

Town of Stonington
Board of Selectmen and
Mystic River Boathouse Park Implementation Committee
Special Meeting Minutes
Stonington High School
176 South Broad Street, Pawcatuck, CT 06379
10:00 a.m.-12:00 p.m.

A joint special meeting of the Board of Selectman and the Stonington Mystic River Boathouse Park Implementation Committee was held on this date, Saturday, December 1, 2018 at the Stonington High School, Commons Room 176 South Broad Street, Pawcatuck, CT 06379

Present were Rob Simmons, First Selectman, MRBPIC Chairman; Kate Rotella, Selectwoman; John Prue, Selectman; Mike O'Neill, MRBPIC Vice Chairman; Scott Bates, Mike Crowley, Tom Switz, Tim O'Brien; Jim Kelley, Breck Perkins, Steve Planchon, Sandy Tissera, Recording Secretary; as well as Jason Vincent, Director of Planning, Town of Stonington, Chad Frost, Principal, Kent + Frost, interested citizens and members of the press

Absent were Steve White, Nick Kepple, Frank Todisco and Kathryn Burchenal

1. Call to order

Chairman Simmons called the meeting to order at 10:00 a.m.

2. Pledge of Allegiance

The assemblage stood for the Pledge of Alliance.

Chairman Simmons called for a moment of silence in recognition of the passing of George H. W. Bush, our 41st president of the United States.

3. Boathouse Park Master Plan

Chairman Simmons welcomed the group to the meeting and said he was glad there was such a large attendance of the public.

Chairman Simmons said Jason Vincent, Director of Planning, would be the moderator for the public forum calling first on Mr. Frost then Mr. O'Neill to do their presentations followed by Public Comments.

Chairman Simmons asked the Board of Selectmen to approve the change of sequence of the agenda to allow both presentations upfront followed by public comment, then selectmen and committee comment.

A motion was made by Kate Rotella and seconded by John Prue to change the order of the agenda to the requested sequence as described.

All: Aye

Jason Vincent provided a presentation of the framework of the project and the approach taken to develop the master park plan. Part of the presentation was the timeline of the development of the park demonstrating a critical flow chart and the length of time between processes.

Mr. Chad Frost gave a presentation on the development of the master plan. Mr. Frost gave details of the environmental testing process and the results. Mr. Frost addressed the issue of safety of using the property as is and said the coal slag is not an immediate hazard. There is remediation to be done but it is safe to be used under supervision. The Crew Team uses the property under supervision so it was deemed safe for them to use, however, remediation will need to be done before public use.

4. Hart Perry Boathouse

Mike O'Neill gave a presentation on the process of the development of the boathouse. Mr. O'Neill explained the boathouse was designed for the function and purpose it will be used. The Boathouse Committee acknowledges there needs to be more discussion of the façade of the boathouse. Mr. O'Neill said this is a process and the plans were put out for community input and there will be more discussion as things move forward.

5. Comments from the public

Mr. Vincent opened the floor to comments from the public:

Paul Sartor, Mystic, said he thought the presentation was great. Mr. Sartor said he knows the project is about the park but the crew program deserves all the support it can get from the community, it is a model of how a non-profit agency should be ran. Mr. Sartor said he understands the most important thing is general access by the public and there is remediation to be done and you were clear

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about supervised use. Does the town accept it is safe for the crew team to continue use it in the manner it is being used? Mr. Vincent said supervised use is acceptable use. Mr. Sartor asked about cost; he is interested in financing that is available, financing that has been secured, how is it encumbered and where is it directed. Also, how are the available existing funds supposed to be used, allowed to be used and what is the planning to get to the next phases and a breakdown of phasing costs of this design. Regarding the timeline, we understand about supervised use but, at what time, would it be available for public use. My final comment is regarding parallel parking, I think it is a great idea, pack in as much as you can, it will slow down traffic. Jason Vincent said this project will be built in phases, there are elements here that are unaffordable all at the same. As part of the Master Plan process, the first step is getting conceptual validation and troubleshooting from the public. Once we have this validation, we can develop the master plan into a site plan with phasing with the costs. The first step is to make sure the public approves of the plan. The boathouse is a separate project so we are not looking for validation on that today.

