

Conservation Commission Meeting  
Virtual Meeting  
February 17, 2022

Roll call was taken of members and staff present included: Chair, Peg Arguimbau, Keevin Geller, Stephen Cremer, Colin Barbera, Alan Westman, and Jon Wasserman. Meredith Avery, Vice Chair, was not present. Staff present included Josh Philibert, Conservation Administrator and Jana Katz, Conservation Secretary.

Arguimbau opened the meeting by reading Governor Baker's Executive Order of March 12, 2020. As of June 15, the measure was extended in An Act Extending Certain COVID-19 Measures Adopted during the State of Emergency, allowing by Governor Baker to continue to permitting virtual public meetings until April of 2022. Per guidance from the State, Arguimbau noted that all votes would be taken by roll call. She then reviewed the ground rules for the meeting.

The remote meeting was called to order at 7:30pm.

<b>7:30 PM</b>	<b>Discussion Item</b> Linda Berger, Sharon Recreation Department
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Linda Berger, the Recreation Department Director and Gary Bluestein of the Recreation Advisory Committee presented a proposal to members regarding the relocation of the Community Gardens to Conservation Land located at Morse Street and Lakeview Street, which is currently designated as space for passive recreation. The plan would include transforming the current location of the Community Gardens into recreation fields. Relocating the community gardens would be the first step in a multi-phase project. Berger began by discussing a 2015 study assessing the town's needs for recreation fields which found them to be: overcrowded, overused, poorly maintained, and deteriorating.

Berger continued by updating members on improvements and attempts to address the issues. In 2016, a proposal to create additional field space at Gavin's Pond was voted down at Town Meeting due to the land being a butterfly habitat. At a 2017 Town Meeting, funding was approved for Middle School field improvements. In 2018-2019, the DPW worked to better maintain the fields at East Elementary. Fred Turkington worked to get more money to for field maintenance. In 2020, residents passed a three-year moratorium on turf fields over environmental concerns which resulted in the construction of a grass field on the former football field. In 2021, CPC funding was allocated to improve drainage with sand at fields located at East Elementary School and the Middle School.

She continued by informing members about a CPC funded FY22 town-wide feasibility study to evaluate playing fields in town noting numbers can fluctuate. Data illustrated a need for more multi-purpose playing fields which could be utilized for lacrosse, flag football, and modified cricket games. Berger also noted the town's Master Plan identified the need for more open space for organized and non-organized activities. Because 55% of the land in town is either open space, conservation land, or recreation facilities, the Recreation Department would like to utilize town owned space for further development.

With permission to relocate the community gardens, the Recreation Advisory Committee would secure CPC funding for schematic design which would likely cost about \$45,000. If successful, a project committee would be created with vested groups which could include: Sustainable Sharon Coalition, sport organizations, the Master Plan Committee, ADA advocates and others. The goal would be to hold a public meeting in early April ahead of the May 2<sup>nd</sup> Town Meeting.

Barbera and Berger discussed the size of the multi-purpose field in relation to currently used fields. Berger stated the proposed multi-purpose field at Deborah Sampson would be approximately the same size as the one at Ames Street. Barbera gave his input that the field behind Cottage Street School may be too small for many activities. Berger agreed and noted that the field behind Cottage Street School could be included at the end of there is a deficit of recreation space.

Wasserman and Berger discussed the timeline for speaking with Community Garden members. Currently there are 82 residents, 17 non-residents, and 1 town employee using garden space. Soil preservation was listed as an anticipated concern and Berger mentioned the idea of transporting the soil to the Lakeview and Morse site.

Geller, Arguimbau, and Berger discussed the history and abutting land to the property on Lakeview Street. It is surrounded by more conservation land with trails and then extends to the border of Camp Everwood. The Conservation Commission acquired the land (approximately 170 acres of mostly wetlands) when the Horizons Road subdivision was built. The community gardens currently exist on an 80,000 foot parcel and the Lakeview Street land measures to over 119,500 square feet for just gardens. Arguimbau stated concerns about the impact to the area on Lakeview Street which has not seen much development or disruption in a long time.

Westman and Berger discussed potential needs for emergency access and lighting at the Deborah Sampson ballfields. Bluestein and Arguimbau commented on the topography being amenable to both types of use should the gardens be relocated. Wasserman and Berger discussed the former Conservation Administrator, John Thomas, and his idea for creating ADA accessible paths around the gardens at the Lakeview Street should they be relocated.

Philibert discussed the lack of grassland in the area and how there is no lack of deciduous forest. He has spoken with representatives from Natural Heritage and Moose Hill confirming the grassland is a rare landform and a place of interest because of its biodiversity. He noted the Baltimore Checkerspot Butterfly feeds on a common plant but is an unusual butterfly. He suggested moving the butterfly habitat to the landfill or another location. Bluestein suggested designing outside the common planting. Geller mentioned concerns about the birds of prey and other wildlife hunting in open fields and how the community gardens would disrupt their ecosystem. He also expressed concerns about the amount of parking at the site while noting he does understand the Recreation Department and Advisory Committee's needs for additional playing fields.

Members discussed using GIS technology to explore potential garden configurations at the Lakeview Street site as well as the possibility of clearing trees to bring the gardens to Lakeview Street outside of the grassland. They would like further discussion on the matter with additional information regarding Community Garden members' input, CPC funding, and an update from the Recreation Advisory Committee meeting.

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Barbera informed members the Finance Committee and the Select Board approved the warrant language for the May 2<sup>nd</sup> Town Meeting regarding the Lake Management Committee. CPC approved a \$24,500 request to Town Meeting for water testing, education, and community outreach. Solitude has amended their initial assessment of the weed survey and increased the cost of mitigation from \$17,700 to \$30,000. Water and Wetlands, another company, would be willing to perform another survey for \$2,500. Camp Everwood reported seeing less weeds this past year.

**8:59 PM      Other Business      Approve February 3, 2022 Meeting Minutes**

**Motion:** To accept meeting minutes from February 3, 2022.

Cremer moved

Barbera seconded

Cremer – Aye, Wasserman – Aye, Westman – Abstain, Barbera – Aye, Geller – Aye, Arguimbau – Aye

5-0-1 (Motion Passed)

**8:42 PM      Discussion Item      Stormwater Bylaw and Regulations**

Arguimbau and Philibert updated members: the DPW will be handling Article 1 and the Conservation Commission will be handling Article 2 (permitting and enforcement). Members discussed the benefits of having 1 acre be the cutoff point for whether an applicant would need to come before the commission for a formal hearing or some kind of administrative approval could take place if less than 1 acre. The next step is a joint meeting with the Planning Board which sometimes comments on bylaw revisions. If the Conservation Commission is expected to hold the hearing, Arguimbau would like it held at the end of March or beginning of April.

**8:53 PM      Motion to Adjourn**

**Motion:** To adjourn

Cremer moved

Westman seconded

Cremer – Aye, Wasserman – Aye, Geller – Aye, Westman – Aye, Barbera – Aye, Arguimbau – Aye

6-0-0 (Motion Passed)