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TOWN CLERK
ACTON

Minutes for CPC Meeting of 1/8/04, 7:30-11:15 pm, Town Hall, Rm 204

Attending: Andy Magee, Catherine Coleman, Alison Gallagher, Susan Mitchell-Hardt, Walter Foster, Peter Berry, Peter Grover, Mimi Herington, Chris Schaffner, Erin Bettez, Matt Lundberg, Roland Bartl

Audience: Anne Forbes, Bill Mullin, Carol Holley, Dick O'Brien, Ray Gallant, Betsy Comstock, Nancy McShea,Tom Tidman, John Ryder, Brewster Conant, Steve Desy, Ken Sghia-Hughes, Peter Ashton, Dan Duquette, Anita Rogers, Clay Rogers, Bobby Abare, Steve Scanlon, Bruce Muff, Steve Noone, Suzanne Brozek,Scot Apgar, David Scheuer, Ken Sghia-Hughes, Gerry McGavek...

1. Meetings with Applicants:

1. Morrison Farm Feasibility Study and Phase 1 Field Development - submitted by Town of Acton, presented by Don Johnson

The farm was purchased in 1997 for the purpose of recreation - active and passive. Don handed out copies of the warrant article and motion which indicated a unanimous vote and that it was purchased as General Municipal property. Other reasons for purchasing the farm were to preserve the Concord Road streetscape, to protect Ice House Pond and the tranquility of the cemetery.

Don stated the town owns 1500 acres - only 20 of which are devoted to active recreation.
It is difficult to change the property's designation from General Municipal as it will take a Town Meeting vote and must go back to the legislature.

Tom Tidman discussed the feasibility study: He stated that a Master Plan is important due to the farm's proximity to East Acton Village, Bruce Freeman Rail Trail which runs parallel to the Nashoba Brook, and runs the entire length of the property. It also ties directly to the East Acton Village (EAV) green and Ice House Pond. There is abundant publicly owned open space abutting the Town Center - Woodlawn Cemetery and soccer fields, Acton Arboretum (60+ acres) Wetherbee Conservation area (72 acres), etc. Sidewalks are almost completed allow Concord Rd.

The Morrison Farm is 32 acres - half forested. At the north end of the pond was a bridge that crossed over to Great Road - someday it may connect a trail system (3/4 mile long) from the parking lot at Ice House Pond to the village green and Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) The highest area of the property, approx. 4 acres, is suitable for recreational use. The lower fields are wet and protected by the Rivers Protection Act, and should be maintained as meadow appropriate for fields. This is a wonderful area full of possibilities for boardwalks.

Tom showed us a map delineating potential parking, approximately 150 spaces, which can accommodate 4 games (coming and going). (They have a goal for 3 50 parking space lots; Tom envisions them sited near the street). The map also also showed the site of the Robbins Monument.

Preparation has been done for the Master Plan. Three graduate students from the Conway School of Design worked on a Master Plan. There will be many sections, and they will require lots of public input.

Nancy McShea spoke about the fields: She stated that the upper plateau lends itself to one field space 600' long, which could serve a multitude of purposes for different leagues. The 4 acres could support a combination of any two of the following fields: soccer, lacrosse and field hockey and/or rugby fields; or 6 small soccer fields. One could fit one big ball diamond, but that would be too obtrusive. If we put a field on the Morrison Farm, it can open up other space for a ball diamond.

There is significant benefit to developing both fields at once due to economies of scale. Also, if the fields are completed simultaneously, they can be rotated so they won't get worn like the Concord Road field.

Expenses: 150 space parking lot. One parking space costs $750 for a total of $112,500 for the entire 150 space parking lot. Irrigation is $50,000, and ABYS will help with that. Field development costs $270,000 which covers surveying, grading, drainage. They propose to sod the field which is barely more expensive than seeding. With sod it's possible to establish a good grass root system.

The total cost is $432,500 minus $50,000 (from ABYS) equals $382,500. Maintenance costs will be covered by user fees and donations from ABYS.

If we have a great growing season, it will take 30 weeks to establish the field. Maintenance consists of seeding, mowing, fertilizing, aerating, irrigation, and trash removal.

