



Williamsburg Conservation Commission
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**Meeting Minutes
November 18, 2021
via Zoom**

Commissioners present – Marci Caplis, Andrew MacLachlan, Melinda McCall, and Joe Rogers

Members of the public present –Jeff Squire and Doug Serrill, The Berkshire Design Group; Robert Todisco, P3; Kevin Chrobak, Bill Sayre and Jean O’Neil, Public Safety Complex Building Committee; Mark Stinson, DEP; Meredith Borenstein; Kathleen Casey; Alex Barrows; Julia Peters, Kathy McKeown, Penny Robbins from Mountain Road.

Meeting was called to order at 7:00 pm

NOI, Public Safety Complex, Berkshire Design Group/Town of Williamsburg:

The Berkshire Design Group submitted a NOI for the demolition of the old Helen E. James school, site work, and construction of the new Public Safety Complex at 16 Main Street. Most of the site is in the 200 foot river front area of the west branch of the Mill River, while the southern part is in the 100 foot buffer.

There are no storm water controls at the current site, so the rain gardens as described in the plan are an improvement. The rain garden near Main Street is at a low point, capturing water from the apparatus bay driveway. The Department of Transportation wants this improvement. The rain gardens would be planted with woody and herbaceous vegetation with an eye toward diversity and complexity.

A large part of the riverfront will be affected. The proposed work area includes the existing degraded area and some regrading. This area would be replanted, with any loss of the buffer zone due to the building or driveway being mitigated by conversion of a different area. The planned mitigation was to convert a sandy play area near Main Street into lawn, and to plant a conservation mix along the river.

Questions were raised about the planting plans.

- **Buttonbush is planned for a dry area**
- **non-natives are listed**

Erosion Controls:

Mr. Squire noted that minimal time between demolition and construction is planned between the two phases. Erosion controls placed on site at the limit of work would be put in place before demolition and stay through the construction.

- **The commission requested a construction narrative detailing plans for protecting the existing wetlands, what equipment will be used, and how the equipment would access the site without inflicting damage.**
- **The commission wanted clarification of “restored,” as some area marked as restoration were just improvements.**
- **Berkshire Design will look into staging and temporary protection, or schedule the work for when the ground would be dry.**

Working along the river:

- **The basketball court was left as is in the current plan. The issue will be brought up to the Public Safety Complex Building Committee. One alternative is to move the recreation area closer to Main Street.**
- **A wetland delineation was done by Ward Smith in 2017 .**
- **Though the sandy area proposed for restoration would be easy to access, it’s value for restoration is low. A preference was stated for restoring a ten foot strip along the east side of the river. This land most likely used to be wetland but is now compacted and full of invasive plants. The closer restoration can get to the river, the better.**
- **The southern rain garden is planned for an area that is already wet. Excavation would bring it two or three feet below the level of the river. The ability for it to hold the runoff from the parking lot was questioned. Mr. Squire said that calculations were done, and the garden should drain within 72 hours. However, it is unclear whether any test pits were dug in that area. There is an overflow outlet.**
- **Plowing needs to be considered. Where is snow going to go, and how close should trees be planted to the parking lots.**
- **Commissioners preferred to replace Blue Holly. With a non-cultivar.**

Notes from DEP on Notification of File Number:

Five comments were made clarifying requirements.

- **Restoration occurs directly along the river and includes herbaceous and woody plantings. Improvement and mitigation occur at and beyond the riverfront area boundary. Restoration is done at 1:1, mitigation is 2:1.**

- Stormwater standards are not met. There is not enough pre-treatment of stormwater.
- The stormwater narrative must include reviewed checklists for each low impact development technique listed in 310 CMR 10.05(6)(n)
- Since the plan results in a reduction of impervious areas it may better to just plant native vegetation instead of a stormwater basin on the southern end that needs to be maintained. However, heavy rain will channelize a flow, so some sort of compromise between a rain garden and direct runoff is needed.
- Include BMPs from Chapter 2 of the handbook, and keep a log book.

RDA, 67 Chesterfield Road, Connors, new house construction:

Wetland scientist Meredith Borenstein represented the land owners in addressing the committee. Mike and Jen Connors own 11 acres of land on the corner of Petticoat Hill and Chesterfield Roads. There is an existing woods road on the southern edge, and the Connors would like to use that as a driveway. There is a small isolated wetland on the northwest corner of the property, so the woods road is in the buffer zone, and the road is quite wet from seeping groundwater. There is no defined channel so it is an isolated, non-regulated wetland. A driveway could be cut in away from the wetlands, but would require cutting trees. The owners wish to cut as few trees as possible though a swath does need to cut for the septic field. Commissioners issued a negative 4 finding, but recommended best practices during construction of the driveway.

Consultation, Kathleen Casey, 11 Rear, North Main Street:

Ms. Casey had a general inquiry for the condominium association. Many of the units are set against a stonewalled portion of the Mill River and have gravel drives within 25 feet of the river. The opposite side of the river is a bouldered bank. What is regular maintenance vs. work that requires a permit?

The Commission replied that most maintenance is minor, exempt activity. However, cutting large trees, or major repairs or enlargement of driveways would require a permit. If larger equipment is involved, then a permit would be needed. The applicant would be the Condominium Association, but an individual could be the representative. Commissioners agreed to set up a site visit.

Consultation, Alex Barrows, 74 Village Hill:

Ms. Barrows was interested in purchasing the property at 74 Village Hill and came to the Commission with questions about the possibility of rehabilitating an old lake bed on the property, as well as crossing the river for a building site. She was

informed that either of those projects would require a great deal of permitting and added cost. It was recommended that she hire a wetlands consultant. In addition, she was told that toxicity reports related to the shooting range are available at the mass.gov waste site cleanup website.

Consultation about water level rise in Beaver Brook on Mountain Street, McKeowan, Peters, and Robbins:

The three neighbors reported that the water level in Beaver Brook and Munge Swamp as been happening for years and is not storm related. They are concerned that the extra water is coming from the upper part of the watershed because the Northampton water plant is at capacity. They stated that 2.5 million gallons of excess are flowing, and they need help with the hydrology. They sent question about this water flow to the Northampton Water Department but got no response. They are also concerned that excess water is being released to ease the burden on the Whately dam, which is in need of repair.

Commissioners agreed that a site visit would be valuable, and then concerns and informed questions could be passed on to Northampton. Ms. Peters asked about requesting a presentation from DOT, however, there will be opportunities to look at the plans in the future.

Other updates:

Mr. Rogers is putting together a RDA for the Meekins library walkway and tree removal from the retaining wall. The Haydenville Library needs a separate RDA written as a maintenance project.

75 Petticoat Hill Road owners hired Stockman Associates to delineate wetlands. Their findings agreed with the Commissions assessment... a small, isolated wetland not requiring permitting.

Minutes from October 14 were approved with changes.

Meeting was adjourned at 9:41.

**Respectfully submitted,
Melinda McCall
Secretary - Williamsburg Conservation Commission**

