

53 River Street Committee Meeting Minutes
50 Audubon Drive, Acton
June 20, 2018
7:00 PM

Committee Chairman, Peter Berry called the meeting to order at 7:00.

Committee Members present: Peter Berry, Bill Klauer, Bob Whittlesey, Bill Alesbury, John Cook, Pete Hocknell, Michele Holland, Lou York.

Staff present: Selby and Bettina Abe

Public present: David Honn, Katheryn Acerbo-Bachman, Todd Bachman, Amber Klauer, Andy Richardt

Peter Berry called for citizen's concerns. Amber Klauer asked for a relaxing place to sit, a quiet park. Also keep the historic value. She wants senior housing but not here, citing potential respiratory issues with living near the water.

Kathryn Acerbo-Bachman asked if it is possible to put the Town Meeting presentation by Janet Adachi on DocuShare, as well as the Conway School presentation. Selby stated they are both uploaded. Bettina will check during meeting. Could we add a hyperlinks link to the agenda to DocuShare such as the BOS agenda? Selby will look into doing this. Also she asked is there any plan to have another public forum? We will discuss this tonight.

Tom Bachman asked whether the committee has a timeline for its work? Is the 12 month goal realistic to provide enough feedback? Peter stated that 12 months may not be realistic because funding for studies may cause delays. The committee can go back to Board of Selectmen to ask for more time.

Andy Richardt stated he would like to see a peaceful park, and also learned there is a 5-year waiting list for affordable senior housing, and wants to keep this idea in the mix.

Peter Berry received an email from Franny Osmond, who cannot attend. He read her email for the record: "I really liked Bob Whittlesey's idea of a structure that had affordable housing in it and trails that celebrate the history and nature of the land at 53 River Street. Access to the river will be so wonderful. I think it is important to take every opportunity we can to add affordable units in Acton. Especially when we use taxpayer dollars, including CPA, to purchase land. What a lovely place to live! And when I looked at the map when we discussed this at Housing Authority, it looked like there was sufficient land to have multiple uses. And if there is multiple unit housing, I would like to see some common social, outdoor, or parking areas. I hope it can be designed with pedestrians, not cars, running the show. And with a good portion of the site made into a park. Someone suggested residents working on the landscaping and that sounded like a nice model to consider."

Minutes from June 13. Some spelling corrections noted. Peter wants to go through the minutes, and we will vote on the changes in July meeting.

Bill K gave a presentation about the history of the site. Bill brought in new material, including a letter on South Acton Woolen Company letterhead, and a picture of Hannons Bridge. He discussed the various businesses; Sam Richardson appears to have rented the building out. The mill was first a sash and blind factory then calico printing. By 1855 Holmes Manufacturing was making wool blankets which supplied troops in the Civil War. South Acton Woolen Company exited from 1880 to 1948. Fred and Bill Rawitzer from Germany were the owners. They developed machinery to reclaim wool, called shoddy. Bill Rawitzer dropped dead at Exchange Hall at a dance, after his brother had predeceased. Bill remained with the SAWC until his death. Then the American Woolen Company in Maynard acquired it. Production ceased

in 1948. There was a fire in 1951. The mill site remained vacant until 1977, and purchased by Lazarro. There was a piano factory at 115 River, which burned in 1956. The 53 River Street mill was a two-story building. There was a massive flood that washed out the dam and the road at some point. The current cement dam was built in 1935. Nearby Audubon Hill was purchased from Lady Campbell at the Faulkner house, consisting of about 70 acres. It was left to the Audubon Society, who determined they did not need it, and sold it to developers.

There were five mills along Fort Pond Brook: 53 River, Ericksen's, Flannery's, Merriam and the ironworks mills. All had fires.

Bill was asked to speak about how important the mill was to the town at that time. Bill stated Acton Center had a shoe factory at the present war memorial, burned in 1862. South Acton had more favorable conditions due to the water power. Women mostly worked in the Fletcher Shoe factory but received lowest wages. There are about 15 houses that were associated with the mills still standing.

What happened to Hannons Bridge? Michael Hannon's daughter married Honey Fitzgerald. He worked for the railroad. The railroad wanted to buy the property but in 1879 Hannon bought the land, then moved after his daughter drowned in the river.

