

MINUTES TO CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEETING – SOMERSWORTH, NH

May 9, 2012 Council Chambers – City Hall

7:00 PM

Attending: Frank Richardson, Scott Gessis, Imants Millers, Liz Wilson, Dale Smith-Kenyon,
Director of Planning & Community Development Dave Sharples

1. Workshop Business.

- A. Approval of prior meeting minutes. Frank Richards noted that “Mast Pointe Dame” in section 3.B of the November 9, 2011 minutes should be “Mast Pointe Dam” and that the word “what” should be inserted into the fourth line from the bottom of section 3.A such that it reads “...to get a sense of what”. Scott Gessis noted that “gold” in line five in Section 3.A should be “golf”. Imants Millers made a motion to accept the minutes of the November 9, 2011 meeting as amended. Dale Smith-Kenyon seconded the motion. The motion passed unanimously.
- B. Discussion on the Mast Point Dam conservation land trail network proposal. Dave Sharples presented the concept plan for the reuse of the Mast Point Dam area, including the historical use of the property as a recreational area, the current misuse of the space, and the interest by the City to redevelop it. Several property owners attended the workshop to express their opinions regarding the concept plan.

Kate Shattuck, an adjoining land owner, expressed her concern about the existing daytime and nighttime activity at the dam and that she had been robbed twice. Additionally, she stated that cars tend to drive excessively fast on Salmon Falls Road and that she is worried about people parking and walking along the road with high speed traffic.

Scott Sanderson also lives close by and indicated that his home has been broken into twice and that the traffic on Salmon Falls Road is too fast. He suggested that the police don't have the time or money to adequately patrol the area; that this portion of Somersworth is a low priority. Mr. Sanderson's concern was that if a recreational area was developed, more people would be walking along the road and potentially onto his property. He expressed concern that opening up the area would provide 15 acres of land for more illicit activity. Mr. Sanderson suggested that the City needs a serious plan if it intends to develop the Mast Pointe Dam area. Such a plan would need to include a long-term strategy for maintenance and enforcement.

Greg Tierney, who lives close to the area, stated that he has seen the subject area from the river for approximately 4 years. He suggested that it would not take a significant effort to discourage the illicit behavior provided that attention is paid to the space. He also suggested that the nearby break-ins are not necessarily related to the behavior known to occur at the dam. Rather, the thefts could be due to a general lack of police presence along Salmon Falls Road. Mr. Tierney stated his belief that developing a recreation area would not make the problem worse. He also stated that he does not believe the City is paying attention to the Salmon Falls Road portion of Somersworth.

Resident, Jim Proulx, referenced Bellamy Park in Dover as an example of how an undesirable location can be redeveloped into a family-friendly space. He suggested

that the park is now one of the best Frisbee parks in the region, families can now confidently use the park, and that the space is maintained by volunteers.

Resident Christopher Cortez stated that Salmon Falls Road has no street lights and that the area experiences significant night activity. Mr. Cortez expressed concerns over safety at the dam, including flooding and fires.

Susan Tierney, a nearby resident, indicated that she is a walker and likes the idea of a pedestrian entrance. She has concerns about the traffic and overall safety. However, she wants to be proud of Somersworth and favors efforts by the City to redevelop the area.

Resident Dan Witham stated that he sees this concept plan as potentially making the situation either worse or better; that there's always a risk. He sees a potential for families if the area is properly developed.

Dave Sharples summarized statements made by residents unable to attend the workshop. Statements included opposition to the plan due to the lack of police enforcement and concern over the potential that the project would increase the level of illicit activity. Other comments included favor for the project on the basis that the area would provide a place for walking and dog walking and as an opportunity for community partnerships.

Greg Tierney stated that launching boats can be dicey and suggested that a warning sign for boaters would be appropriate. Christopher Cortez agreed that water activities would be great for the space, including tubing.

Several residents inquired about the cost of additional lighting for Salmon Falls Road and if it is possible for PSNH to donate lighting. Dave Sharples said that he will add street lighting and parking lighting to the concept plan.

Jim Proulx stated that when there is something that residents need, the City ignores resident concerns and requests. Mr. Proulx asked about who would maintain the recreation area. Dave Sharples responded that the Recreation Department would handle the maintenance. Mr. Proulx suggested that the City set aside an emergency fund for major events.

Dave Sharples and the Commission thanked residents for attending the workshop and expressing their views on the concept plan.

- C. Disposition of City-owned property. Given that the Sunningdale Golf Course parcels have been taken by the City for taxes, the City asked boards and commissions about their interest or potential use for the property. The Commission had no interest in the parcel containing a single family home. Dale Smith-Kenyon suggested that Lot 5 has potential conservation and recreational value because it contains a pond and is adjacent to Millennium Park. Frank Richardson agreed that Lot 5 has conservation value and added that the parcel contains woods and migratory birds. Dave Sharples noted that the parcel contiguous with Millennium Park is quite steep and would be very challenging for active recreational use. Frank Richardson suggested the possibility of mountain bike trails in this area. The consensus of the Commission was

that a portion of Map 20 Lot 5 around the pond has recreational and conservation value. Dale Smith-Kenyon added that Lot 5 is also located close to a school and could provide a space for outdoor education.

D. Election of Officers. Dale Smith-Kenyon was elected as treasurer; Liz Wilson was re-elected as interim secretary; Imants Millers was re-elected as vice-chair; and Frank Richardson was re-elected as chair.

E. Any other workshop business that may come before the Commission. The Commission's membership to the Strafford Rivers Conservancy was due to be renewed. Liz Wilson made a motion to renew the Commission's membership at the \$100 level. Imants Millers seconded the motion, and the motion passed.

2. Adjournment. Dale Smith-Kenyon moved to adjourn. Liz Wilson seconded the motion. The Commission unanimously voted to adjourn at 8:34 PM.

Respectfully submitted, Elizabeth Wilson (interim Secretary)