The second speaker did not identify himself. This gentleman said he is a big fan of the project but his concern is it will become a tourist attraction and not a taxpayer asset. The more it becomes a town attraction, the less it becomes a town asset. This is going to be a tough balancing act, is this going to be a tourist attraction park for the state region or an asset for the town and just the locals. How are you going to address this balance?

Steve Hobaica, Mystic, spoke of his concern of traffic and inadequate parking. Mr. Hobaica had a question about the boat launch, is it for boats on trailers or for kayaks. Mr. Vincent answered the launch space is for car top boats Mr. Hobaica stated I don't know how buses are going to get into here, or parking for events as parking seems inadequate. Mr. Hobaica's suggestion would be an established parking plan and a study associated with it.

John Johnstone, Mystic, said he thought that most of us here today are here to voice our opinion on the building itself. I think what we are looking for is three or four ideas because we all have different tastes. Mr. Johnstone spoke of coming down Route 27 and the first thing you will see is the water then the next thing will be the park and this building. Mr. Johnstone said he thinks there are many ways to approach this building and how it appears. Mr. Johnstone said on Facebook, it has been proven people do not like how the building looks. Mr. Johnstone asked for different designs to look at for the building.

Jason Vincent said the focus of this community meeting was to get the master plan finalized so it could move forward. The boathouse concept is not finalized and we are aware of the public's opinion and will be working with them on other choices for the façade of the building.

A community member asked if the goal today was to be able go forward as a community to allow the park to go to the permitting process. Mr. Vincent said his vision for the outcome of this meeting today is for the park committee at their meeting on Monday to authorize submission of the master plan to go to planning and zoning for master plan approval.

John Flaherty, President of the Friends of Stonington Crew, asked Mr. O'Neill to explain the differences between flat roofs and capped roofs, materials, advantages and disadvantages. Mr. O'Neill reiterated the inside of the building fits the function of the use of the boathouse but the challenge is to stay within a budget that has been set as financing is through donation. This budget puts constraints on the design. The challenge is to meet the criteria the town is looking for the outside of the boathouse and meets the criteria of what is needed for the crew on the inside. Our task is to come up with some other designs to share with the public. We can build whatever the town wants as long as we get donations to build it.

Matt Ferrier, Mystic, made comments on the site saying he did not like the trees on the street saying it would block the view of the river and trees rip up the sidewalk as they get bigger. Mr. Ferrier said he is opposed to the parallel parking along the street because, with the significant amount of traffic, it is dangerous and people could get injured getting in and out of cars. Although the architects say it slows down traffic another concern with Greenmanville is it is a very populated area on the weekends and slowing down the traffic might cause bigger issues. The other point I want to make is where the boathouse will be located, it seems they will have to carry the boats a long way to get to the water. I think the boathouse should be located closer to the river. There is a concern with the boat ramp as well with people taking their boats off their cars and having to carry them a long distance. Another question is who is maintaining it as I've heard the Mystic River Park bathrooms are expensive to maintain, who will be paying that bill. Mr. Ferrier asked

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about the crew chase boats, is the boat ramp at the park going to be able to support them or are they going to have to use the ramp on Bay Street which is currently closed.

Jamie Whitman, Mystic, said there are no sidewalks on her side of the street and has to cross the street when she walks downtown and the traffic does not slow down or stop for pedestrians which is a concern. Ms. Whitman noted she now sees the parallel parking is a bump out and that is wise. Ms. Whitman said there are a number of accidents in that area and thinks, even with parallel parking, there still will be so this is an issue. Ms. Whitman would be more interested in how the slag will be addressed and would like more history on the house. Ms. Whitman said she and her husband are big fans of Stonington Crew and strongly support this project and look forward to adult programs at some point.

Mr. Vincent explained the coal slag on the property is mostly covered over with soil and grass, there will be an additional two feet of soil coverage on the site to ensure that nothing penetrates through with frost heaves and to elevate the site to accommodate sea level rise in the future.