- Erin asked if they considered a Turftech field. Nancy said they did, but the costs are prohibitive.
- Peter Berry inquired if the Ice House Pond parking lot could be used to count toward the 150 parking spaces. Tom said they plan to upgrade that lot and make it handicap accessible.
- Peter asked if a ConsCom Order of Conditions or Waiver will be required for the fields. Tom said that the Master Plan will look at what to do with the meadows and will indicate whether nor not filing will be required.
- Peter asked if there could be additional fields or are the two fields final?
- Tom indicated that the topography limits the number of fields.
- Catherine asked if putting in a large field would disrupt the wildlife corridor? Tom replied that it will have an impact; (most of the animals are nocturnal).
- Andy clarified that the statement comparing 1500 acres of conservation land to 20 acres for active recreation is comparing apples to oranges as a soccer field can be put on one acre of land whereas hiking and trail riding require larger tracts and none of the wildlife shown in the Morrison Farm video could survive on one acre.

Phasing:
- Andy observed there are two proposals, one for the Master Plan and one for playing fields. The students show a plan for one full scale soccer field, and Nancy suggested two. This points to the planning phase of the study. Is it feasible to plan and build the fields without the plan? Andy envisioned funding the plan this year and building the fields next year.
- Tom stated for timing reasons the Master Plan and construction of fields can dovetail. It will take 17 weeks to develop the Master Plan. Nancy added that we can't use the fields right away. Construction should finish and the sod will be laid in the end of the fall. The root system will establish itself during the spring and summer '05.
- Andy commented there is the issue of grading the fields and concern with fill removal and redistribution and the issues of traffic and site lines. Tom commented that a traffic study will be done, and the site line issue needs to be addressed.

Matt Lundberg inquired if two events could be held concurrently - Nancy replied affirmative.
- He inquired if parking is a residential concern to which Nancy replied there is a concern now, and they need to accommodate peak parking load.
- Chris inquired about the impact of fertilizer on the pond and wildlife.
- Nancy said they are mindful of that and have a limited fertilization program. They would fertilize twice/year, and they don't use pesticide on ball fields.
- Chris asked if the Master Plan phase could be skipped.

- Tom said he considered it, but since there are so many pieces to this project: - gateway for Acton, large historic element - critical American history occurred nearby, etc., that the Master Plan is important.
- Mimi inquired re: what would happen if CPA funds weren't available? Don replied that it would have to wait despite the urgent need. According to the five year Recreation Plan the fields are to be built this year, and next year Tom is to follow up with a request for $400,000 for the BFRT.

Public Comment: None

2. East Acton Village (EAV) Green - submitted by the East Acton Village Planning Committee, presented by David Brown

David summed up this project with two words - simple and historic. There used to be a green on the site (corner of Great and Concord Roads). The purpose of restoring the green is to connect EAV back to its history.

The EAVPC reduced the request from $100,000 to $70,000. The EAVPC was appointed three years ago. A primary focus was to preserve open space and tie it in to the history of EAV. On the site was a former railroad depot which was an important part of the economic base 100 years ago. Last year there was a Special Town Meeting to rezone a parcel of land across the street which would allow the Station Master's house to be preserved. The vote was almost unanimous which shows that this focal point is an important key component.

The site consists of two half acre parcels. The side closest to Ice House Pond is zoned Agriculture Recreation Conservation (ARC). The parcel nearest to Great Road is zoned Limited Business, but should be rezoned to ARC. The Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT) goes through the property.

The plan for the EAV green was paid for by a grant. The landscape architect from the Cecil Group worked with Tom Tidman and Dean Charter. The Cecil Group looked at the wetlands, current uses, tied in the history and the town's needs. The plan was well received. The BFRT and Morrison Land enhance the green but are independent of it.

Historical context: Across the street from Ice House Pond is the Dam House which used to be a grist mill, the Wetherbee House (moved to the rear), Station Master's House, Wetherbee Tavern and post office, Nashoba Tavern, etc. Originally the site was a rail road depot - two sets of tracks and an old telegraph pole remain.

A blue stone seating area is proposed which will outline the footprint of the depot. Nearby will be a kiosk for information and to relate the local history. Advertisements for "Summer Fests" could be posted there. Sight lines will be opened up to EAV and Ice House Pond and the view to the dam house/grist mill. Low maintenance vegetation is planned - most of which will be natural. They have talked to Dean Charter about mowing. Excess topsoil was donated in which grass was planted.

