

January 19, 2017 - Fresh Pond Reservation Master Plan Advisory Board Meeting Minutes

Submitted: Dave Kaplan/Sam Corda – March 16, 2017

Advisory Board Members in Attendance:

Janice Snow (Chair), David Kaplan, Susan Agger, Jim Barton, Doug Brown, Janet Burns, Adam Corbeil, Jennifer Letourneau, Deborah Masterson, Jamie Porreca, Claudia Thompson, Candace Young

Advisory Board Members Not in Attendance:

Lauren McPherson-Siegrist, Ann Roosevelt

Water Department in Attendance:

Sam Corda, Tim MacDonald, Vincent Falcione, Martine Wong

Public in Attendance:

Kathleen Kelly (Resident, Cambridge Water Board Member), Elizabeth Wylde (Resident, Friends of Fresh Pond), Magda McCork (Resident, Cambridge Pedestrian Committee), Diana Lomakin (Resident, Friends of Fresh Pond Planning Committee), Bud Scheffy (Resident, Reservation Walker), Carol Lynn Alpert (Resident, Cambridge Lighting Task Force), Andrea Williams (Resident, Cambridge Bicycle Committee), Nidhi Gulati (Boston Resident, Livable Streets), Joe Lamerian (Arlington Resident),

Meeting opened at 6:05 pm

Meeting Minutes: S. Corda, D. Kaplan

Item 1: Review Agenda

No amendments, modifications suggested.

Item 2: Meeting Minutes

Deborah Masterson moved and Candice Young seconded the motion to accept the November 17, 2016 meeting minutes as amended. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion.

Item 3: City Lighting Proposal for DCR Pathway along Huron Ave (Olmsted) Forest

Advisory Board Chair, Janice Snow prior to the Board comments and their vote offered a context for the discussion: a brief history of the origin of the Master Plan Committee, its product, the Master Plan and the Advisory Board established by the Plan to oversee it. She also wanted to correct the misunderstanding of some that the Master Plan was simply a standard project guideline of limited duration. She referred to the multi-year Master plan process set up by the City Manager's office in 1997 to support a long-term vision for protecting the future of our water supply and its landscape for future generations. She cited Master Plan language that reiterates this point: the Plan's vision statement that speaks of the Reservation as a "unique and irreplaceable resource," as a "legacy for future generations" and as the "only City-owned parkland with a wild character;" the repeated use of terms in the Plan such as "long term planning," "long term stewardship," and the Plan as "a road map."

She reminded the meeting of the Master Plan's Section IV, the "Ecological and Social History of the Fresh Pond Reservation" which speaks of "continued pressure" to install structures inside Fresh Pond's water supply lands and decades of citizen efforts to protect and restore the natural landscape going back to the 1970's. The Plan's Land Use Policy was written to address these pressures. What makes the policies of the Master Plan and its oversight by the Advisory Board particularly relevant, she noted, is not just its unanimous vote by the Master Plan Committee that wrote the Plan, not just its support by the City Manager, but the near unanimous vote by the City Council on January 8, 2001 to approve the Plan.

Member Comments on Lighting

Jim Barton spoke against lighting in that it will attract, not deter criminal activity in an isolated gully area. Jim, one of only three Advisory Board members from the original 1997 committee that wrote the Master Plan, noted that he was also a member of the subcommittee on Land Use chaired by the Deputy City Manager, Rich Rossi. The Land Use Policy written by the subcommittee and approved by the full Committee is part of the Master Plan, approved by City Manager and the City Council. Key provisions of that policy protect among other areas the pine forests south and west of Fresh Pond as examples of those areas that “shall continue forever as undisturbed natural areas...”

The Land Use Policy of the Fresh Pond Reservation Master Plan also has a general no lighting provision with the exception of developed areas. It’s public safety exception was anticipated for the small lights atop a limited number of police call boxes along the Perimeter Road, never for installing light structures in natural areas such as the base of the Huron Ave Olmsted forest. Installing lighting along the multi-use path will if anything encourage, not deter crime as the area is hidden from the street, below a dark forested hill where a criminal could hide unseen while waiting to attack a well illuminated victim walking or biking along the path.

