

Meeting Minutes
Weir River Estuary Park Committee
Tuesday, October 17, 2023, 4:30pm
Remote - Call in Meeting

This is a Tri-Town Committee, appointed by the Boards of Selectmen for Cohasset, Hingham and Hull, not a non-profit Watershed Association. Formed in 2002 approved in 2005, the goals of the WREP Committee are; to **Preserve** the rare and idyllic setting, **Expand** public access and low impact recreational opportunities, **Protect** the historical and geological integrity, **Protect** and restore natural resources and biological diversity, **Conserve** a contiguous corridor of open space and healthy habitats, **Develop** educational opportunities and foster stewardship, **Establish** Community support for land and estuarine habitat protection and maintain working relationships with Town Selectmen, Conservation Commissions, Planning Boards and Advisory, Open Space and Harbor Development committees, local Land Trusts, Land preservation organizations, and related regional state and federal agencies.

- 1) **Call to Order** by chair Scott Plympton (Hul), Sharon Allen (Hin), Dick Avery (Coh), Tom Bell (Coh), Judeth Van Hamm (Hul), Mark Buonagurio (Hin). Meeting called to order with quorum at 4:38 PM; members of the public introduced themselves.

2) Presentation: Trail to Straits Pond for Wildlife Viewing

- a) Hull's Director of Conservation and Environmental Impact, Christian Krahforst, provided an update of the proposed trail and shared the latest draft plans via zoom.
- b) Hull Conservation Committee (HCC) submitted a CPC application; the idea is to have a collaboration with Hull DPW and Hull Land Conservation Trust. The Application sought to determine existing conditions.
- c) Result was a topographical survey to delineate wetlands, design a pedestrian walkway that meets wetlands standards, develop storm management design, and get permits.
- d) The town has access along Eastman Rd and up to the Island, via easements; Older map shows a marsh in an upland area; should provide easy access to Straits Pond Island. The Commonwealth recognizes this area as an existing Wilderness Trail.
- e) A concept to move ahead with permitting has been established; the initial design proposal didn't explore moving the path to avoid taking trees; the only way to access the island through wetlands is to build a boardwalk across the marsh area – that is where the project is now; may revisit path through the permitting process. Christian discussed a boardwalk with Phil Lemnios, who said that the cost is increasing; possibly looking at breaking the project up.
- f) Judeth said that she believed a previous town meeting put some of this land under conservation; Christian will verify.
- g) Anne Murray (public) asked what happened with the Lofchie property, where the access was going to originally go through? Answer - The lot has been sold; Scott Plympton thinks that there is better access and grade by going through Eastman Rd. There was a fundraiser to put a brick patio there; that is a question for the Hull Land Conservation Trust.
- h) Applied to Mass Trails to assist with permitting; just missed being selected for FY23, but they really liked the project, particularly accessibility via the "Forest Service Accessibility Guidelines." Mass Trails suggested a two-phase approach if we want their help:
 - i) Minimal trail to wetland/estuary edge with viewing platform
 - ii) Boardwalk across marsh (expensive?) or seek easements to the Straits Pond Island, via working with Paul Gratta

