

Bristol Mills Dam ad hoc Advisory Committee

Minutes of Meeting Tuesday, September 12th, 2017
Bristol Town Office

Committee members present: Phil Averill, Bill Benner, Claire Enterline, Chuck Farrell, John Freburger, James Hatch, Abby Ingraham

Absent: James Albright, Pam Allen

Also present: Chris Hall (Town Administrator); Joe McLean (Wright-Pierce); Sandra Lane, Laurie Mahan (Parks Commissioners); Lara Sargent (Parks Manager); Don Means, Rick Poland.

The meeting was called to order by chair Enterline at 6:05 pm with a quorum present, and the Pledge of Allegiance was recited.

A motion to accept the Minutes of 7/25 was proposed by Averill, seconded by Farrell, with the amendment of the date in paragraph 6 from 'Sept. 11th' to 'Sept. 12th.' Carried unanimously.

Hatch requested, and Chair Enterline concurred, that the agenda be expanded to include further discussion of Option 2. With this amendment the agenda was adopted 7 – 0.

Joe McLean of Wright-Pierce presented a conceptual option for development of Ellingwood Park, as an alternative to the Dam impoundment for both swimming and fire protection. He brought a plan showing a paved driveway from Benner Road to the boat launch site, with a circular loop close to the boat launch to allow for turning by boat trailers and for fire trucks to access a proposed dry hydrant. Swimming was suggested from a deck or dock on ledge immediately behind the Ellingwood Information Center. McLean noted that several details could be changed or added to the concept, including designing the traffic flow to allow for more parking or adding restroom facilities.

Farrell asked if this would replace the dam as the primary source of fire protection water. McLean noted that it could either supplement or partially replace the dam. It is not exclusive of other options. Farrell then asked what a difference it would make for swimmers.

Ingraham asked if this stretch of river is muddy or swampy. Averill indicated his belief that the bottom is scoured clean at this point by the bend in the river by Gary's Island, and McLean indicated that the depth at the proposed swimming deck is about 7-8 feet. Averill also noted that the area for swimming would be larger than the current area at the dam impoundment, and swimming in this area would be safer because the water is slower moving and there is not the danger of the dam.

Ingraham further asked if the road would be gravel or paved, and McLean indicated that while any decision would presumably fall to the Parks Commission, for planning purposes he assumed it would be paved.

Benner asked if the road would require blasting. McLean said that while there would be a considerable slope at the rear of the Information Center, little or no blasting should be needed. Benner asked for costs, which McLean said would be prepared for the final report of the concept included in the Feasibility Study. Farrell asked if the proposed design could be implemented in phases, which McLean said was possible but likely at higher cost.

In discussion about the current level of use of Gary's Island, Averill averred that it has a stunning view of the Stone Arch Bridge, being one of the great sights of the Town. The Parks Director agreed development of the park could attract people for multiple uses.

Commissioner Mahan, for the Parks and Recreation Commission, doubted that the site could be a true replacement for the dam as a swimming hole. McLean agreed that swimming quality is in the eye of the beholder, but suggested that with recreational and parking enhancements at Ellingwood, it could be a popular site.

In discussion of boat traffic, it was pointed out that, although the proposed deck or float would be 150 feet downstream from the boat launch, it may be difficult to separate motor boats from swimmers, however a buoy system could be installed to separate boaters and swimmers. Averill suggested that there is in fact little use of the boat launch for power boats, except perhaps in duck hunting season.

Farrell asked whether the number of parking spots would be adequate. McLean said that because of the site's relief, he had tried to minimize the dirt work required, but more parking could be added. This could also be achieved by using the footprint of the current concept, but creating one-way circulation on the access road, allowing angled parking with a narrower travel lane in the same width of paved surface. Many committee members noted that the fire department needed to weigh in on the traffic flow and grade and design of the drive.

Hall asked about the grades – McLean said they would not exceed 5% - and toilet provision, in the light of the expectation of additional visitors. Any decision on this would be up to the Parks Commission, and need not be included in the baseline costs. Commissioner Lane pointed out that a new well is planned for Ellingwood, which would be factored in to the plans.