Deborah Masterson spoke against lighting as contrary to the City Council approved Master Plan for the Reservation. She read from the 2006 letter signed by former City Manager Robert Healy letter (attached) as prior accepted rationale against lighting; Healey wrote, “the lighting does not meet any of the desired outcomes of the Fresh Pond Master Plan in terms of the aesthetics, native vegetation and trees and the desired atmosphere of an individual’s experience when visiting the reservation that is very important to the overwhelming majority of users of the Fresh Pond Reservation.”

Candace Young who recently walked the “gully” below the pine forest where the path will be installed argued that the area should not be artificially lighted for ecological and safety reasons. The lighting would give a false sense of security and she cannot imagine wanting to walk in this “gully” after dark, or encourage people to do so. She noted that some supporters of lighting the multi-use path proposed many years ago may not now be aware of the habitat Fresh Pond Reservation has become. She is concerned that lights will attract people into the Reservation when it is closed. As the state DCR, who has the easement and is constructing the multi-use path, has a “no light” policy and the Reservation has no-lighting policy described by former City manager Healey’s in his 2006 letter to the City Council, Candace also opposes installing lighting below the pine forest.

Claudia Thompson supports a bike path, but is strongly opposed to lighting the area within the Reservation. She is both an ecologist and bicyclist, and walks regularly around the Reservation. Permanent lights along the path will in her view compromise ecological integrity of the area, especially for bird life and other wildlife at night. As a bicyclist she has ridden hundreds of miles along bike paths in multiple states; she finds personal lights not only sufficient for safely navigating these routes, but preferable to the “spottiness” of street/path lighting. She is also very concerned about the likelihood of lighting drawing unwanted uses into the Reservation at night, and making the area less safe overall.

Jamie Porecca agreed with previous comments against lighting. She cited ecological impacts as a major concern and passed out a scientific journal article (Journal of Ecology 2016, Ecological effects of artificial light at night on wild plants, J. Bennie, et al.) including effects on plant pollinators and thus plant growth. She also cited studies collected in the book, Ecological Consequences of Artificial Night Lighting, 2006, C. Rich and T. Longcore, eds, including studies of the negative effects of artificial light on predator prey relationships (salamanders, moths, and mammals). Nocturnal animals protected by darkness in a natural ecosystem are more vulnerable to predators who can now see them under artificial lights. She argued that humans must adapt to natural landscapes not visa-versa.

Doug Brown spoke in favor of lighting in that it is allowed according to the Master Plan, if needed for public safety. He argued that ecological impacts can be managed through technology (dimming, timers, shielding). He noted that City lighting policy supports lighting of bike paths and that off road bike paths are needed to provide minimal redress for the dominance of space provided to automobiles and the danger they pose to street bicycle riders.

Adam Corbeil (DHS Division Head Cambridge Recreation) spoke in favor of lighting believing that lighting could positively impact public safety and lessen the risk of potential injury."

Susan Agger (Science teacher and Coordinator, Maynard Ecology Center) spoke against lighting along the new Reservation segment of the DCR multi-use path as it would negatively affect wildlife, a priority for protection at the Reservation. Wildlife experts have noted that this area provides a green corridor for animals, including those traveling at night to and from Mt. Auburn Cemetery. There is enough ambient light as it is in other areas limiting safe space for nocturnal animals.

Jennifer Letourneau did not provide an opinion on lighting citing lack of subject matter expertise. She was not present for the vote. Later she asked if emergency call boxes were planned for this section, and spoke of future pathway connections north of Concord Ave. She noted that the DCR has filed a Notice of Intent for a wetlands construction permit, hearing date 1/23 at 7:05pm, and is not including lighting as part of the submission.

