



City of Cambridge Conservation Commission

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Public Meeting – Monday, October 16, 2023, at 7:00 PM Zoom MEETING MINUTES

The following meeting minutes were taken by Tracy Dwyer and are respectfully submitted.

Present Commission Members: David Lyons (Vice Chair); Jennifer Letourneau (Director); Kathryn Hess; Elyse Magnotto-Cleary; Erum Sattar

Absent Commission Members: Purvi Patel (Chair); Michelle Lane

Attendees: Duke Bitsko, Hatch; Matt Burmeister, VHB; Stefan Surette, IQHQ; Annie Gleichauf, VHB; Bridget Hilgendorff, VHB; Chrissy Gabriel, IQHQ; David Kaplan, Cambridge Water Department; Howard Moshier, VHB; Kara Falise, DPW; Lena Frappier, DPW; Tracy Dwyer, DPW; James Williamson

David Lyons opened the meeting.

7:00 – Request for Determination of Applicability Aquatic Management Program Solitude Lake North Point - Cambridge Crossing Pond

The applicants were not present at the meeting, and this will be moved to the November 13, 2023 meeting.

7:04 – Administrative Topics

Meeting minutes from September 18, 2023 – not approved will be voted on in November 13 meeting.

James Williamson asked in the chat if the commission was sticking with the meeting agenda as posted?

Jennifer Letourneau stated they are sticking to the same agenda, but that Solitude Lake was not present and they are waiting a few minutes in case they are running late.

Jennifer moved onto administrative topics. Jennifer stated that she and Purvi Patel the chair of the commission met with Mass Audubon at Magazine Beach, they took over the lease on the

facility at Magazine Beach in order to do more programming there and would like to take on a stewardship role. Jennifer said she reached out to other stewards in the neighborhood and starting in October or November they are going to hold a bimonthly meeting with DCR, Charles River Watershed, Charles River Conservancy, Magazine Beach Partners, Mass Audubon, and the local boat club. They will work on collaborating on projects in the area.

Kathryn Hess asked if it made sense for someone from the Conservation Commission at the meeting as well.

Jennifer said that would be great for someone from the Conservation Commission to be present at the meetings and she would share the meeting dates with the commission members once they have been set.

Jennifer stated that the Head of the Charles regatta is this weekend, so things are being temporarily erected and she has made many site visits to the river. She said that the cutting for viewing was done per the vegetated management plan, and they had lots of staff around as well as she said she was out monitoring. Jennifer said the order of conditions was being followed now for the second year.

Jennifer said as far as submittals she was expecting to see them from Jerrys Pond and Memorial Drive Phase III but she has seen neither. She said she was part of discussions regarding Jerrys Pond with Community Development and also the Planning Board. As larger projects come up, she is planning on scheduling informational presentations for those.

David Lyons said he did attend a City Council Committee meeting and it sounded as though Jerrys Pond would come in before the end of the year.

Elysse Magnotto-Cleary thanked Jennifer for being out on the river and she couldn't believe that they were already in year two.

Jennifer stated that she just received a text message from the Commission of DPW, Kathy Watkins and stated that all the appointments were approved by council. Erum Sattar and Purvi Patel are now members for another three years. They also approved a new appointment to Patricia Carney who will be serving on the commission for three years and will come on board in November. They also approved an associate member for one year John Leo and will also come on board in November or December. An associate member is a non-voting member but can assist the commission with submittals and they are only on a commission for one year.

Erum Sattar wanted to thank Jennifer for all her work on the river and building these partnerships. She said she would love to join the Mass Audubon group meetings.

7:15 - Request for Determination of Applicability

Birch Grove Seating Area Improvements

Hatch

Fresh Pond Reservation Perimeter Path

David Kaplan the Watershed Manager with the Cambridge Water Department was present to introduce Duke Bitsko from Hatch who is the consult landscape architect. David Kaplan stated that they were before the commission seeking a negative determination for a small project in the buffer zone that will decrease the impervious surface and will improve drainage in that area.

Duke Bitsko stated that this project is for the reconfiguration of an existing seating area that was built about fifteen years ago. Duke stated that the project is in the northwest quadrant of Fresh Pond, where Little Fresh Pond is to the lower left and to the west is the Fresh Pond golf course. Duke also stated that there is a perimeter road that circumnavigates Fresh Pond Reservoir that is

about two miles long and is mostly made up of a bituminous or porous asphalt path that is approximately twelve feet wide.

