



City of Cambridge
Conservation Commission
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Public Meeting – Monday, October 21 2024, at 7:00 PM
Zoom
MEETING MINUTES

The following meeting minutes were taken by Lena Frappier and are respectfully submitted.

Present Commission Members: Jennifer Letourneau, Director; David Lyons, Chair; Elysse Magnotto-Cleary, Vice Chair; Erum Sattar; John Leo; Kathryn Hess; Lorie Graham; Jim Gerstle, Associate; Sean Bedingfield, Associate

Absent Commission Members: Khyati Saraf

Attendees: Lena Frappier, DPW; Kara Falise, DPW; Elizabeth Gorda, DCR; Jason Santos, DCR; Joe Rigley, MBTA/Delve; Ron Guillotte, MBTA; Tess Paganelli, MBTA; Marian Rambelle, MBTA/CDW; George Kober, MBTA; Tom Valton, DCR; Chrissy Gabriel, IQHQ; Ann McDonald; Anthony Colletti; Byron Harvey; Charles Teague; Danny Frias; David Bass; David Nowak; Debra Darby; Eppa Rixey; George Armstrong; Gwen Speeth; James Williamson; Jan Innes; Janis Kearney; Jeremy Fontaine; Jess Dausman; Joel Nogic; John Michalak; Lisa Birk; Madeleine Aster; Martin Nee; Maya Bickel; Melissa Ryan; Mike Nakagawa; Nancy Pendergast; Stefan Surette; Stuart Moss; Thomas O'Brien; Tom Gould; Vicki Paret;

David Lyons opened the meeting.

7:02 – Request for Determination of Applicability

Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR)
Install a Retaining Wall within the Resource Area Buffer Zone

Jason Santos of the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation presented improvements they would like to make concerning Memorial Drive in front of the BU Boathouse with a good portion of it is within the 100 foot buffer zone. They will widen the sidewalk from the existing 5-6 feet to about 13 feet wide. As the path approaches the BU boathouse, it will widen even more to about 15 feet. Jason stated the new sidewalk will require extending the retaining wall west about 55 feet and filling with concrete sidewalk.

Commission director Jennifer Letourneau stated that this planned area is buffer zone only and DCR is confident that trees will not need to be removed and presented more photos of the area.

Chair David Lyons responded to a chat question that there were 23 attendees present. He also stated the importance of the project after the tragedy of a biker killed at the location about a month ago. David asked if the work presented is sufficient for the entirety of the bike safety improvement to know if DCR would be coming to the commission again in the near future.

Jason responded that they are more than doubling the width of the sidewalk and tightening the lanes for the on-ramp to Memorial Drive East to slow traffic. As they are doing as much as they can to give people more space, he does not see them going further into the buffer zone.

Jeniffer also stated that the applicant has worked with other departments on non-Commission jurisdictional issues, and this meets all statute abilities to permit under and RDA.

Vice Chair Elysse Magnotto-Cleary stated this is the vicinity where John Corcoran was fatally struck at the end of September and appreciates that this project is before the commission. She also announced that there is also a City Council meeting tonight and there is sure to be a lot of public comment related to bike lanes, so she is happy to hear what participants have to say here.

Erum Sattar also expressed her appreciation for the project and asked for clarification on the duration of construction and material storage concerning mobility and site disturbance.

Jason responded that they are scheduled to be fully completed by Thanksgiving and their aim is not to disturb the public or impede their movement; Peds, bikes, or vehicles in any way more than they absolutely need to.

John Leo questioned if any calculations concerning drainage will be submitted concerning fill impacting the area.

Jeniffer described that with the grade and pitch of sidewalks stormwater will flow away from the guardrail to the curblin and into existing catch basins and infrastructure. She also stated that it would be nice to go by the area after the work as well.

Kathryn Hess asked for further details on mitigation during construction to protect runoff.