Discussion regarding the process moving forward:

Selby says that Amanda and Eliza at the Conway School are planning to finish two concepts: one that includes affordable housing, and one focusing on conservation and ecology. Final drawings will be available shortly. They will send the final presentation.

Bettina submitted the application for restoration and revitalization priority projects to the Division of Ecological Restoration. Timing for the DER decision as to our priority designation will be made in 3-4 months bringing us to late September or October. The maximum value for tech services will vary according to scope and nature of project, and the funds available each year. Typically, between \$5,000 and \$50,000 is spent per project per year.

Bettina stated that it is not clear if the DER has archeologists to work on this or if we will need to hire our own.

The Community Preservation Committee has a late October/early November deadline for funding requests. This committee's first priority is the archaeological study, the second is expert analysis of dam's structural integrity to determine whether to maintain the dam or breach it for safety.

It was opined that the question of the dam safety should be addressed to the MAPC (Metropolitan Area Planning Council) who is working with the Town on an update of its multi-hazard mitigation plan (a requirement for FEMA funding). Primary to hazard mitigation is dams, and 53 River should qualify. They should do the hydro study, and maintenance. The draft plan is open to public for another 3 weeks. They do the study, they will not do the work. Grant applied for the MAPC, for this study. The draft plan stated that 53 Dam should be breached for safety. Peter suggested we could get funds to do the archaeological study during the 4 month wait for the DER grant. We need a full inventory of the studies needed. A proposal from Tighe & Bond was submitted to the CPC but later withdrawn. The BoS felt it was premature, so Selby pulled it from funding this year. If it is a credible approach to how to handle this property, then let's do what it suggested. We should discuss this at a future meeting. An archaeological study was not included. When the town was building the waste water treatment plant in 2002, arrowheads from the "Pine Hawk" Native Americans were discovered. During Nagog water treatment, there was a condition to have an archeological study prior to construction. It may be likely that Native American

artifacts will be found at 53 River Street. Selby will reach out to the Public Archaeological Laboratory for a quote for a study. Another study needed is feasibility of affordable housing. For example, the Walker property showed a small scale project was not feasible on that site.

Bill Klauer was asked to articulate what his concerns are. What the things that could be done and what are those that cannot? Can we clean it up enough to have the public visualize the possibility? Removal of the gravel and concrete block is already permitted by the Conservation Commission. Peter said it is important to know what constrains the site. Hydrology, archaeology, and building suitability are first. We need to identify people to continue the educational piece such as the Friends of Pine Hawk. People to ask may be Linda McElroy, who produced a study of historic sites in town, David Honn from HDC, the Historic Society, Tom Tidman, Cathy Fochtman. Peter will begin with historic. Acton TV can provide an aerial of the site to compliment the studies. Selby suggests a public site visit and clean up. Green Acton does clean up around town every spring. However it was felt this site may be too dangerous at this point for a public clean up.

For our next meeting we will discuss the Tighe & Bond proposal, which is on DocuShare.

If the housing is not viable then we should try to get some answers. Selby will provide the Walker site feasibility study, but there are some major differences in the two sites, one being that sewer is available at 53 River Street.

The committee discussed what other information is required for the committee to be best informed of the site conditions.

Peter will meet with the Town Manager to request funds for the hydrology and archeology studies, and housing feasibility.

Archeology may take precedence over all due to the historic nature of the site.

Site civil survey, topography will also be needed.

Contours, meets and bounds, as well will be needed

A geotechnical report is also needed. Lazarro did borings for a 21E study, but that was for contaminant remediation, not to determine soil suitability for building.

Selby to ask DPW Director Corey York whether has traffic counts for River Street, and ask for an engineer to study what happens if River Street is made one-way.

Informal counting of bike and pedestrian traffic usage.

Environmental study of species, invasive, plants and wildlife.

Water quality study (maybe from OARS).

There is sewer available site, so septic is not an environmental concern.

Is the water clean enough to source well fields for town water? Does the water district have studies? WR Grace may have a plume in the area.

Ecological study, a scarlet tanager was spotted recently. Include migratory patterns

We have a lot of expertise in town. We will gather data, and proceed when funding is found. We need to put a CPC proposal together, also proposals to recreation and historic.

Motion to adjourn was unanimously approved.

Meeting adjourned at 8:45 pm

The next meeting will be on July 18th.

Respectfully submitted by Michele Holland