A picture was shown of the project area that Duke explained what was depicted which was the perimeter road which is impervious surface about twelve feet wide with another five feet of shoulder with the seating area with a drinking fountain located in the middle. The three benches that are located in the seating area are on top of a Sta-Lok material which is an impervious surface material that does not let water go through. The drinking fountain is very rusted and needs to be replaced and the fountain is sitting on a concrete pad. Duke explained that the Sta-Lok material is not ideal for this location. The drinking fountain they think drains to the gravel area located underneath the Sta-Lok material, but they are not certain because it's before David Kaplan and Duke Bitsko's time. They are hoping to replace the concrete pad with another surface material that would be better for drainage.

Jennifer stated that there was a member of the public who could not see the slides. Jennifer confirmed with attendees that they could all see the slides. Jennifer asked James Williamson to unmute, and she tried to walk through James to be able to see the slides. Jennifer stated she would email James the slides for the IQHQ presentation. James stated his email address was tompaine@hotmail.com.

Duke stated that the picture shown shows the proximity of the pond to the drinking fountain. He stated that there is about fifteen feet to the chain-link fence and then another three feet to the bank of the pond. Duke stated they were going to be adjusting the grade slightly to have the water run back towards the seating area and away from the pond. Duke stated that they would be reducing the size of the overall footprint of the seating area as well as removing all impervious asphalt apron along the perimeter road. He said they would also be moving the two benches and the drinking fountain slightly closer to the perimeter road as well. Duke stated that they will reduce the seating area from three benches to two benches and also replace and rotate the drinking fountain adjacent to the perimeter road in order for it to not get hit in the wintertime during snow plowing operations. Duke stated they will replace the impervious area with native plantings as well as define the seating area limits with flush granite curb. Duke stated they will also be removing the gravel that is in the drainage area and move it to a subsurface chamber that will be located behind the seating area and will have a cap on it so it can be easily cleaned when needed. Duke stated that there are two large trees near the seating area, and they will try to have as little impact to the root system as possible. Duke said they will also be investigating the condition of the pipe for the drinking fountain. He stated that the pipe comes from the Fresh Pond golf course maintenance facility which is a far distance away. They are not planning on replacing that line, but they are going to replace the line from the fountain to the irrigation box. Duke stated that they plan to reduce the impervious area but one hundred and eighty-four (184) square feet. Duke stated that they have a planting plan in place which includes under story trees and shrubs as well as wildflowers and grasses. Duke stated they will also be putting up a temporary plant protection fence it will be put up in the spring and will stay up for one growing season. The fence will consist of a snow fence and a chicken wire fence on the bottom three (3) feet and this combination of fencing they found keeps the rabbits out, so they don't eat the plants. Duke stated the project has not gone out to bid yet, but they believe it will take two to three weeks to complete.

David Lyons stated that he knows this location very well and asked them to talk about the Fresh Pond committee's review of the project. David Lyons wanted everyone to know what the view

was from the Fresh Pond Master Plan Advisory Board who would have had a presentation on this project as well.

David Kaplan stated that they had two meetings with the Fresh Pond Master Plan Advisory Board and had two iterations of the project and this was the plan that the Master Plan Advisory Board agreed to. They did not hold any other public meetings regarding the project. David Kaplan stated that the use will stay the same it will just be more compact.

David Lyons asked if Jennifer or Kara had any questions or comments.

Jennifer stated that since all of the submittals on this evening's agenda were RDA buffer zone projects there was no really substantive material to review. Jennifer thought all of these projects were very straightforward that the commission has heard in the past.

Kara Falise stated that the package and presentation is clear and was in line with what they are asking for.

Elysse Magnotto-Cleary asked if there was a timeline for the project.

Duke stated they are looking to put the project out for bid in the winter with a spring start dated and it will last two to three weeks.

Erum Sattar asked why they were going from three benches to two benches.

David Kaplan stated that during their investigations that all three benches were never full and that the space served more of a gathering space rather than somewhere for people to sit. So they thought they could reduce the number of benches and make the space more compact and add more native plants without impacting users.