Farrell asked that the proposed turning area be designed to be strong enough for fire trucks. Farrell then suggested a motion to authorize McLean to proceed with further refinement and costing of this option, but Enterline asked that this be held until Public Comments had been received.

From the public benches, Means asked that this concept be shared with the Fire Department as soon as possible. Rob Davidson asked about its cost, with Benner adding that while we are close to a cost for an improved fishway we have no sense whatsoever of the costs of this plan. McLean stressed that Wright-Pierce were working on this and would include it in their Report.

Prompted by Commissioner Lane, there was a discussion about whether maintenance costs would represent an increased burden on the Parks Commission, which has to fund its operations from admissions fees. Averill stressed that it was not the intention that the Parks Commission should pay any of the capital costs, but maintenance costs could be similar to those incurred today on the site. Ingraham stressed the desirability of keeping a free swimming hole (and park) as a community resource.

It being 7.15 pm, Chair Enterline called for a motion, bearing in mind that Wright-Pierce was committed to further consultation on this concept with the Parks Commission, the Fire Department and the Selectmen. Farrell moved to authorize Wright-Pierce to refine and cost out the concept plan presented this night, seconded by Freburger; motion passed 7 – 0.

Enterline then asked for a revisit of Option 2, partial dam removal, per the revised agenda. Hatch said he was uncertain what ‘partial removal’ means. McLean said he understood it to be a nature-like structure that accommodates enough water supply to provide for fire protection needs. With this clarification, Enterline moved the Committee to consideration of Option 3, full dam removal.

She outlined the elements of this option that needed discussion:

- The location of an alternative water control structure for the upstream water bodies;
- Adequate fire protection water supply;
- The nature of the ‘nature-like’ fish passage, and
- Impacts on abutters.

McLean stated that the water control structure or structures should be near the Stone Arch Bridge, either immediately upstream or downstream. McLean noted the structure would need to maintain the water level by around 2 feet of the level that would be realized in the absence of the dam, though Averill thought by not more than 14 inches. This could be achieved in ‘steps’ of around 8 inches, spaced so that an overall distance of 75 feet would be required if the full 2 feet were needed and a slope of 1:30 needed for the passage of certain species (alewives needing 1:20). There was considerable discussion of whether these should be sited within or downstream of the bridge, in order to allow kayakers to approach as closely as possible to the historic bridge. McLean indicated that the ledge downstream was appropriate, though it might require slightly higher rise; and believed that no structure should be built within the bridge. Enterline said she understood the Committee’s consensus view is to allow kayakers to get as close as practically possible to the bridge.

Abutters between the new upstream structure, and the present dam, would not have a ‘mud flat,’ as has been suggested in past meetings, but would see a free-flowing river similar to that below the dam at present. The major difference is that they would no longer be able to have a boat dock on their property. McLean noted that the sediment seen during the 2016 drawdown would not remain, but would be flushed out so the river would flow over ledge throughout that stretch.

Hatch prompted discussion of water levels by pointing out that at the present time the water level at the dam is perhaps three feet below the lip. Enterline said that water level monitoring would be completed this fall, and it is hoped that the data will include both the spring high and the fall low water level points. Benner stressed that a new weir-type water control structure would not allow variation of the water level as the dam does to a degree at present, and would allow greater control if the suggested improved gate controls are installed.

Enterline, reviewing the Scope of Services in the Wright-Pierce contract, pointed out that the original date for a final report is September 15th, which will not be met. After discussion, it was agreed that Wright-Pierce will try to complete and circulate their draft report to the Committee in October, at least a week before the October 24th meeting. Meanwhile McLean will meet separately with the Fire Department and the Parks and Recreation Department. In response to Freburger's question as to whether McLean could circulate the report in sections as it is completed, McLean preferred to release the draft all in one piece.

In Public Comment, Commissioner Lane raised the question of whether an admission charge should be levied at Ellingwood, or whether increased sales at the information Center might offset increased maintenance. Ingraham again stressed her belief that some things in the Town should remain free, while Averill said that whether the dam is left in or taken out, the concept as presented is an opportunity for the Town have a purpose-built swimming area.

At 8.05 pm, Hatch moved to adjourn; seconded by Freburger, and passed 7 – 0.

Respectfully submitted,
Chris Hall
Town Administrator