Jeniffer clarified that two other team members, Tom Valton and Alex Smigliani, contacted her for recommendations on this topic. She stated that compost filter tubes at the limit of the work zone or straw waddles that are weed free are acceptable and able to be cut open and left on site at the end of the project.

Lori Graham did not have any questions but commented that her experience with biking through the detour was good.

Jim Gerstle questioned what DCR sees as their biggest risk for this project and specifically to the wetlands.

Jason stated that because this is such a heavily used area, making sure the detour is effective and safe throughout the duration of the project means checking on it every day and making sure barrels and signage are where they are supposed to be. He also said ensuring that the straw

waddles are correctly placed and connecting with Jeniffer whenever there is a question will ensure the wetlands are protected.

Sean Bedingfield pointed out that the location of the drain basin should help decrease impact.

David directed to move to public comment and stated that the number of attendees is 28.

Gwen Speeth asked in the chat if she could assume that the straw waddles DCR currently uses are made of natural material and not the old plastic string that currently letters parks meaning it's a natural material.

Jennifer confirmed it is natural material.

7:21 – Public Comment Closed

6 – In Favor, 1– Absent

Kathryn asked if there are conditions that should be laid out.

Jennifer answered we typically include our construction mitigation conditions on a project like that once the erosion controls are installed, she does an inspection and then the work can begin. They must keep those erosion and sediment controls in place and functioning for the duration of the project until the project is complete. She typically does periodic checks, but because this is so close by and such a high-profile project she will probably go by daily until it's complete and just take some pictures of the site to make sure it's going well. Jeniffer also stated she will share them at the November 18th hearing. Her visits will ensure proper procedures concerning storing of fuel, keeping trucks covered, keeping the work zone tidy and making sure the detour is up and free for pedestrians and cyclists to get around.

Erum questioned if Jeniffer will be the only one performing site visits.

Jeniffer stated that no other city permits will be issued for this project as it is state land so she will be the only city personnel inspecting the project.

7:24 – The commission unanimously approved the negative determination of applicability.

6 – In Favor, 1– Absent

7:55 – Notice of Intent

DEP File To be Determined

Massachusetts Bay Transit Authority (MBTA)

New Red Line Access Tunnel within the 100-year Floodplain

Tess Paganelli, Director of Environmental Permitting and Review for the MBTA, stated they are proposing a new red line high rail access tunnel in Cambridge and introduced Joe Rigley from Delve Underground to elaborate on the project.

Joe stated the red line tunnel stays underground from the Charles River all the way to Alewife Station and maintenance vehicles are only able to access the red line near the Charles River area,

about 4 ½ miles away from the Alewife Station. He said because of this distance it is virtually impossible under a nightly closure for a high road vehicle to enter through that point, make it's way up the red line, complete maintenance activities, and make it back in time for nightly closures. Joe said the project will improve the reliability of the red line with shorter and less frequent shutdowns along with less busing to reduce diesel emissions. Essentially the project will make maintenance more efficient, and the project will effectively pay for itself in time as the cost of busing decreases. He introduced an image of a high rail vehicle with rubber tires and a track mounted system that can propel on rails, along with a map showing the proposed tunnel in relation to Alewife Station. Joe stated that the rail system is shallower near the Alewife Station and the furthest point from where they currently have access so they focused on possibilities closer to this section of the rail. He also stated the proposed area is the furthest from residents at approximately 500 feet along with the most direct access for operational flexibility. Compared to other sites they did see lower traffic impact here along with of the shortest tunnel lengths that they could achieve to tap into the tunnel, which reduced the site disturbances and impacts to natural resources. Joe described a map and the areas of the site in relation to the nearby wetland resource area with three main parts to the project being the paved access road off of Alewife Center Road, the multimodal path crossing the road, and the covered entrance ramp that will be a little over 100 feet before heading underground. To construct the tunnel, they will push sheet piling into the ground to form a continuous watertight wall followed by a drill rig which pokes a series of holes in the ground and injects concrete under high pressure to form a jet grout plug to create watertight walls and a watertight seal on the bottom. From there they will excavate, build structure, backfill and removing bracing. Joe stated the erosion controls will be a series of erosion control fence around the perimeter that they've defined as work limits for the contractor that they're not to work outside of. There will also be a 12-inch diameter silt-sock with five foot overlap looking to mimic the same silt sock that was used as part of the IQHQ development and make sure that their specifications call for the contractor to maintain it in good condition throughout the project. He also said the stormwater drainage is comprised of two discharge points; the paved access road, which drains to the southwest to the existing wetlands, and then there's drainage area where all the stormwater runoff on top of the entrance ramp is diverted to the northwest to an existing low point on the site. Joe detailed their goal is to have no net flood storage within the 100-year floodplain. From a landscape perspective, there's 30 trees within the footprint of the proposed work and they will be replacing the 30 removed trees, some of which are dead and evasive with 30 new trees that will all be suitable for a floodplain and non-invasive accompanied by 36 shrubs. He stated the project schedule is final design for August 2025, appraisal and acquisition of rights completed for November 2025, construction notice to proceed in March 2026, and construction completion in March 2028.

