

Parks and Natural Resources Committee
Tuesday, March 23, 2021 7:00 PM
Special [Virtual] Meeting
Minutes -- DRAFT

1. Call to order

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 PM

Roll Call: Attending: Jim Morrow (Chair), Ken Feathers (secretary), Tom Harrington, Sue Harrington, Vicky Wetherell, Quentin Kessel (Cons. Com. Rep.), Charlotte Pyle, Miranda Davis (Alt.) and, joining later, Juliana Barrett (Alt.)

Town Staff Present: Jennifer Kaufman

Others Present (with interests in Agenda item 4A proposed development):

Thomas Cody, Attorney, Robinson and Cole

Geoff Fitzgerald, Civil Engineer, Bohler

David Fresk, JE Shepard

Amanda Wallis, Capstone Collegiate Communities

Thomas Ryan, landscape architect for Capstone/JE Shepard

Mohamed Mohsen, Architect for Capstone/JE Shepard

Robert Sitkowski (UConn)

2. Approval of Minutes

A. Minutes of the January 26, 2021 meeting were approved (moved S.Harrington, second T.Harrington (?))

B. Minutes of the March 4, 2021 field trip were approved (moved S.Harrington, second T.Harrington)

3. Opportunity for Public comment

No members of the general public made comments.

4. New Business

A. Special Permit Application of Capstone Collegiate Communities, LLC and J.E. Shepard Company (applicants)/DDS Associates, LLC and Benjamin Brown (owners)

Town staff described the project and the specific committee role of determining if the proposed public amenities sufficiently address enhancement of the town's available recreational opportunities to justify a permissible increase in housing density under the regulations.

Representatives of the developer presented a description of proposed public amenities, with four dedicated public parking spaces and proposed interpretive signage. Amenities proposed include a disc golf course, bocci courts, a walking path through a restored pollinator-focused landscape, an outdoor yoga platform, and a picnic location near an old root cellar.

Some committee discussion focused on who from the public, beyond residents of the project, would be likely to use the facilities and how the public would become aware of the available amenities. Discussion focused on whether there would be reason to drive to this location or if most potential users would be walkers or bikers from the four corners area. Committee members felt few people would drive to this location for its amenities, and there were questions on how the proposed public parking would be effectively kept open for those that might. The applicant's representatives addressed concerns raised.

There was some discussion concerning accomplishing appropriate protection for the historic stone root cellar and the best type of expert to consult. Concern was expressed over the increased risk by having it more noticeable, even if fenced. There was also concern that restoration/preservation be appropriate.

The walking path was considered to be a potential future useful byway providing an alternative route to following any future sidewalk along Route 195 all the way. The proposed stile over the amphibian

barrier was discussed as a possible limit on accessibility and changing this to steps was suggested. The possibility of formalizing a connection off the property to Discovery Drive was raised, with the expectation that residents are likely to walk that way even if not an official path.

Restriction of development between the proposed open space dedication and the CVS location was raised as a valuable additional community amenity, to preserve at least one part of the Route 44 corridor viewshed in a natural forested state.

Other discussion included exploring making additional parking available through cooperation with the restaurant across the street, providing bocci equipment so users do not have to bring their own, and the nature of signage.

The committee concluded the amenities were appropriate to justify increased development and adopted the following motion (Moved Feathers, second Barrett [alternate replacing T. Harrington who had to absent himself to take a phone call]):

Motion: *The proposed public amenities, modified by extending the conservation easement to the CVS property and replacing the proposed stile with steps, will serve more than the development's occupants and have potential to be an asset to the community, especially as the trails become integrated into the wider town network.*

B. Regional Parks, Preserves and Trails Map

Town staff informed the committee of progress on the regional parks and preserves map, and showed an example of a possible format that will be used. There was some discussion of how various mapping efforts interrelate and will be implemented to avoid duplication of effort.

C. Plein Air Trail – Art in Wild Spaces

The committee was briefed on the Town Arts program being conducted in the parks

5. Old Business

A. Pollinator Pathway

The committee discussed prescriptive mowing and problems with timing mowing when conditions are not too wet to mow. Discussion of various town properties suitable for inclusion in the pollinator pathway continued. S. Harrington suggested that the parcel next to MMS could be improved to add access and a mowed loop trail with interpretative signage, and logistics of this were discussed. C. Pyle suggested that pollinator gardens with signage might be developed at other town properties as part of the landscaping.

6. Communications

A. Conservation Commission Minutes

Reference is made to the Conservation Commission Minutes in the packet

7. Reports From Members [and Town Staff]

Town staff reported interest in a preapplication meeting for development proposed at the Golf Course.

Town staff reported seeking a grant for a management plan for fanwort at Eagleville, to evaluate what has been done and develop a long term strategy.

8. Executive session in accordance with CGS section 1200(6)(D)

There was no executive session

9. Future Meetings

No specific discussion documented

10. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 8:37 PM by consensus (moved Kessel, seconded Wetherell)

Respectfully Submitted, Ken Feathers, Secretary