7:36 – Public Comment Closed – no comments

4 – In Favor, 2 – Absent, 0 – Abstained

David Lyons asked if there needs to be any special conditions.

Jennifer stated just all the normal conditions would apply.

7:36 – Negative Determination was approved.

4 – In Favor, 2 – Absent, 0 – Abstained

Jennifer Letourneau let the commissioners know that James Williamson got both presentations via email and was satisfied and stepped off the meeting.

David Lyons read from the chat that James Williamson wrote he would come back onto the meeting when the Comeau Field Bus improvements was being heard.

7:39 - Request for Determination of Applicability

Comeau Field Bus Loop Improvements

VHB

Jerry's Pond - Rindge Avenue

Annie Geichauf from VHB was present at the meeting. Annie stated that these improvements were part of Article 19 special conditions permit for the Alewife Park main project. It was also before the commission a few years ago under DEP file number 123-311. This is a separate project but as a special condition of Article 19 IQHQ agreed to do these improvements to the

Comeau Field bus loop. The project area sits between Jerry's Pond and Comeau Field. Annie stated that this project is to improve the riding experience on the number 83 bus. The 83 bus line stops at this location and the bus uses this parking lot to turn around and exit back onto Rindge Avenue. This project will improve the grading of the driveway apron to the parking area which now is also twenty percent. Annie stated that they are proposing to reduce that crosswalk and make handicap ramps to bring it down to grade to make it a smoother rider experience entering the bus turnaround. Annie stated that this is a buffer zone project they are in the buffer zone of the bank of Jerry's Pond. Annie stated depicted in red on her slide presentation is the one-hundred-foot buffer zone. Annie stated with this project they will also be upgrading the ADA ramps with wings to them. When they met with the City, the Traffic and Parking Department asked for them to extend the platform where riders wait for the bus to provide more space with a loss of one parking space, so it's a swap from asphalt to concrete and also with that is relocating one EV charging station which will be moved one space north. Annie stated that it's a very straightforward project and for erosion and sediment controls they plan on installing a silt sack between Jerry's Pond and the project area as well as silt sacks in the catch basins on the downstream side of the project. Annie stated that there will be no increase in impervious area.

Jennifer stated that this is another straightforward project and it is a buffer zone project and really we should be looking at the construction mitigation side of the project. Jennifer stated that there are no impacts to the wetland resource areas and no changes to the drainage or drainage flows.

Kara Falise said this project was reviewed by the city, DPW and Traffic and Parking and it is a positive project to improve the ridership experience on this bus line.

Kathryn Hess asked if this location also has a light for people has to exit out of the parking lot. She asked if there would be any improvements or changes to the light.

Jennifer said there were no changes or improvements to the light, it's just improvements to the grading and pedestrian ramps.

Kathryn stated that the button that needs to be pushed to activate the walk signal is not easily accessible.

Annie stated that on the plan that was presented that they are improving the existing sidewalk and replacing the sidewalk panels to make a level landing and then it will slope down to a ramp to make it ADA complaint. They will not be changing the layout where the masts are for the lights and that the parking entrance will be lower than the sidewalk to make it a smoother transition for the buses.

Jennifer stated to answer Kathryn's question there will be no change to the mast or the signal button.

Erum Sattar asked if even though they are not changing the masts or the signal heights there will be an increased improvement for accessibility.

Annie stated they are adding tactile strips so there is warning for the visually impaired people that they are entering traffic, so they are bring the area up to ADA standards.

David Lyons stated he believes that they permitted this EV charging station before. He asked Jennifer if there would be any special conditions with this permit.

Jennifer stated they did permit the EV charger at this location, and they would have all the typical construction mitigation requirements with this permit as well.

7:51 – Public Comment Closed – no public comment
4 – Favor, 2 – Absent, 1 – Vacancy

7:51 – Negative Determination was approved.
4 – Favor, 2 – Absent, 1 – Vacancy

7:52 - Request for Determination of Applicability
Alewife MBTA Headhouse Improvements
VHB
Jerry's Pond

Annie Gleichauf from VHB explained that this project is another condition to Article 19 improvement to the Alewife Main Campus site. IQHQ agreed to make surface improvements to the Russell Field entrance to the MBTA site. Annie stated that this project is within the buffer zone for bordering vegetated wetlands. Annie presented a locust map of the property which depicted what land is owned by the MBTA, IQHQ and MassDOT. She stated that the project plans were reviewed by both MBTA and MassDOT and were approved. Annie stated that this project is mostly a resurfacing project which will decrease the impervious area, installing new lighting, and make landscape improvements. This project will be phased to maintain access to the headhouse, and they are currently working with the MBTA on the phasing. Annie stated that the site is surrounded by curbs and walls which will help with erosion and sedimentation, but they will be placing additional erosion and sediment controls beyond the walls and curbs will silt sacks placed in the catch basins.

