

WREP Meeting Minutes 02/03/2007

Location: Hingham

Attendees:

Dick Avery Faith Burbank, Judeth Van Hamm, Karen Farber, Phillip Delano, Dave Clinton, Bill Sarni, Lawry Reid, Margot Isabelle, Darrell Baker, Jim Davenport (Hingham Open Space), Kathy Reardon (Hingham Land Conservation Trust), Robert Giacchetti (Senator Hedlund)

Scribe: Scott Plympton

- Minutes from 1/3/07 were approved
- Correction: Hull Land Conservation Trust has \$70K that comes from the Hull Conservation Commission Fund

The special focus of this meeting was to learn about the proposed Cliffside Condominium 40B Project in the Weir River Estuary and to prepare a letter in response.

Faith Burbank began the presentation by showing the group the location of the property on maps and identifying the boundaries. This includes Quarry Pond and land that borders the Weir River near the GWB bridge and Rockland St., directly across from the Estuary Center. Faith noted that land owner Mr. Boyle, purchased the entire 54 acre property, 15 acres of which are included in this project, in 1999 for under \$650,000. Two years ago he indicated he was willing to put the land in conservation, but we were unable to secure the deal. Since then he has a history of violations with the town of Hingham in his pursuit to build residences on the property.

The primary negotiating factors to this development are: the land is assessed as undevelopable, there are significant hurdles in providing sewer and water, and the property falls within an ACEC and Mass River's Protection Act area for considerations and restrictions.

The project is being proposed under the State's 40B (affordable housing) process as a 6 story 250 unit condominium complex. Permits are now in process.

Bill Sarni provided the group with detailed maps that showed the impact of the property (proposed buildings / parking lots) against the boundaries for the ACEC, flood zone lines, and the River's Act 200' buffer zone. Only the smallest fraction of the project falls outside of these restrictions.

Robert Giacchetti, representing Senator Hedlund's office, presented the group with information about the 40B process noting there are many check points where MassHousing may approve, modify or deny the project. The first is the Zoning Board of Appeals. The senator is very much against this project and is preparing a letter to Mass Housing. Representative Bradley is also expected to get involved.

Actions: Our input and help is needed. Each local group (WRWA, SPWA, town committees, etc.) will forge letters to MassHousing. The WREP committee will prepare its own letter that responds to our areas of knowledge and focus to be included in the Town of Hingham's response.

The remainder of the meeting was spent to brainstorm ideas for the letter. These include:

- In essence this project totally flies in the face of everything WREP has been doing for four years which has won financial support from both State and private funding.

- Locus of the project is in the middle of a park created with the help of DCR, CZM,TTOR and local groups from the three towns.
 - The Estuary Center Building (a “green technology” demonstration site) is directly across the estuary from the project.
 - Three of the four corners formed by the estuary and George Washington Boulevard are protected Conservation lands.
 - State and Federal funds are earmarked for upgrading the West Corner culvert and Rockland Street drainage to improve water quality and wetland habitat.
 - The mission of WREP to provide quiet recreation and education in a serene and protected natural waterway habitat (where humans are the visitors) is starkly threatened by such an intense, encroaching, hardscape development.
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- Quarry Pond is the most intensely used wildlife habitat of the estuary with over 120 species of birds recorded.
 - The bluff surrounding the quarry is central to the flyway used by waterfowl and migrating song birds.
 - Hingham and Hull Harbormasters have been working with WREP to enforce a NO WAKE zone for power craft to protect shoreline from erosion, protect aquatic habitat, and assure quietude for paddlers.
 - Hingham and Hull Highway Departments, Selectmen, and Mass Highway are working to upgrade crosswalks to enhance safety for pedestrians and cyclists using the park.
 - Light, noise, trash, water, and vehicle pollution would be injected into the center of a contiguous natural habitat.

Hull Land Conservation Trust

It was announced to the committee that Hull Land Conservation Trust has recently formed. The core board consists of 15 members with Scott Plympton as president. We are currently filing to become a legal entity. Our purpose is to acquire land within the Estuary as the opportunities become available. The strategy is to leverage the over 1500 Hull residents who supported the Community Preservation Act to raise funds and seek matching contributions from the state. The first priority parcels are the Lucas property within the Weir River Woods and the Lofchie property on Straits Pond.

Next Meeting

Cohasset March 7th at 7:00