

53 RIVER STREET MASTER PLAN COMMITTEE

MEETING MINUTES

MAY 9, 2018 at 7:00 PM

ACTON TOWN HALL, ROOM 204

PUBLIC FORUM AND PRESENTATION BY CONWAY SCHOOL OF LANDSCAPE DESIGN STUDENTS

1. Introduction by Peter Berry, Chairman and Selectman: Peter gave an introduction to the property and explained that the purpose of tonight's forum is to solicit public input for redevelopment of the property. **Amanda Pebler and Eliza Kress**, Masters Program students at the **Conway School of Landscape Design** are culminating public input for impetus on property redesign. Tonight's forum will first have a large group discussion, then a small group activity. The process of designing this parcel is ongoing and by no means will be definitive tonight. Eventually funding will be sought, and town meeting approval required. It's a community effort. **Committee members in attendance introduced themselves: Lou York, Bill Alesbury, Bill Klauer, Cami Duquet, Bob Doyle, Pete Hocknell (were present).**
2. Presentation by Conway School of Landscape Design. Amanda and Eliza are completing their degrees in ecological design, so they will be doing a site based analysis. A brief overview given. They will graduate in June. On May 25 they will present, then return May 30 to present designs to Acton public. Lastly they will prepare a final vision. Preliminary goals: restoration, redevelopment, recreation and historical preservation of significant old mill artifacts. Possible senior housing, more public parking, park with ADA pathways throughout. A historical timeline of the 7 acre property was shown since 1845, mostly with regard to the industrialized 2 acre developed section below the dam. Mill burned down in 1950's; Lazaro family used parcel through the 1980's when an oil spill occurred. S. Acton Historic District was created; 2009 oil spill cleaned up. 2017 Town purchased property. The site locus was indicated on town map. No current sidewalks exist along the property frontage. Existing conditions, wildlife and plant species photos were shown. They would like to restore natural beauty of the site and remove invasive species. The Wetlands Protection Act (WPA) imposes significant regulations on resource area activity and will require oversight by the Acton Conservation Commission and the Mass. Department of Environmental Protection (DEP). The entire parcel is considered within the 200' river front area. Since approximately 2 acres of the parcel were developed prior to the WPA, some activity may be permitted. 100 year flood plain was shown. A hydrological assessment will be necessary. Assets: historical significance, habitat, town ownership. Constraints: flooding, narrow, accessibility.

Questions from the public were:

About how many acres require "clean up?"

What is the motivation for removing the dam?

If the dam is a historic structure, why not leave it and let it fail?

Is the dam on the cultural resource list?

How much habitat would open up downstream?

Some answers from committee members and Town of Acton Natural Resources Director are:

Yes, dams are considered historic.

There is no hazardous waste on the property now.

If the dam were breached, wildlife would be able to move up and down stream improving habitat connectivity.

Peter Berry explained that Corey York, Acton DPW Director, came to last committee meeting to explain the viability of building a sidewalk or designating River Street a one-way road. Easements would be required from private property owning residents. There is no definitive design yet. It is possible to fit a sidewalk on either side of the road, given time, engineering, and money.

Amanda and Eliza have not yet put a 5,000 sq. foot building (for an apartment building) onto the property map yet, but they will factor that into one of the possible designs.

3. Break out into small groups for community participation and input.

Some reported summaries from the groups:

One table wants a traffic study, but they are in favor of conservation land and highlighted historical aspects; but no housing. Another table liked interpretive signage, perhaps a small building to show ecological and historical significance with volunteer docents. A sidewalk on River Street is desired. Another table has interest in conservation and historical elements and including cultivated gardens like the Arboretum, with a natural wetlands as well. Minimal parking to disrupt the area was desired. One group suggested a kiosk area for talks or educational elements, like at Nashoba Brook conservation land. A riverwalk/trail would be nice. Along River Street, the pavement is crumbling near the guardrail due to erosion, so some suggested rehabilitating the road shoulder. Historical significance of the site should be acknowledged because this is literally where Acton's history began, at (Erikson) dam and all mills over the years. There were urgent concerns voiced about dam removal and flood risk and need for hydrological study. Residents very concerned about functional aspect of the dam. What function does it serve holding water and regulating volume of water. Participants anticipate the amenity and opportunity to get close to the water and to sit by it to watch and listen to the brook flow. This site allows people to access the waterfront along the entire edge of the 7 acres. Therefore, housing is not desired, just a preservation of wildlife habitat. Reduce the paved area, but it would be nice to have a playground. Preserve some of the dam and the raceway to show the history of how it functioned. Very few advocates for housing arose. Connectivity is important for wildlife and for walking and "Complete Streets." Be sure everyone can get to the "park" safely. Peter Berry noted that getting to Pratt's Brook conservation land from this parcel will not be possible due to prohibition crossing MBTA tracks. Bill Klauer noted the machine shop/cinderblock building and he would like to see a use of the building if possible. Klauer asked the group to please email himself or the committee if there is any support for saving the cinderblock building abklauer70@gmail.com or 53river@acton-ma.gov .

4. Next Steps: Peter Berry asked the participants to please visit the town website and sign up **"Notify Me"** so they can attend all future forums. 53 River Street Committee generally meets twice monthly at the Recreation Center on 50 Audubon Drive in South Acton. Studies will definitely have to be done and the results communicated to everyone such as an archaeological study, hydrological study, traffic studies and how to pay for those things.

Next meeting is May 30, 2018 at 7PM. We will try and get the Faulkner Room/204 again at Town Hall if possible.

Thanks for the great turnout and interest in the site. Amanda and Eliza thanked and asked participants to reach out to them at acton2018@clsd.edu . Next they will present 3 design alternatives, then a final design or vision will be presented. Please watch for a public survey for the whole community to participate in.

Meeting adjourned 8:30PM

Respectfully submitted by
Bettina D. Abe, Town of Acton Natural Resources Assistant