Costs: They used town services to accomplish the current look along with a donation to redefine the lettering on the historic granite marker. The original request for $100,000 was too high as the landscape architect didn't understand the committee's constraints.

Business owners are supportive, and will donate between $20,000-$30,000 cash or like kind, which reduces the request to $70,000. The EAVPC would like to get the funding for the project in tandem with the EAV Plan which is on the warrant for April.
- Mimi inquired about the price for the bluestone and whether or not it is necessary. David commented that it costs $6900. Less expensive pavers could be used but wouldn't last as long.

- It was remarked that Great Rd. is very busy, and the state would have to approve a cross walk. A cross walk with flashing lights in the ground is recommended. Dave commented that Robbins Park residents could go there without crossing the road,; the EAVPC wants people to be able to cross over and has recommended a light.
- The EAVPC is also requesting state approval to reduce the speed to 35 mph in EAV.
- Chris Schaffner suggested that since the town owns the land why not leave it as is. Dave explained that it's the gateway to EAV. It will distinguish the area. There will be a sign indicating entrance to EAV; the area is not used after clearing it as there is no place to sit; the pond is an asset which will be enhanced by the green, and it will serve history.
- Chris asked why not develop it as commercial land? Dave commented that due to wetlands, etc. it's not buildable.
- Andy asked what would happen if the Town didn't approve the EAV Plan. Dave replied that the green needs to be done independent of passage of the EAV Plan and that sidewalks, cross walk and creation of an oversight committee will still happen independent of passing the Plan. It also fits in with the BFRT.
- Andy asked if it were an open space or historic proposal. David replied that it was 50:50.
- Andy noted that the proposed vegetative clearing down to the water's edge would not likely be an asset to the water quality of the pond, as implied in the
- Walter commented that leveraging of funds is important. He was pleased to learn that $20,000-$30,000 would come from anonymous donors; he asked if there were efforts to raise additional funds. Dave was not optimistic - he expects only small donations.
- Andy asked if they have concrete bids they can show. Dave said they don't.
- Walter commented that the Morrison Farm Master Plan will encompass looking at the BFRT and the green. He suggested that it would be prudent to wait in case there were a better location for the kiosk, etc.
Dave replied that the Cecil Group looked at the BFRT, and they are cohesive units.
- Ken Sghia-Hughes commented that they want to start this year while they have momentum - to kick off the EAV area. If full funding is not available, they would consider partial funding.
- Steve Steinberg suggested that one approach is for the committee to negotiate an arrangement with the committee, business owners, donors and appropriate dollars based on the following conditions: services donated, private donations, etc. as seed money or matching funds.

Susan commented that the green will be a tremendous asset, and that the kiosk should receive priority as it will explain the history of the area and the rationale for the green. She observed that the cost information in the proposal was sketchy. For example, the total cost for Area 1 is $39,000. The CPC learned that the bluestone plaza cost was $6900; the kiosk is $2000-$3000 based on the cost of the pencil factory kiosk on Davis Road after which this one would be modeled. No estimates were given for the following: salvaged seat walls, wood platform deck, associated planting, misc. signage, misc. site preparation and demolition, misc. earthwork. Justification is needed that these items add up to $31,800 and as to whether or not donations could offset some/all of these items.
- Catherine inquired if without the rail trail and the Morrison Farm development with parking and without easy access from one side to the other, do you think the green will be used?
Dave replied yes - on the "if you build it, they will come" principle. - also those who live on the same side of the street can get there easily.
Alison and Peter Grover were supportive; Peter felt the dollar request could be pared down.

Public Comment:
Anne Forbes commented that it is a terrific proposal. Her question had to do with the last page of the proposal, the breakdown of costs. Under Assumptions,

#4 says, "Hard costs only. Does not include design fees, permits and permitting and/or contingency." - it doesn't include individual figure for design fees.
Steve Steinberg suggested having a donor pay for design costs..

3. Leary Field Proposal - Bill Mullin presented for Friends of Leary Field and the School Committee

Bill handed out a copy of all slides and a supplemental handbook to the CPC.

Bill stated his goal was to show that the CPA and synthetic turf represent value and a ripple effect.