- i) Christian proposes an RDA (Request for Determination of Applicability) from HCC to clear vegetation and create footpath. Wants to review existing design, engage public and coordinate with stakeholders (Park Committee, Boy Scouts, DPW) to have design meet these expectations; perhaps easier to view in winter, then review the plans and have a public meeting to see what people want there. Commercial activity is about 70% cleaned up, work ongoing.
- j) What is the WREPC's role in this project? Scott thinks it could be support, including help clearing
- k) Comments from the Committee:
 - i) Tom Bell asked about last map; Christian said it's the plan for now, not what they want to construct. Had a challenge working with the surveyor due to limited budgets, so the map may not include suggested revisions. Tom wants as little disturbance to the existing vegetation as possible, even invasives provide a screen, wants the trail to go down Eastman Rd. as far as possible. Christian wants to ensure pedestrian safety, but it can be considered. Doesn't think the RDA will start with removing trees, but does want to remove brush and then look at removing trees that prevent access. Unsure how close they want to go to the tree service on the other side of the road.
 - ii) Dick Avery: Is Eastman Rd. open enough to use as a trail now? Christian - no, the road ends earlier than it appears, then becomes forest, thinks we need to get a better look in there. Christian mentioned the viewing platform again, from a science aspect, to monitor the pond. There is another (paper) easement via Chilton Ave, which Christian thinks could provide access via a short boardwalk, but there is a steep bank, but need to see what they can construct.
 - iii) Tom Bell: If you can get to Chilton Ave., could you negotiate with Paul Gratta about obtaining access through the next two parcels that he owns? Christian – yes. Might be a challenge due to hilly area, but same challenge as with the Lofchie property.
 - iv) Dick Avery: Is the island solid land? Christian – yes. People used to dispose of metal, etc.; still a lot of stuff there - opportunity for volunteer work. If successful in getting an easement from Paul Gratta, could ask for another easement to Richards Road. This initiative has given us a survey map, and idea of ways for public to access the area, and provided impetus to clean up the area, and is the start of the way forward for public access. Dick mentioned that on one side of the island hosts egrets; ducks on the other side.
- l) Public Comments:
 - i) Clark Frazier: Would urge us to get connection to Richard's Road, and a pass that goes through would be safer.
 - ii) Carol Meyer – Asked about an RDA; explained by Christian, asked about what was submitted, is the current plan the minimal trail, with a goal to access from Eastman Road – Yes, from Eastman. Christian said Richards Road was separate, by a different group of people. Plan will go through public process and re-designed. It's a "backdrop" to work off of, and will be redesigned.
 - iii) Christopher Sweeney – Why put a path through Straits Pond and not conserve the woods? Says coyotes, geese and other animals are out there. Was told that the chair of Hull CPA said money is given out for shovel-ready projects. Also wanted to know who will be funding this. Scott explained that grants are expected. Asked about parking, Scott said that town manager said perhaps parking could be available at the barn.

3) **Minutes** from the meeting 06/13/23 were reviewed and approved for posting.

4) **Re: SOSHull**

- a) The HRA has a new change of leadership; with that change of leadership, they are asking for a lot of opinion, and a lot of citizens are responding with their ideas of what they would like to see, and are being discussed by the HRA in a public forum.
- b) Dick mentioned that the letter can be done in regards to our committee's purview; there are a lot of birds that stop there, it's a big migration spot. Christian also mentioned there are edible meadow mushrooms.

5) **Updates by Town:**

a) **Hingham:**

- i) Sharon – has not heard a lot; Hingham DPW cut back brush at Foundry Pond this past weekend so fisherman can get out there; there is a lot of trash to clean up.
- ii) Mark – Asked for updates from other members of the committee that can be shared via the Committee's Facebook page, to engage the public; also mentioned that river otters were spotted in Foundry Pond.

b) **Cohasset:**

- i) Tom: Didn't get CZM grant to study water quality in Straits Pond and the Estuary; Cohasset applied for a municipal grant to conduct a native pollinator plant; Wadleigh park by Blackrock Beach was selected as an area for a small test plot to plant native plants; Pulled in birdhouses for the year; had lots of barnacles on the spokes; didn't have any tree swallows nesting in them, perhaps put in too late, and were too far out - should be closer to wooded areas. The plastic may be unattractive to the birds; will coat them with burlap to make them more tree-like.
- ii) Dick: The Straits Pond Watershed Association and Weir River Watershed Association were discussing combining resources, due to a lack of people. Considering our committee as the "third leg."

c) **Hull**

- i) Scott: Previously mentioned SOSHull. Nothing otherwise beyond that and Christian's presentation.
- ii) Judeth: Left a message for Hull teachers on Monday regarding a woods walk. Wants our committee to consider thinking about GW Boulevard as part of the Weir River Estuary Park, as it passes over the Estuary. Wants a reduction from four to two lanes, with walking and biking lanes, and solar personal rapid transit

6) **Public Comment:**

- a) Anne Murray: Asked if the Committee could support a sidewalk and gravel bike path on the Jerusalem Road side of Straits Pond, where the road curves. Said there is a new sidewalk committee in Cohasset, can our committee support that? Scott mentioned that there has been a long idea of having a path all the way around the pond. Anne mentioned that there used to be a victory garden in there, but Cohasset Conservation Commission has been resistant to any ideas. Christopher said that if they had sidewalks, wouldn't need to disturb land on the other side.

7) **Next Meeting:**

- a) Next meeting is on Tuesday, November 14, at 4:45 PM. This will be a Zoom call.
- b) Possible topic for November's meeting is the vision & direction for the committee.
- c) Meeting Adjourned at 6:02 PM.