

Town of Canton, CT
Upper Collinsville Mill Pond Master Plan Steering Committee
Special Meeting
August 30, 2011

Approved Meeting Minutes

The Upper Collinsville Mill Pond Master Plan Steering Committee held a Regular Meeting at 6:00 PM at the Canton Library/Community Center in Room E located at 40 Dyer Avenue in Canton, Connecticut.

1. Call to Order

The meeting began at approximately 6:05 PM.

2. Roll Call

Attendance:

- Jeff Shea, Town of Canton
- David Sinish, Inland Wetlands Commission
- Anne Raftery, Economic Development Commission
- Todd Jacobs, Parks and Recreation Commission
- Jim Davis, Conservation Commission
- David Murphy, Milone & MacBroom, Inc.

Committee member Bill Spatcher was not present.

Guests who signed the attendance sheet:

- John Fitts, reporter, 15 Colony Road
- David Leff, 4 The Green
- Steve Roberto, Selectman, 1 Tanglewood Drive
- Kent McCoy, 6 Center Street
- Dave Gilchrist, 54 Lawton Road
- Kevin Jackson, 86 Atwater Road
- Kathy Munroe, 17 Town Bridge Road
- Dale Munroe, 17 Town Bridge Road

3. Public Comment

Selectman Steve Roberto believes that public access to the river is needed and is achievable. The Rotary Club may be positioned to donate up to \$40,000 to assist in this endeavor. It would be good to have some parking at the new gazebo, although the curb cut would require State approval.

4. Review and Approve of Minutes

The meeting minutes from June 7, 2011 and June 16, 2011 were reviewed. One correction was made to the June 7 meeting minutes: the sentence “Although the property owner is displeased with people swimming to the bridge abutments and climbing/diving off the abutments, Mr. Sinish believes that they are a great resource” was changed to “The property owner is displeased with people swimming to the bridge abutments and climbing/diving off the abutments.” Both sets of meeting minutes were then approved. A motion was made to approve the minutes of the June 7, 2011 and the June 16, 2011 minutes and seconded. The motion was approved 4-0.

5. Review, discussion, and such other matters as may pertain to the Upper Collinsville Mill Pond Master Plan Project

David Sinish reported that the banks and walls along the impoundment appear to be intact as a result of the recent significant rain events, although vegetation has been flattened or bent. The largest of the three sandy islands near the boardwalk appears to have changed shape due to the high flows from T.S. Irene, and it is possible that bathymetry has changed as well.

6. Review Committee Charge from the Board of Selectmen

Jeff Shea read the resolution that established the steering committee for the Upper Collinsville Mill Pond Master Plan.

7. Review Results of Public Survey

David Murphy presented a synopsis of the survey results (refer to attached memo) and reminded those in attendance that the full results from Survey Monkey are available on the project web site. Many of the comments were related to public access, with respondents split between those favoring maintaining the status quo, discouraging more visitors, or increasing usage. Less than 20 people specifically mentioned water depths. For the sake of drawing meaningful conclusions from the survey, the seven respondents in favor of dredging and the eight respondents in favor of raising the water level could probably be interpreted as a total of 15 people who are generally in favor of increasing water depths.

David Sinish raised a point about the comments pertaining to “dredging.” This term means different things to different people. David Murphy noted that the survey did not prompt for a response or comments about dredging, thus making it more difficult to interpret what respondents could be stating or implying. Some people could be thinking in terms of a wide area of sediment removal, and some could be thinking of just a few selected locations such as sandbars.

A short discussion ensued about increasing the water surface elevation with flashboards. Some in attendance believe that the fixed costs for increasing the water surface would be more beneficial for the Town instead of the repeated cost of dredging. David Leff explained that flashboards would have engineering and construction costs as well as annual costs such as retaining a professional to install them and maintain them. David Sinish indicated that

new designs could accommodate flooding. The Hydropower Study evaluated gate-type boards that can be raised and bladder-type dams that can be inflated. As the owner of the dam and the agency that permits work on dams, The Connecticut Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) would have significant influence in this matter.

8. Existing Conditions Mapping (Bathymetry, Depths, and Public Access)

David Murphy presented the large maps of the bathymetry, water depths, and possible shoreline with the water surface raised three feet.