Janet Burns spoke out against lighting for ecological reasons including impacts to plants and wildlife. Darkness at night is an idea which supports master plan goals of preserving and restoring naturalistic visual character and ecological site values. While the area of focus is not large it is unusual on the reservation. It is buffered from the parkway by distance, topography and the pine forest. She supports the DCR policy to not light bike paths, which concurs with the Audubon Society's position that lighting interferes with the well being of wildlife. Scientists are in the early stages of new knowledge about night time ecology which Cambridge should acknowledge where possible. Signage, as cyclists enter the unlighted area, could educate about the role of darkness and highlight the fact that the "transportation corridor" is passing through a rare urban ecological refuge.

Kathleen Kelly (representing the Cambridge Water Board in place of Ann Roosevelt), a resident of Strawberry Hill, argued against lighting. She spoke of the profound importance of maintaining dark spaces, citing scientific studies that artificial lighting disturbs wildlife; in fact, observing the natural nocturnal cycle is essential for wildlife. In response to the notion that the "big picture" is defined by human needs, she argued that a healthy environment defines the big picture. She noted that there appears to be conflicting data with respect to the public safety benefits versus public safety harms of artificial lighting. Along with others, she requested more data from the City on the matter, suggesting that the conflict created between City policy on lighting for bikeways versus the DCR policy on no lighting is further complicated by public safety concerns and convenience as they clash with the mission of Fresh Pond Reservation to insure a viable water supply, which depends upon the protection of natural areas around the Reservoir.

David Kaplan (Watershed Manager) spoke against lighting citing concerns over lighting attracting after-hours usage of the Fresh Pond Reservation (open dawn-dusk). Lighting will introduce new and avoidable ecological impacts. He is skeptical that lighting in this area is necessary for public safety. If not necessary for public safety, installing lights in this area conflicts with the Fresh Pond Master Plan outdoor lighting policy.

Janice Snow, Advisory Board Chair and a member of the Committee that wrote the Master Plan, noted that her opposition to installing artificial lighting in this dark, Olmsted pine forest is supported by DCR's policy against lighting its bike paths for both safety and habitat reasons and the Master Plan Land Use Policy on Lighting. In addition any light poles/structures themselves would violate the

Master Plan policy and the aesthetics of this space and set a dangerous precedent leading to demands for more lighting. The Reservation's lighting policy defined in the Master Plan 16 years ago and approved by the City Council should not be seen as conflicting with any City bike path policy, but as a necessary exception for a precious landscape as made clear in former Manager Robert Healey's letter to the City Council (attached) cited above by Deb Masterson.

Cambridge purchased the railroad right-of-way with the easement to construct the multi-use path to the state DCR which has a long standing no-lighting policy along the length of this "Greenway" and all its paths and requires users to use bicycle headlights at night for safety. Why then would the City send a letter to DCR Commissioner Leo Roy (attached), asking him to overrule DCR policy and his Director of Recreation Facilities Planning, the expert in charge of constructing these paths? Still more concerning is that the letter to Commissioner Roy (which the Board was not sent) makes no mention that the path segment runs through Fresh Pond Reservation, let alone that the area is a sensitive forested watershed area with its own City-approved no-lighting policy.

Toronto Canada with many miles of bike lanes through urban and natural spaces offers an alternative to a one-size fits all approach. They light open urban stretches and place clear signs at the entrance to and exits from sensitive areas warning bikers that these segments are not artificially lit. There are also a number of designs of heavy duty, adhesive, and plowable pavement reflectors in multiple colors to mark path to protect users from oncoming bicycles and to delineate the path edges to keep users slipping off the into planted wetland depressions or the many trees lining this segment.

Given its location, the Reservoir path segment is more likely to be used, not by Cambridge commuters, but by Watertown bikers entering from an unlit segment. This area of Huron Ave has also been discussed as an ideal location for a separated bike lane providing a more direct and safe route to Harvard Square. Converting car space to bikes is a much sounder ecological tradeoff than sacrificing the quality of our scarce natural spaces to light poles.

Sam Corda, Managing Director of the Water Department, noted that the city standard is lighting bicycle pathways. He would like to see the result of the proposed "lighting study" to determine if lighting can be used with little or no impact on the pine forest plant and animal habitat within Fresh Pond Reservation.

