brook has concrete banks, for much of its length, lots of fill, CSOs, no riparian buffer in many areas, degraded water quality, stormwater runoff, poor accessibility to Brook, invasive species (mainly Japanese knotweed and garlic mustard).

The stormwater treatments proposed include raingardens and swales to treat and infiltrate stormwater on the parkland before it enters the Alewife Brook. The planting plan will increase the amount of native plants and will restore the canopy to shade out the invasive species. The chain link fence will be removed at the bank of the Brook, in order to allow for wildlife passage and promote corridor movement. Wildlife are then more able to take advantage of the wild fruits and mast in the parkland.

The work will involve some construction disturbance but the project overall will improve the water quality of the Alewife Brook. Restoration efforts are located closer to the waterway, while the path is located farther from the Brook. The path will be constructed in sections of board walk and stabilized aggregate. Isolated wetlands will be connected together with the possibility of connecting this to the Brook in the future.

Not all of the problems of the brook will be solved with this work, but it will bring awareness of the many issues at play with Alewife Brook.

Seven thousand feet of the bank of Alewife Brook is not natural. The invasive species which predominate the area will be removed. The unstable areas of bank will have erosion control matting and live stakes installed.

The large amount of Riverfront area of the project will be planted with new native plants to shade out the invasives. The Bordering Land Subject to Flooding will be impacted only with the high elevated section of boardwalk from Broadway northward.

Sequencing of the long project will be necessary and prudent. The erosion and sediment controls will be 24-inch diameter filter socks filled with mulch. The exposed soils will be limited to 1000-foot sections of the project.

Ms. Bradford presented the planting plan with the objectives of improving biodiversity by replacing existing Norway Maples and other invasives with large shade trees and small trees, shrub masses all to shade out the knotweed. Evergreens will be used for screening. Some areas are open meadows with ornamentals. The plant lists include a variety of native species. There are dry areas, wet areas, areas of seasonal interest. This project is an urban pathway along a brook, with major intersections included. There are 5 different spireas included in the design. The seed mixes included are low maintenance choices, as a goal of the redesign is to limit the amount of lawn areas that need mowing. Meadows, wet areas, wildflowers, tall grasses (fescue and bluestem) are included. There are open areas and closed areas. A priority goal includes the minimization of long term maintenance activities.

The large amount of invasive plants are proposed to be removed and replanted as soon as possible to out complete their reestablishment, recutting, starving the rhizomes. This requires 2-3 years of this activity.

Ms. Beckwith asked if the five trees in the area of Dilboy Stadium (currently shown on the plan for removal) can be replaced with evergreens. Ms. Bradford responded that the trees were marked for removal due to the project path location, and that yes, evergreen trees could be installed closer to the brook in this location.

Mr. Lederer said that small machinery would be utilized for most of this work, on the order of the size of a Bobcat, and the rest of the work is handwork.

Mr. O'Rourke asked if there were any plans to coordinate site work meetings.

Mr. Driscoll said that all state project have a trailer with a Resident Engineer on site at all times for the duration of the project.

The consultant (Bioengineering Group) is hired to stay on for the project during construction. The work will takes approximately 10-12 months, due to the length.

The accessibility issues along the existing pathway will be improved.

The wood to be used for the boardwalk will be recycled wood and plastic for the substructure and epee for the surface boards which have a 50-year useful span. This what was used on the Upper Charles River project.

The trees that will be removed will all be marked for removal on site and can be approved onsite by the Arlington Conservation Commission. All replanted trees will be 2-inch caliper.

Mr. Tirone asked if the 2-inch tree will replanted for a larger tree removed. Mr. Driscoll answered yes. This is not going to conform to our local wetland bylaw, but the DCR does not have to comply with local regulations, if it's still conforming to the Wetlands Act of the Commonwealth.

Mr. O'Rourke asked about the pipes that are in disrepair in the section behind Sunnyside Ave.

Mr. Driscoll responded that work on these pipes would be coordinated with the Town of Arlington, for safety purposes any holes would be repaired.

Mr. Stoff presented his comments and requested to continue the hearing to allow for a site walk to the southern end of the proposed project. The interests of recreation along the brook should be more carefully reviewed. The overlook near Fairmont St is placed near the Fairmont St drain, which should be repaired or daylighted. The water quality improvements proposed with this work should be monitored and proven.

The invasive species chosen for removal only include Japanese knotweed and should include the phragmites in the cattail marsh. Why not restore it?

Ms. Montesi responded that the stormwater treatments were designed to treat the 10-year storm or better, by capturing the runoff from storms that are 4.7 inches in size.

Mr. Driscoll replied that water access was a focus of this design.

Mr. Stoff asked if the access point near Fairmont St, could be relocated to the existing canoe launch located at the old railroad spur.

Mr. Lederer responded that the canoe launch was on the Town of Arlington right-of-way, so it was avoided for the location of the water access point in this design proposal.

Ms. Rowe commented that the Board of Selectmen would need another week to submit a comment letter to the Conservation Commission. They were leaning toward supporting the removal of the boardwalk in the section behind Sunnyside Ave and moving the railings back 10 feet from the access Rd behind the homes along Sunnyside Ave.

Mr. Driscoll discussed the selection of wood guard rail along the access road and an informal play area which is now located at the gateway park.

Ms. Hoey asked what are the design criteria for this hearing? What financing is available for this work?