The map of existing public access was presented next. Highlights included Town Bridge Road, the beaches upstream and downstream of the Town Bridge Road bridge abutments, Flaherty's rock, the big island, the Town Garage parking area and small beach, the trail, the new gazebo, the small triangular park along the trail that is adjacent to the boat launch, Collinsville Canoe and Kayak, the areas around the dam and the Route 179 bridge, the small canoe dock along lower Collins Road, and the two pedestrian access points on the church-owned land. David Leff explained that ice skating occurs along lower Collins Road, and that raising the water level would benefit skating and boating in this particular area. Occasionally, residents have added water to the surface of the ice to make it smoother. One point of access was missed: the bridge of Rattlesnake Brook was designed to provide ADA-compliant fishing access.

9. Public Access Relative to Land Ownership

David Murphy provided his findings relative to land ownership while stressing that interpretation of deeds, easements, and legal documents is not an area of expertise for Milone & MacBroom, Inc. An additional caveat is that the parcel mapping available from the Town is not yet in digital format, and the parcel data from the State is relatively generalized.

Town Bridge Road is town-owned and the right-of-way may be sufficiently wide to accommodate the parking that takes place. The beaches upstream and downstream of the Town Bridge Road bridge abutments may be partly on State land (the portions riverward of the high water mark) and partly on private property. Flaherty's rock appears to be partly on the nursery's land and partly on the MDC land (both are long strips of property). The big island is State land.

The Town Garage parking area and the small beach are on Town-owned land and State-owned land, respectively. The Farmington River Trail along the study area follows the old railroad easement. The new gazebo is on the Town land.

The boat launch, the small triangular park along the trail that is adjacent to the boat launch, the Collinsville Canoe and Kayak store, and the adjacent shops appear to be all on private property. However, a sliver of land to the west of the shops appears to be State-owned. This needs to be investigated further.

The areas immediately around the dam and the Route 179 bridge are State-owned. The small canoe dock along lower Collins Road above the high water mark is essentially public land, as

it lies on the boundary between a town road and the impoundment. The two pedestrian access points on the west side of the impoundment are on church-owned land.

A discussion ensued regarding the ownership of the old railroad right of way on the west side of the impoundment. David Murphy noted that the assessor mapping shows that private property ownership extends across the line to the edge of water. Several in attendance believe that the railroad right of way could have reverted to the adjacent private property owners.

David Murphy remarked that in his experience (and the firm's experience) with public access and master plans, the Upper Collinsville Mill Pond stands out as an area that "works" even with so much access occurring on land that may not be publicly-owned. This is a very positive attribute of the area.

10. Status of Sediment Sampling Plan

The Canton Inland Wetland Agency approved the drilling and sampling in July, and CT DEEP provided its comments on August 26, 2011. David Murphy explained that DEEP has emphasized characterization of sediment that would remain in place due to benthic organism concerns, whereas the Town needs to understand the quality of the sediment that might be removed. In order to satisfy both concerns within the budgetary constraints, ten locations could still be drilled and samples collected. However, only eight samples would be submitted for disposal quality characterization and eight samples would be submitted for benthic quality characterization. Sampling is scheduled for September 6 and 7, 2011. David Murphy believes that flows have already decreased to the point that the drill rig on the raft will be able to operate without trouble next week.

11. Related Studies and Efforts

- a. Town Bridge Road Bridge – When the bridge replacement/repair project occurs, large laydown areas may be needed. This could potentially provide an opportunity to secure land through easements or acquisitions that could later be converted to public access.
- b. Hydropower Study – The master plan will need to provide viable options for scenarios that include or do not include hydropower generation. It is understood that FERC licensing would require fish passage. David Leff posed a question regarding whether DEEP could require fish passage if the water surface elevation is raised in the absence of the hydropower project. David Murphy indicated that it could be strongly encouraged although it would be impossible to know if fish passage would be a condition of the approvals. The committee recalls that fish passage would be very expensive, on the order of seven figures for the ladder.
- c. Pedestrian Study – The traffic calming and pedestrian safety recommendations will need to mesh with the master plan. It was noted that Route 179 is a State scenic highway, which could have some implications to the master plan.

12. Site Constraints and Opportunities

David Murphy presented an informal list of opportunities for discussion. These included organization of parking along Town Bridge Road, either in connection with the bridge project or not; potential opportunities to provide additional access if the Town Garage is relocated, creating a boat ramp and beach area with ADA accessibility; developing more or a gathering place for programming near the gazebo; creating a small beach along the edge of water in the triangular park east of the existing boat ramp; improving signage throughout the area; and gaining access to the possible State-owned land west of the canoe store (toward the dam) for non-swimming/non-boating access such as fishing.