Grace Vandal, Mystic, said she would like to thank the people who had the foresight to take a piece of private property and turn it into a park to provide public access to the river, it is a fabulous thing to do. Ms. Vandal said she agrees with the concerns of the parking spaces on Route 27. Ms. Vandal said she is an avid cyclist and she thinks the Town of Stonington needs to do more to support cycling and think about ways to reduce car traffic. Ms. Vandal finished by saying she would like to see the promotion of safety in cycling on Route 27 incorporated into this project and the bump out would be a good start.

Eve Aldrich, Old Mystic, said she thinks the design looks like a big storage container. Instead of it being two stories high, could you consider losing the facilities on the second floor? If it was a one-story building, it would save money and look a little prettier. Also, like the last speaker said, move it back so it isn't right on the road and it wouldn't be blocking the view of the Mystic Seaport. The other thing to mention here is the town will be paying for the upkeep of this building and it is for one sport. Should we spend that much for 100 kids, I don't want to take any money for education away from the rest of the children.

Frank Pucci, Mystic, asked if there is another plan if the historical society will not let you take the building down? Jason Vincent said we do not have a backup plan at this time, we will react to what the state historical commission says we have to do. Mr. Pucci asked how many parking spaces allowed. Chad Frost said there are 21 provided on the site.

A community member asked for an answer to the question about the boathouse being one story. Mr. O'Neill said they would like to have the needs of the crew team met in one place. Mr. O'Neill explained how the first floor is in largely in a flood plain and is only good for storing the boats so it makes sense to locate the training facility on the second floor so everything is in one place. If they were both on the first floor, it would take away from space for the park. As for moving the building closer to the water, then it starts to block the view, if it is up near the street, it is blocking the back of the Latitude 41 restaurant.

A community member asked about the height of the boathouse roofline compared to the existing house. Mike O'Neill said the roof of the house is higher than the building. Mr. O'Neill said regarding the question about spending this much money for 100 kids, the town is not funding the boathouse, the money is being raised through donations and our belief is the number of kids able to use it will grow along with members of the community. Mr. O'Neill said this sounds like it could be a traffic problem but rowers row in the morning at 5:00-8:00 a.m. or in the late evening so it won't contribute to a lot of traffic adding as the crew team has been operating out of the Mystic Seaport, any traffic associated with it is already on that road.

A community member asked if there will be larger events once the boathouse was built. Mr. O'Neill answered there is one big regatta hosted by the Mystic Seaport in the fall which has been going on for 27 years and we will continue with that. At Stonington High School, there are races in the early spring before the summer crowds. The design of the park allows for buses to pull into the park to unload.

A community member asked about long-term maintenance costs. Mr. O'Neill said the boathouse will be maintained by the town and the original concept created of the boathouse was very low maintenance.

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Lauren Graham, Stonington, said it is really exciting and she applauds what the crew team is doing, it is good for the community. In terms of the aesthetics, there was a huge discussion on Facebook about it. My husband is from Assisi, Italy and there are 5 million visitors a year that come to see the land of Saint Francis. At our home there, we are not allowed to change our windows even by an inch or to install skylights in our roof and parking is very limited. Speaking of Stonington, the economy of this town is driven by people who want to see Mystic, Connecticut, the way they envision it. I think the objection of the people who have lived here many years is they do not want to see modern architecture but want to keep that quaint and coastal look. That is not an aesthetic choice but an economic choice. Another question is what is going on in the Rossie Mill, does it belong to the Mystic Seaport and is it being used. Is there any way we cannot build another building but get permission from the Seaport to use some of that facility? If the Rossie Mill is holding materials that are archived, could they be moved elsewhere and the crew team could use a building that already exists and there wouldn't be an argument over the aesthetics of the building.

A woman came forward to say she had worked at Mystic Seaport for a long time and volunteers in the tutorial department at the Rossie Mill. She said the Rossie Mill houses many archival and collections research materials, 500 water craft and it is quite full.

Arthur Lehmann questioned if they couldn't do anything with the master plan until they find out what the historical society would do so the project would be stopped, is that correct. Mr. Vincent said we have local control over decisions leading to the master plan, we can adopt it and if the historical commission directs us to do certain activities, we would have to go back and explore it. The national historical district is not a regulatory tool, it is a recognition tool, and this is a recognition district so there is a process that we will go through with them.

Ed Novak, Mystic, said the statement that struck him is that parallel parking will slow traffic down. This will not work on Route 27 as it will stop traffic as people have to pull up and back into a space.