Mr. Driscoll responded that while the project is not yet funded, that the new Federal bill to stimulate the economy with \$30 billion of infrastructure improvements. This project would qualify and be ready to go. Also there is a Federal grant program for enhancement work along with MAPC. Maintenance is the sole responsibility of DCR, but stewardship coordination and partnership is essential but not mandated.

Ms. Hoey also commented that the current plan shows a construction staging area located behind the houses along Sunnyside Ave. Is it possible to relocate this behind the autobody shop property, further to the south?

She also brought up the issue of the homeless encampments on the park property.

Ms. LaCourt again stated that the BOS would hold a meeting to go over non-wetland issues and Mr. Driscoll offered to attend but that DCR couldn't afford to send the consultants to this.

Ms. Fiore asked if the project had been submitted to the Somerville Conservation Commission. Mr. Driscoll replied that they had already been through the process with Somerville.

Ms. Fiore recounted that the cattail marsh was supposed to have been restored by the MBTA when the tailtracks were installed underneath the Minuteman bikepath, but that work was never done.

Ms. Scypinski remarked that the Master plan had paths on both sides of Alewife Brook and that it was her recommendation to wait until the CSOs are closed before constructing a path on the Sunnyside area side of the brook. The bikepath should be on the Somerville side of the brook.

Two paths are redundant. Evergreens are needed to screen the neighbors from Dilboy field. The pipes through the DCR property are in extreme disrepair, are dangerous and need backflow prevention. The soils are very clayey at this location and the location of the constructed wetland, with poor drainage. The proposed boardwalk should have a pinning system to avoid it floating away during a flood. The invasive plant control plan is possibly a waste of money, with only shading and twice a year cutting, hopefully there is enough funding to maintain this work.

Ms. Scypinski restated her recommendation to remove the path from the design behind the homes along Sunnyside Ave, until the CSOs are closed. The audience applauded.

Ms. Thompson stated that she could not understand the information on the plans readily since they were not colored. She asked if the debris (shopping carts) currently in the waterway would be removed.

Ms. Janowitz asked how will the boardwalk be maintained after the sewage-laden floodwaters recede. Will they be sanitized or marked as unsafe until they are cleaned?

Mr. Lederer responded that almost this entire project is within the 100 year floodplain. This work will improve the 100-year flood storage but it can't change the frequency of flooding. DCR cannot fix the CSOs, that is the operator's responsibility (Cambridge and Somerville).

Ms. Montesi responded that the stormwater treatments are designed for smaller storms, should help those. Stormwater needs to be treated within the entire watershed. The Mass Ave redevelopment project should include stormwater treatments to prevent runoff from reaching the parkland and the brook.

Ms. Salsbury asked if the flooding from the hotel area, and behind CVS would be controlled and prevented from coming over her property on Henderson Rd. She has received a letter regarding the flood insurance. Ms. Rowe responded that the letter was in regards to the FEMA flood level map revision that is currently taking place and that homeowner need to decide if they need flood insurance. That letter was not in regards to this park proposal.

Mr. Ostrum stated that he is looking forward to this project and that the large constituency engendered by this work will help to solve the other problems.

Mr. Smith stated that the plowing of snow from the access road behind the homes along Sunnyside Ave, is difficult already, and that the guardrail should accomodate that use. If the access road is used by construction vehicles, and it is damaged, will DCR repair it?

Mr. Driscoll stated that there is flexibility in the design along the access road. The edge could be moved inward and a split rail fence installed with ornamental plantings in front of it, in order to accomodate the turning radius in to the rear driveways.

Mr. Stoff asked if the snags in the Alewife Brook near Massachusetts Ave would be removed and if planting of new trees in this area could be restricted.

Ms. Bradford said the design include thinning the existing trees and no new trees are being proposed in this area, just new groundcover.

Mr. Driscoll responded that cleanup after floods is not necessary as the bacteria in CSO releases are dead after 24 hours, from the drying process.

Ms. Fiore stated that Arlington doesn't have CSOs and they all deserve to be closed.

Ms. Ruan asked that the trees located near her house be saved from removal and that the pathway could be relocated.

Mr. Tirone asked why the path was designed at 10 feet wide. Mr. Driscoll responded that the stabilized aggregate tends to be colonized by grass along the edges and what is constructed as 10 feet wide often if reduced over time. The 10-foot width is criteria for safe passage of elderly, strollers, etc. The exact layout of the path will be determined on site at the time of construction in order minimize the impact to mature trees and any other key features.

Mr. Tirone asked if the mulch sox would be staked. Mr. Lederer responded that the sock material is designed to photodegrade over time or can be cut open when desired.

Mr. Smith also requested that the construction staging area be moved to behind the former Boyles autobody property.

Mr. Roth stated that the Arlington Bicycle Advisory Committee was in full support of this project.

Mr. Tirone asked how the knotweed removal was going to be accomplished. Mr. Driscoll responded that the plant is very aggressive and would the work would be conducted in 1000 foot segments.

The Conservation Office has received written comments for this project from ABAC, Christine Scypinski, Susan Hoey, Robert Smith, Xiao Lan Ruan, and David Stoff.

The Conservation Commission, with the applicant's approval, continued the hearing to Dec. 18 at 7:45pm.

Meeting adjourned at 11pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Corinna Beckwith
Administrator