CWD Staff Comments

Vincent Falcione cited his 13 years of experience as Fresh Pond Reservation Site Supervisor as informing his opposition to lighting the pine forest path for these reasons: (1) This path segment will connect to unlit pathways in Watertown and Arlington (2) It will encourage after-hours visitation to the Fresh Pond Reservation leading to damage to vegetation and create safety problems. (3) Agreeing to lighting in this sensitive area could lead to requests, claiming a need for public safety, for additional lighting around the Reservation. (4) The area is a wildlife corridor that artificial lighting will disturb.

Martine Wong, Water Department Volunteer & Outreach Coordinator, spoke against lighting citing concerns over after-hours Reservation usage. A biker, she has found that personal (bike) lighting is sufficient.

Resident Public Comment

Bud Scheffey (walker, Strawberry Hill) asked about known increased attendance at Fresh Pond Reservation. David Kaplan pointed to the census program and reports published on the Water Department website. No clear trends in usage since the census program inception in 2011. Mr. Scheffey asked if Reservation crime was increasing. Vincent Falcione, who manages Reservation incident reports, did not have reason to believe crime is increasing (anecdotal).

Carol Lynn Alpert (Cambridge Lighting Task Force) suggested alternatives to lighting. She explained that more light does not equal security. Complex issue that needs to be carefully considered. She asked about how to increase public safety in other ways, for example path reflectors.

Elizabeth Wylde (Friends of Fresh Pond) spoke against lighting citing habitat loss threatening wildlife. She stated that lighting the path is a “disservice” to ourselves and nature.

Diana Lomakin (Friends of Fresh Pond) passed out a letter on behalf of the Friends of Fresh Pond group against lighting (attached).

Magda McCormick (Cambridge Pedestrian Committee) spoke in favor of lighting [multi-use paths in general] to get more people biking and walking.

Andrea Williams (Cambridge Bicycle Committee) spoke in favor of lighting to draw people in, get cars off the road, and improve public safety. She is a proponent of dark skies.

Nonresident Public Comment

Nidhi Gulati (Livable Streets, Jamaica Plain) spoke in favor of the Greenway and in favor of lighting for attracting usage and facilitating path discovery.

Joe Lamerian who bikes to work in Cambridge from his home in Arlington spoke against lighting. He rejected the argument that lighting environmentally sensitive natural areas off road should be an acceptable trade-off to protect bikers from cars. What should be the tradeoff, he argued is the taking more of the paved lit space now reserved for cars to bicyclists to ride in safe, separated, lanes.

Deborah Masterson moved and Jim Barton seconded a motion that the Fresh Pond Reservation Master Plan Advisory Board send a letter (including all Board members’ comments on lighting) to the City Manager’s Office in favor of no lighting within the Pine Forest section of the Greenway and in support of preserving the area’s ecological uniqueness in relation to the Fresh Pond Master Plan. The vote was 10 to 2 (Adam Corbeil & Doug Brown dissenting) in favor of no lighting. No abstentions. Jennifer Letourneau was not present at time of vote. Kathleen Kelly voted as proxy representing the Water Board for Ann Roosevelt.

Claudia Thompson moved and Deborah Masterson seconded a motion to request the City Manager’s Office analyze lighting the Pine Forest section to determine if lighting will enhance or decrease public safety. The vote was 12-0 in favor of the motion, Kathleen Kelly voted for Ann Roosevelt.

A request was made for David Kaplan to find out the status and scope of Community Development’s Greenway Lighting Study.

Item 4: Watershed Manager's Report

DCR Landscape Plan Update: New plans are available for review and comment. Plant schedule does not reflect updated plans.

Drainage and Community Garden Project: The project was publically advertised earlier today (1/19).

Landscape Maintenance: Waiting for ground to freeze to schedule routine tree work.

Jim Barton moved and Candace Young seconded the motion to table the remaining agenda items to March and adjourn the meeting. The vote was unanimous in favor of the motion. The meeting was adjourned at 8:18pm.