Jason Vincent said this is why it slows down traffic. Studies prove when people approach areas where there are cars on the sides of the road, they use more caution and slow down.

Mr. York, Mystic, who worked at Mystic Seaport for many years researching the buildings there said he learned a lot about the Rossie Mill from Chad Frost's presentation but he didn't see how this information would be conveyed to the public. There was some talk about the landscape and signage but if the mill played such an important part there should be something to show it, perhaps, a small exhibit space in the boathouse that talks about the Rossie Mill. If we want to emphasize the history of the site, we need to have a way for people to understand that and an interpretive exhibit would be helpful.

A community member asked about the history of the house. Mr. Frost answered from what is known, it was a separate piece of property. It wasn't a house owned by the mill. It wasn't until the Bumgarner's purchased it in the 1950's that it became one piece of property. The house was detached but close to the neighborhood where the Mystic Seaport is located. There was not a mill owner or manager who lived there or a parsonage of a church so there is not a direct connection to the mill that we know of at this point. The garage was the coalhouse that grew and eventually, the auto shop added onto it in the 1950's or 60's.

Tim O'Neill said he would like to congratulate both the process and player, it is a great example of a shared project. There is a private element and public element working together to share the costs of preserving history and creating access to the water. This is a model process for the town to work together. The fact there are so many people here and so engaged shows how things should happen in a small town so congratulations to all of you.

Don Flore, Pawcatuck, commented about the Glastonbury, Connecticut boathouse and recommended the park committee visit them to learn more about what has worked or not worked with their boathouse park. Chairman Simmons said he has visited Glastonbury so he has spoken with them about their program and it has been educational.

Chuck Stevens, Mystic, said he is a member of the Mystic River Park Commission, and he wanted to speak about what it costs to maintain the restrooms. The Mystic River Park's restrooms are open year-round and the budget item is about \$17,000.00 a year. The other thing is that I want to congratulate everybody on this open transparent process, I'm very much in favor as an individual on

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the master plan but one question I have for the architectural people is how would the living shoreline be impacted by a CAT 3 or CAT 4 hurricane or a big storm surge. Mr. Frost answered the idea is for the living shoreline to handle those situations. The oyster castles dissipates the waves as they come in and the bank has been raised up a few feet, so, based on Hurricane Sandy, we know what the water elevation got to, and using that as a base, we set the elevation to that level plus 20 inches. Mr. Frost also said, regarding the building location on the plan, it is a little deceptive, it is not a long way from the water. The same thing for the kayak launch, the boat launch is about 30 feet from the parking area.

Eve Aldrich, Old Mystic, suggested the boat house be put on a barge.

A community member name Erlin, said she was on the Stonington High School Crew team and is one of the many kids who received a crew scholarship to go to college. Erin said for the people who want the boathouse moved closer, her experience in college was boathouses were not close to the water. Erin spoke of the sport of rowing and how it builds careers because of the lessons you learn building a team and a family structure.

Matt Ferrier, Mystic, said his question of the boathouse being closer to the water had been answered. One additional thing he would like to mention would be parking meters in the parking set for certain time periods to offset the costs of the restrooms and maintenance.

6. Comments from the Committee and the Selectmen

Chairman Simmons thanked everyone for coming to the meeting and invited the Board of Selectman and Committee for comments. Scott Bates thanked First Selectman Simmons for his leadership saying without his persistence this project wouldn't have moved forward. This is an amazing turnout today, it speaks volumes about what kind of town this is and I think I speak for all us when I say I'm proud to be working on this project with all of you.

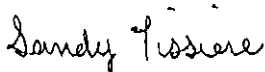
Selectman John Prue said he wanted to recognize the park plan has gone through a number of different generations and I believe it is very mature and it has my full support. The park plan is very well thought out and is a good use of space.

Chairwomen Kate Rotella thanked everyone for coming saying she felt the park plan was wonderful and they just need to look at other options for the boathouse. It is a great public/private partnership which is really important moving forward.

7. Adjourn

The meeting adjourned at 12:37 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,



Sandy Tissièrè
Recording Secretary



Stacey Haskell
Recording Secretary