Kara Falise stated that some of the questions outlined in her memo were addressed in the presentation so they should submit these items for the record. She stated the grading out there is a little finicky and she noticed there was a section in the presentation where the limit of work was very aggressive and set immediately outside the limit of grading. Having more understanding of how this road which turns into a tunnel that is as deep as 30 feet would be constructed and what the limits of the impacts would be beneficial and more detail and acknowledgement of some temporary impacts that may be out there would be helpful. The sheet piling they touched on is noted in the application and is something that IQHQ as property owners will need to agree with probably as part of their negotiations with IQHQ, but it would be helpful to understand where those sheet pilings will be and to what depth they will be down into the ground. Demarcations of

the limit of work may need to be detailed as that limit of work is further expanded for tree protection for trees that are adjacent to the work. Kara also said the proposal as presented does indicate an excess of flood storage by volume for the project. There is a requirement that flood storage be provided in foot increments to mitigate the change at each elevation. There was a deficit at one of the elevations and they should review the plans to see if they could make that up to get the proper compensation at every elevation. Another item she wanted to focus on was the pedestrian path. Kara stated when IQHQ was before the commission they received a check on their compensatory storage proposal that the path generally is riding on grade. IQHQ's path is not making significant changes to the grade, but there was proposed grading in the area of this tunnel associated with the IQHQ project. It was not clear in the initial application that they use the IQHQ grading as the existing conditions. They did confirm that tonight, but we will need to see that formally on a plan. She also said it's also helpful to show compensatory storage by area in plan view. Kara described when the access road becomes a ramp, there is sort of wall sections that will extend above the ground. It was unclear whether that volume was compensated for along with talk about a floodgate being proposed at the entrance where this becomes a tunnel and whether that closing the gate impacted the flood storage was being calculated. We're assuming that in a flood occurrence, that gate or door is closed so the tunnel does not provide any of the flood storage. She said the proposal for stormwater management is adequate and just some administrative items to be cleaned up. Kara stated the city would like more details on the gate concerning operation, specs and hours. She moved on to tree impacts and proposed mitigation with the removal of trees and stated the MBTA, on MBTA property is not subject to the tree protection ordinance. It's become more standard to talk about caliper inches lost and they did provide that in the notice of intent that there was about 270 caliper inches lost with a replacement of 74 caliper inches. It's a one-to-one tree replacement that is proposed and not a one-to-one caliper inch that is proposed, which would be consistent with the tree ordinance. Another point Kara pointed out was the proposed limit of the easement that would give the MBTA rights to the site should never be overlaid with the construction plan. The city would like to make sure that the MBTA is getting rights that encompasses the entire project and that they can access, maintain, and operate this tunnel, particularly as the stormwater management system sits outside. She also noted that attention should be paid to how this access road interacts with the curb cut at the access way from the loop road and impact to compensatory flood storage.