Leary Field is in the center of the ABRHS campus where Acton meets, grows, learns, forms relationships - in short, it's a central community meeting place. 4000+ people/year enjoy spectating athletics or music. The safety of the play surface will enhance recreation.
The problem with the current field is that regular maintenance is expensive and ineffective. It's closed in the summer, and it costs $20,000-$50,000/year to maintain as it gets heavy use as the demand for playing fields is greater than the supply. Soccer, lacrosse, Pop Warner football and Band are heavy users. Acton has 3.1 acres of field space/1000 vs. 10.5 acres/1000 which is recommended by the National Recreation and Park Association.
Potential Pop Warner and lacrosse athletes are turned away.

Fieldturf represents an opportunity for immediate benefit. It would allow the field to be scheduled 4 times as much as now - in other words, it would be the equivalent of building 4 new fields. Due to the potential for increased use Bill could imagine senior citizens at one end (doing Tai Chi) and band at the other.
We could go from 70 useable days to 250 useable days. Bill vehemently supported the purchase of Morrison Farm and its use for developing fields on the level open part; however, Leary Field has the infrastructure in place - traffic control, needs no permits, will serve previously underserved groups.
- Community use would be encouraged - woman's adult soccer team could play, 4th of July celebration could be held; it will relieve the demand to convert the Morrison Farm this year.

The Fieldturf system is 1.2 inches deep; 800 fields are installed worldwide; it increases the usage, no downtime; no water, no fertilizer; it maintains consistency; improves safety over natural grass, and certainly over mud.
- They envision financing over 5 years for each of the 5 years of bonding. The total cost to the taxpayer is 12.6% of CPA funds. Bonding is a challenge - let the voters decide. A 2/3 vote will be required at Town Meeting.
- Fieldturf meets the CPP criteria.
It's consistent with the CP Plan, with the Master Plan Update.
- it's economically feasible to implement;
- It serves a currently underserved population
- It addresses more than one focus area - it will have a ripple effect to open space - it will give more opportunity; can take more time with Morrison Farm, won't have to put soccer fields every where.
- Leverages additional sources of funding - funds will come from fellow citizens.
- Enhances currently owned asset
- The purchase of land for fields is consistent with Town Meeting action.
- The applicant successfully implemented projects of similar type and scale; has demonstrated ability to implement such a project - it will be managed by the school district which has the capacity
Bill stated that the project will benefit to 6000 people - not "stray dogs and cats" - it takes an asset, leverages it, and creates value.
- With sod games are frequently played on mud or frozen ground and often games are canceled as a result.

- Field Turf costs $700,000. $150,000 will come from outside sources. The funding request is for $550,000 bonded over 5 years.

Public Comment:

Suzanne Brozek, Chair of Friends of Music, commented that the band uses the field. Friends support the marching colonials and the colorguard - they have pledged $1000 and as much work as necessary. The turf represents safety and the opportunity to spend more time practicing and to move up from winning the silver medal to the gold.

Gerry McGavek representing football, pledged $30,000.
Ray Gallant - the Colonial Club has 2000 members who pledge $10,000. He reiterated this will affect many people.

David Scheuer spoke for ABYS which enrolls 1500-1800 children from K-9; they also support adult teams, women's teams, and pledge $50,000; it will be of less benefit to them than others, but it will increase their ability to play on real fields.

Bruce Muff spoke for Lacrosse - it's fast growing and large (105 boys and they use the HS fields) - they had two youth teams and are now up to 8. Lacrosse put forward $10,000.

Scott Apgar of Boxboro stated he is in the process of fundraising privately and from corporations.

- Peter Berry asked if there is a soft cost for bonding - Bill replied, no - the the town issues the bond - it's wrapped with the price.
- Erin asked if the field could be used past 8 pm - probably not as the neighborhood would object.
- Alison would like a more detailed schedule showing specifically who would use the fields and when.

Injuries?

- Catherine was concerned about injuries - she felt the information from other schools was anecdotal. She would like to see an independent study of injuries on this surface - there are none.
- Andy commented that there might be injury issues. He has heard there are fewer injuries, but more severe ones. Bill commented that the Patriots use Fieldturf for practice - they use grass for the games because the aesthetics are better for television. Bill believes there isn't hard data re: injuries - only testimonials.

Steve Desy believes there was a 5 year study in Texas.

- She asked if there is a cooling system if it's hot - Bill answered no, as far as he knows practice has never been canceled for heat.