Jennifer stated in the process of reviewing this application VHB did follow-up to report they have cleaned out the laterals on site and will continue to monitor and clean other laterals as needed.

David Lyons asked if that can be conditioned in a negative determination.
Jennifer said yes.

Kara Falise stated that when she and Jennifer were reviewing the project there were some tree removals. Kara asked Annie if she could talk about whether those removals fall under the Tree Protection Ordinance.

Annie stated that was an error in their plans. She stated that there are empty tree pits along the Linear Path, and they are removing the tree pits and adding in a raised landscape area and planting some trees as well.

David Lyons asked if this would be the last commitment under Article 19 from IQHQ to this particular part of the property.

Chrissy Gabriel from IQHQ stated they will be in front of the commission again for Jerry's Pond which is south of the headhouse.

David asked if there was any additional work, they would be doing on the actual headhouse land. Chrissy said yes that this would be the only project at the headhouse.

Kathrym Hess asked if there was a maintenance plan for the landscaping. She said they talked about empty tree wells, and she did want to see the landscaping go.

Chrissy Gabriel stated they were aware of the empty tree wells, and it was due to lack of irrigation so they are working on a plan to get irrigation to the site to ensure successful growing of the trees.

Erum asked if they are working on an irrigation plan, is that till the trees are established or is it a more long-term solution.

Chrissy stated that there is usually a two-year period for tree establishment, but she believes that the irrigation will be a more permanent solution.

Stefan agreed the irrigation will remain, so they don't need to worry about trees not being watered.

David asked if the boxes on the plan are planting boxes and not jurisdictional.

Annie stated on the west side of the headhouse those are planting boxes that are raised with seating benches attached. Those boxes can be moved if needed because they are sitting on top of the MBTA tunnel, so they are not installed in the ground. She said they will be planted with additional greenery and will be watered. She said they did not count those into the impervious area because they are not in the ground. Annie stated that west of that area will be an area for food trucks and the seating will be used for people who visit the food trucks.

Jennifer stated that if anyone has been to the area near the Harvard Science Center it will be very similar to that area from a usability perspective.

Kara asked Chrissy in terms of planting, snow removal, catch basins and overall maintenance of the area, who's responsible for it will it be IQHQ or the MBTA.

Stefan stated that they are still in the process with the MBTA for a memorandum of agreement.

Kara stated it is important to make sure that the cleaning and maintenance of the laterals and catch basins is done long term, so she didn't know if the commission would want to know what their agreement would be.

Jennifer said that is a good point. Jennifer asked Stefan and Chrissy if once the MOU is complete did, they think it would be a public document.

Stefan and Chrissy didn't think IQHQ would be opposed but Chrissy said it was a good question.

Jennifer said they should have a follow-up conversation about it because the city would like to know who is ultimately responsible for the maintenance and for what duration.

David asked if IQHQ would take on the maintenance obligation of this negative determination if you're not able to reach an agreement with the MBTA.

Chrissy agreed.

David asked if Jennifer could include that in their negative determination.

Jennifer said IQHQ is always willing but it is hard to navigate the private vs public aspects.

8:09 – Public Comment Closed – no public comment

4 – Favor, 2 – Absent, 1 - Vacancy

8:10 – Negative Determination approved. Conditions – maintenance on landscaping and sewer laterals/catch basins.

4 – Favor, 2 – Absent, 1 – Vacancy

8:11 – Administrative Topics

Jennifer stated there are several items coming up, information presentation on Mem Dr phase three and Jerry's Pond. We will be onboarding new commission members and Solitude.

The commission agreed to move the Solitude application to the November meeting.

4- Favor, 2 – Absent, 1 – Vacancy

8:17 – Meeting Adjourned

4- Favor, 2 – Absent, 1 – Vacancy