Joe answered that the braced sheet piling wall gets us down to 30 feet and there will be no stockpile on site. Many concerns about access and the work limits are still under preliminary negotiations, so they didn't get into too much detail for the presentation s they are still working on those details as well. They are pushed right up against their work limits but plan to keep the disturbance as minimal as possible. He also stated they are using protective fencing concerning trees outside of the work limit and as far as compensatory storage there may have been some miscommunication so they will make those adjustments to get that one elevation corrected along with some other calculations. Joe also said the flood door and the gate is four feet tall and is normally closed so the tunnel is flood protected. The compensatory calculations do assume the door closed. They do consider the wall thickness, and the wall thickness did play a big part in the compensatory storage calculation. They were reducing those walls and increasing rebar to make those walls work and potentially adjust it more. The door will normally be closed and when the MBTA is going to access the tunnel it'll be under controlled operation where the door will open and that'll effectively block the path. There'll be flaggers and detours during work. There has been a lot of discussion with their safety and security teams on logistics and they will forward

those plans. They don't want someone to inadvertently open the flood door and hit someone that's biking by in a multimodal path, so they're restricted to only opening the door from the outside and if there was an event where someone needed to get out, that's where the security gate will allow it open up and someone to get over the top. Joe said they will make some adjustments and clarifications and will be maintaining the ADA compliance and general operational safety both during construction and thereafter.

Jennifer stated this item will be continuing to the next hearing and all these additional and edited documents should be received before end of business November 4th. She acknowledged receiving public comment form the following individuals: Alison Sanders Fleming, Charles Hollander, Charles Teague, Dory King, Gabriel Robinson, Heather Hoffman, Ina Starris, Janet Randall, Jeb Mays, John Hanrowdy, John McDougal, Julie Ray, Green Cambridge, Madeline Astor, Marty Bockle, Melissa Ludke, Mike Nakagawa on behalf of ASG, Nani Valentine, Rika and Charles Welch, S. Ringer and Sarah Gaiarag. Most of those comments read like this; Dear Commissioners, On 9-25-2024 plans show 30 trees totaling 269 diameter at breast height being replaced with 30 saplings totally 74. Cambridge standard is instead a minimum inch for inch replacement. Given one, the current state of climate change, two, the fact that even small trees, let alone saplings, provide almost no cooling and are carbon negative for decades, and three, the high mortality rate of plantings, even the Cambridge standard is inadequate. The Commission must issue rigorous tree conditions for this project. This is not difficult as the current MBTA budget is \$33 million with trees likely currently being maybe \$30,000. The commission must also note the MBTA plans to develop 33 acres in the Alewife Station area, some amount being in the purview of the commission, so policies here may be used as a precedent for the future. Conditions may include mitigation for trees cut down by the MBTA and Alewife Station this spring. Note the MBTA admitted clearing some area but denied the mass tree removals. Tree mitigation for MBTA areas must be at least still inadequate to meet climate mitigation benefits of existing trees. A better solution is to choose a different location with fewer trees to be removed. Double the DPH removed, 50% saplings, at least two-inch diameter, 50% saplings, at least three-inch diameter. The Alewife study group's requirements are also needed. Update the tree survey to include the project updates, including flood storage, completely stake out the site with tape outlining all areas of interest. A commission meeting on site with the public. Public access to the site in order to prepare for the above meeting. Finally, this ASG request should be the highest priority to quote the ESG newsletter a poor location for this tunnel. Yes, this location relatively far from houses, but it goes through one of the most contaminated areas in the WR Gray site. Please consider a different location. Signed Charles Teague. Jennifer also read into record a note from ASG. Please share the following thoughts from the Alewife Study Group with the conservation commissioners. We hope that the meeting on Monday, October 21st, will be an introductory meeting to the future meeting with a deeper discussion after a site visit. Although the Commission visited this part of IQHQ site before IQHQ started work, it would be good to visit the area after the completion of their soil remediation and to get better context for a more limited potential work area. We feel the site should be open to the public as previous site visits have been. The MBTA representatives have indicated that construction is unlikely before 2026. Since there isn't an urgent deadline before the construction activities begin, we ask the commission work with the MBTA to have a discussion meeting scheduled after enough time for the community to investigate the impacts of their proposal, not just in relation to the issues under the Conservation Commission's direct purview, but also with relation to other site issues because; one, the community only learned about project last month, two, the location chosen