Sediment removal could be constrained to target areas to achieve specific goals, instead of wide areas of dredging. In some areas, depths may already be appropriate. For example, there is a good diversity of depths already adjacent to the Town Garage site, which could potentially accommodate a beach, boat launch, and fishing (activities that may require different depths) without dredging.

There was some concern from the committee that the possible State-owned land west of the canoe store might not support fishing. David Murphy will look into this further. A proposal for artificial reefs as part of the plan is being evaluated by the fisheries subconsultant and could help enhance this area.

David Sinish requested that Milone & MacBroom, Inc. review State statutes and regulations regarding motorized boats, as it may head off any debate that could occur. Things to consider include speeds and required depths. Kathy Munroe wondered if emissions standards or requirements could also play a role.

13. Public Meeting Schedule

A public meeting is tentatively scheduled for October 12, 2011.

14. Project Schedule

Most of the remaining analysis will occur immediately after the sediment sampling.

15. Next Meeting

Tentatively scheduled for September 27, 2011.

16. Staff Report

Not applicable.

17. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at approximately 7:30 PM.

UPPER COLLINSVILLE MILL POND MASTER PLAN RECREATIONAL/USERS' SURVEY RESULTS SUMMARY

Standard Questions

Most respondents travel less than five miles to the impoundment, and most drive cars although many bike or walk there. Walking and biking are by far the most common land-based activities for people who visit the impoundment, whereas kayaking was the most common water-based activity.

Existing parking and trails were the most commonly reported needs that were being met. However, these two things (plus a public boat launch) were also reported as “most important to develop.”

A perception of poor water quality appears to be the most common reported problem. However lack of access, poor access points, and lack of restrooms were the next-highest cited problems.

Additional Comments Section

Some respondents (approximately ten) are concerned that too many people are using the resource and that improvements would invite more people. An equal number of people enjoy the area in its current state and do not believe that any “improvements” are necessary. These are valid concerns and should be considered for the master plan. If enhancements or changes are recommended, they should not be so severe that usage of the impoundment increases drastically and leads to any abuses of resources.

Approximately half of the written comments provided specific recommendations regarding public access to the impoundment. Some of the recommendations that may be appropriate for Collinsville include:

- Provide pet waste disposal areas
- Maintain/keep up with the existing trash barrels
- Beautify the area around the WPCF (vegetation, vines, screening)
- Extend the bikeway along the water's edge (behind the canoe store)
- Provide better parking on the east side of the impoundment
- Provide more benches, picnic tables near the river
- Hold events by the river, such as seasonal programming
- Town should own some of the access
- Enhance the view of the river from the east shore by cutting vegetation
- Maintain native vegetation
- Provide a town-owned boat launch
- Provide a boat launch near the town garage
- Provide a beach for swimming
- Provide access that is not steep

- Any of the above, but without more paving
- Add signs that depict access points and businesses
- Work out swimming/fishing conflicts
- Improve ways to safely walk or bike to the area

Some ambitious recommendations included:

- Provide pedestrian access along the west side
- Move the town garage and yard
- Improve access to Flaherty's Rock
- Smooth the trails so inline skating is easier
- Build a band shell
- Build a bridge or trail on the old railroad abutments
- Dog park

Some recommendations are probably not appropriate:

- Add public restrooms
- Add water fountains
- Make electricity available

Responses about motorized boats, dredging, and raising the level were tallied:

Should motorized boats be allowed?

No = 13

Yes = 1

Should the impoundment be dredged?

No = 2

Yes = 7

Should the level of the impoundment be raised?

No = 1

Yes = 8

Because the “dredging” and “raising” options were not presented as an “either/or,” it is not possible to determine if someone’s comment would have changed if either was discounted. However, the number of people who recommended dredging (7) was roughly the same as the number of people who recommended raising the level (8). It may be appropriate to assume that the 15 respondents are sending a message that increased depth is desired, one way or another.

Summary

Two respondents probably encapsulated the themes best when they said:

- ❑ *“I’m all for improving the recreational use of the river to regain what we lost when the state discontinued the use of the flashboards, but I’m opposed to disturbing the quiet natural nature of the river.”*
- ❑ *“We love the natural resources in C-ville and support any thoughtful enhancement of access that would respect the natural beauty and history of the area providing a variety of opportunities to different segments of the population.”*