

Newburyport Conservation Commission

April 2, 2013

City Council Chambers

Minutes

1. Call to Order

A meeting of the Newburyport Conservation Commission was called to order by Chair Joe Teixeira at 6:45 p.m.

2. Roll Call

In attendance were members Joe Teixeira, Paul Healy, Steve Moore, Dan Warchol and Jim O'Brien. Also in attendance was Julia Godtfredsen.

3. Minutes

Paul Healy moved to approve the minutes of the February 19, 2013 meeting as submitted. Steve Moore seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

4. General Business

Plum Island Updates

Julia Godtfredsen said the repair work to the jetty that was accomplished with the original \$3.5 million budget extended six hundred feet. An additional \$5 million was received and the project will be put out to bid a second time. The original contract was not completed by the March 31 deadline and a two-week extension was granted. A plover monitor from the Fish and Wildlife Service is to be on site during this period. The time extension was beneficial in that it will allow most of the work under the second contract to be done from a barge.

Sand has begun piling up against the south end of the jetty. The elevation at 55th Street was increased several feet. The amount of sand that will be needed to provide access at 53rd and 55th streets will be minimal. The ramp at 55th Street will be lowered after the sand has been added. The access at 57th Street will be permanently closed and beach grass will be planted at the top of the dune. Mobi mats will be used at 53rd and 61st streets and the sand ramp at 53rd Street will be angled.

The walkway at 61st Street extends perpendicularly to the beach and opens into the dune. An expert from Safe Harbors recommended that access to the beach be angled. Signage with a positive message will be installed that thanks pedestrians for using the pathways and protecting the dunes. Decisions will be made about which of the many paths through the dunes will remain open and which will be closed. A biomimicry pilot project is planned for the area between the toe of the frontal dune at 61st Street and the end of the sand bags at 55th Street. Short cedar shims will be set into the sand to mimic the native vegetation and help stabilize the sand.

The Newburyport beach did not receive the type of damage experienced in Newbury, but could face this situation in the future. DEP has indicated it would extend permits for scraping in Newbury although this would not be able to take place until more sand has accumulated.

Mayor Holaday said steps are being taken to resolve inconsistencies between Newburyport and Newbury with regards to non-buildable lots and water and sewer hook ups. She also said she is concerned about Plum Island property owners who were told by FEMA that insurance was mandatory but now are not being covered.

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New Ventures/Crow Land Landfill Update

Mayor Holaday said weather delayed the completion of the project. The new head gasket could not be installed until the existing wells were tested and this work required dry conditions. There is more work to be done on the vernal pool and the restoration area and another treatment of the phragmites is scheduled for June. Steve Moore pointed out that the report submitted by Mary Rimmer indicated a large area of phragmites had not been cut because the area was too wet for equipment to be used.

Sea Level Rise Meeting Update

Joe Teixeira said the sea level rise group has met twice since the last Conservation Commission meeting. The meetings focused on the coordination and publicizing of planning efforts. He said the choices when confronted with rising water are to rebuilt, retreat or reinforce. The StormSmart Coasts program at CZM helps coastal communities address climate change issues and the Surging Seas website includes a simulation of the impacts of sea level rise. The Commission might wish to consider the creation of performance standards for land subject to coastal storm flowage. The ordinance does not prevent fill from being added to raise the land above flood level and the building code does not address this issue.

Steve Moore said the wastewater treatment facility should be a primary concern. Julia Godtfredsen said if a wall were constructed, the water would flow around it to other locations, which would make setting a policy difficult. Joe Teixeira said if a wall were built other areas would be impacted, but the major infrastructure would be protected. A policy might require that a compensatory storage area be provided as a special condition.

Paul Healy said a letter might be sent to the mayor suggesting all departments develop a plan for sea level rise. Dan Warchol said a letter to the departments might be sent to raise awareness of the issue and make it known that sea level rise is a concern of the Commission but does not request the setting of a policy. Julia Godtfredsen said a first step might be to ask DEP why it has not yet developed regulations for land subject to coastal storm flowage.

Joe Teixeira said the solar farm planned for Newbury is in the Little River flood storage area. The concrete footings for the panels would displace a great deal of flood storage.

Whittier Bridge Salt Marsh

Julia Godtfredsen said the base line monitoring has been completed and Mary Rimmer has submitted a report.

Ethics Training

Steve Moore distributed paperwork from the session on the open meeting law. He noted that remote participation would not be allowed if a quorum was not present and might not be used only as a matter of convenience.

5. Adjournment

Steve Moore moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:00 p.m. Jim O'Brien seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.