Funding:

- Peter Berry asked if there is a soft cost for bonding - Bill replied, no - the the town issues the bond - it's wrapped with the price.
- Catherine asked how much Boxboro will raise. Bill stated he was not sure. 20% of students come from Boxboro so they would like $30,000 from Boxboro.
- Walter cautioned that this is the first year for the CPC. Two groups raised $150,000 - will they continue? Bill commented they have heavy fundraising to do. He expects the Lions, Rotary, and Monday Night Quarterbacks to pitch in. They will not be able to exceed $150,000. Walter reminded the committee that ABYS can't donate to two projects.
- Steve Noone - Treasurer of ABYS, felt the fundraising would take two years.

Walter re: Bonding at Town Meeting. The argument against the CPA has always been that the CPA could come back and bond - what would you say? Bill said the CPA can't be revoked in 5 years - the life of the CPA.

- The School Committee voted to not ask for more than $150,000 the first year; they are willing to undo the bonding concept if it were more helpful to the committee.
- Peter Berry asked if Fieldturf would finance this? Bill stated they haven't explored it.
- Bill observed funding the project would require 12+% of CP funds for 5 years and that it's using half of the Recreation fund allocation.
- Andy observed that the CPC has $1.8 million of proposals and that the bonding interest costs alone on this proposal would be the equivalent of. If we allocate half the allotment for Recreation it may take away the funding being requested this year for the T.J. O'Grady Skatepark. If one were to suggest that recreation should receive one quarter of the CPA budget, this project alone would represent half of all the CPA recreation money for the next five years.

20% of the participants of the equity funding is from Boxboro - what about the tax base portion? Zero tax revenue is from Boxboro - it's a concern.
Bill commented that the project stands on its own merit - he can't control Boxborough's contributions. If we get 15% from Boxborough and 85% from Acton - it's not a reason to stop.
There is a concern with the schools coming forward with this at a time when teachers may be taken away.
- Catherine asked - if we give you half, could you leverage the rest? - Bill said No.
- Erin asked if the "Friends" have looked at Nike field development grants; They are not appropriate as no commercial use is allowed such as putting advertising around. Bill commented Leary Field is used for non-profit activities.
- Andy reminded the meeting that the field can't be used for commercial use. Bill answered that the school is a non-profit so its not an issue.

Andy asked when the Fieldturf must be replaced. Bill said that no FieldTurf has been replaced - It comes with an 8 year guarantee.
Matt Lundburg felt it would be more appropriate to look at how other high schools and colleges have fared with FieldTurf rather than how the Patriots fared.
- Chris asked who will pay for maintenance - if it's the school district, is that a windfall for the school? Bill replied that it is not a windfall as the cost savings are modest; The HS field hasn't been well maintained . $3000-$4000 for maintenance would be a great savings.
- Alison admonished against pitting Leary Field against the Morrison Farm fields and she recommended emphasizing the economic reasons.
- Andy noted that the comparison to the Patriots was not exactly the same - the Patriots increased the use of turf in their practice area, not their playing field, as proposed here. Bill stated he did not see the difference. Matt agreed with Andy that practice areas and playing fields are not the same thing.

Next Steps:
- Walter commented that at a future date the committee will look at the spread sheet and begin the conversation. The committee will need to arrive at a strategy going forward which will help them to triage.
- Peter suggested the CPC could start early and put the discussion first on the agenda or we could have a separate meeting outside of the scheduled ones.
- Andy said he would like to hear all the proposals first and then review the spread sheet.
- Andy commented that we will have tough choices - and that we should be unanimous as possible when taking our proposals to Town Meeting. It would be awkward to go to Town Meeting with a project only approved by a vote of 5:4, or with a group giving a minority report. Andy wondered if we should require a 2/3 vote of approval for a project, although agreed consensus would be the best.
- Peter noted that was why he had dedicated a portion of an earlier meeting to a discussion on reaching consensus.

- Peter said he would like to convene the Agenda committee again.

NEXT MEETINGS:

1/22, 7:30 pm, Town Hall, Room 204
1/29, 7:30 pm, Town Hall, Room 204; Review spread sheets
2/5 7:30 pm, Town Hall, Rm 204(in lieu of previously scheduled meeting on 2/12)
2/26, 7:30 pm, Library Meeting Room

Respectfully submitted: Susan Mitchell-Hardt