with no community input in the community still evaluating proposed location and possible alternatives, three, the plan for handling contaminated soil, the RAM plan filed with the MassDHP needs significant changes, especially regarding following the Cambridge asbestos Pollution Ordinance requirement for tent and vent where soil disturbing will occur. Even the extensive asbestos found in soil and that of the location is upwind of Russell Field Youth Sports, four, the proposed location is a four acre restored ecosystem committed by IQHQ as part of the special permit for their development, five, the driveway to the proposed tunnel crosses new bike ped path from IQHQ site to the T Plaza and proposed future plan from IQHQ site through arch tunnel on Alewife Loop Road, which more directly connect linear path with Minuteman Fitchburg cutoff and Discovery Park Pass. As the MBTA responds to community concerns through the RAM plan review process, there will likely be changes to the Conservation Commission to consider. Thank you for considering our request. Sincerely Mike Nakagawa for the Alewife Study Group.

David stated that there were 30 attendees present and they will get to a timed public comment, but don't feel the need to speak if you already submitted a form of public comment. He also confirmed the timeline the MBTA set forth with the correction that construction begins in 2026 and ends 2028. David also mentioned his concern for the project to possibly revisit the commission as plans may change with a final design date so far in advance, and also concern for work occurring along with work from IQHQ.

Elysse clarified that public comment will be kept open for the duration of the project being discussed by the commission and those detailed comments can still be submitted. She also initiated scheduling a site visit.

Jeniffer received the commissioners' schedules and set a site meeting open to the public for Friday November 8th at noon.

Erum asked if the commission would be receiving the documents that IQHQ received for the easement application.

Joe stated those documents should be ready November 2025 and eluded back to David's comment about the timeline and why they are coming to the commission first. Everyone wants to have the design locked in as it impacts the plan to enter a real estate agreement with a high confidence level that the project can be built.

Tess stated they are hopeful that any changes to the plan will be minimal enough and will not impact the wetland protection act or jurisdictional resources therefore not requiring another appearance.

Chrissy Gabriel representing IQHQ was able to join and stated that the property is an active construction site and pile drivings will be occurring during the planned site visit so the MBTA team should really delineate the area for the visit.

Kathryn stated a site visit would be helpful as there have been numerous projects changing the area and said it would also be helpful to have a google maps image to help orient the very

detailed drawings. She also said she remembers previous visits for the are required fencing for contaminated areas and is concerned now about excavation in the area.

Tess responded that they are aware of the contaminated material and did not reference it too much concerning the wetland protection act as they are going through a PIP program under MCP regulations.

Joe added that they have a licensed site professional, an LSP, looking at that process right now.

Kathryn also stated there's definitely an intersection because when you start talking about disturbing cogenerate soils there is potential for impacts on the wetlands that we're talking about.

Tess did recognize that as a concern especially with how much material will be removed and they have materials they can share with the commission on that process.

Kathryn also asked about the current ownership of the land.

Tess answered that the MBTA is purchasing the land and will ultimately have an easement for access as they well own and operate the land with the tunnel.

Kathryn commented that the transition of land is a work around of the tree caliper issue.

Tess recognized that is a concern that has been heard from the public and ensures they will try to meet the community in a way that will not impact their operations.

David also asked about the asbestos ordinance and what is being followed.

Tess stated she is not familiar with the compassion of the PIP program and local ordinances, but there will be public meetings to address this as well.

Erum asked to clarify that there are areas where trees can not be planted in the plan.

Joe confirmed that tress would not be planted where they may affect the structural integrity of the tunnel where roots could damage waterproofing and create point loads.

Lori stated she is excited to see the response to Kara's memo but questioned the discussion f easement versus owning the property.

Tess answered that she would be able to provide more information after discussing it with the real estate department, but they would still need to purchase an easement.

Lori also mentioned Joe slightly alluded to inlet protection and asked him to elaborate on that.

Joe stated this referenced the catch basins on Alewife Center Road and using a filter fabric under the grates.

Jim stated it is important to discuss foliage impact does not increase and questioned if there would be a negative pressure tent set up. He said a lot of materials can go airborne there and wondered about mitigation and safety issues so it doesn't impact any other foliage.

Tess said they will provide more information on the PIP standards they will be following.

David reiterated that public comments will be accepted at and up to the next meeting along with the site visit being open to the public.

Lisa Birk of 20 Castle Park reiterated Kathryn's concern of the area changing so much with so many projects and mentioned the area has been developing for 29 years. Lisa stated losing 30 trees may sound relatively small but this is the area that IQHQ dedicated as a four acre meadow that is now being developed. Lisa also agrees with David's and Jim's concerns about tenting the area

Eppa Rixey of 126 Harvey Street and member of the Alewife Study Group echoed the concerns of native plants and compensatory flood storage. Protecting trees and limiting impact to contaminated soils was a large issue when reviewing IQHQ. Eppa stated asbestos containing material is not an accurate characterization of the contamination as it's not chunks from a building, it's loose fiber asbestos integrated into the soil, which is why it's so concerning. Eppa asked that the plan follow more closely to the standard IQHQ was held to.

Joel Nogie, a resident near Russell Field and member of the Alewife Study Group, built off the previous comments appreciating an open site walk and requested an updated tree study. Joel hopes that the MBTA will follow the intent of the local ordinances and not the minimum requirements and follow the intent of the hundreds of hours of community IQHQ collaboration. Joel does not believe two meetings will be enough and hopes that the MBTA will collaborate with IQHQ as the multiuse path they dedicated to residents will go the area in question.

David Bass of 23 Norris Street their sadness for one, the excavation for the mass amounts of contaminated material and two, the negotiation with IQHQ in managing their own land and saving a significant number of trees that may now be removed. David also stated that just when the IQHQ project would be winding down the lives in North Cambridge will now be disrupted by this project.

Charles Teague of Jackson Street also voiced concern of the loss of trees for long term climate emergency and stated that mature trees are irreplaceable and even the Cambridge standard is inadequate.

Ann McDonald of the Whittemore neighborhood walks around the site almost everyday and respects all of the public comments and echoes David Bass's comment of possibly combining this with the Alewife parking garage project. Looking at disturbing contaminated soil and losing trees in an area that IQHQ worked with the community on definitely needs more consideration according to Ann and glad to see that the commission is also concerned.

James Williamson stated they are very upset that a public agency that is begging for money can't consult the community when choosing a location with five alternatives. James stated the garage construction site seems like a promising location.

David Lyons questioned if there is an alternatives analysis of sites that can be provided.

Tess stated she will work on putting together a comprehensive report for the commission.

8:48 – The commission unanimously approved to continue to next meeting.

6 – In Favor, 1– Absent

8:51 – Administrative Topics

Meeting Minutes Approved– September 16, 2024

6 – In Favor, 1– Absent

Jennifer thanked the commission members who attended the fall MACC conference. The next major event will be the Annual Environmental Conference in March of 2025 in Worcester. There will also be more opportunities for trainings including ethics trainings specific to the commission that David had reached out to the law department about. Jennifer stated she will also work on the 2025 meeting calendar.

The commission thanked Kara for the memos this meeting and the thorough explanations.

Elysse stated that David helped unearth the onboarding document she wrote for new members so she will be sharing with everyone.

Jennifer stated it may be nice to review the Head of the Charles and the Eliot Bridge project.

8:59 – Meeting Adjourned

6 – In Favor, 1– Absent