

BELMONT CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

October 24, 2003

APPROVED

Members Present: M. Weil, K. Baskin, J. Curro, J. Smith, R. Foster.

Associate Members Present: M. Velie, S. Sanders, N. Davis, M. Moore.

Additional Attendees: See attendance sheet.

The meeting was called to order at 8:05 a.m. by K. Baskin, who reminded all present that the Commission has been asked by the Selectmen to provide comments regarding the environmental aspects of the residential project proposed by O'Neill Properties at the so-called "Belmont Uplands." She announced that the proposed zoning by-law amendment proposed by O'Neill will not be considered at the Town Meeting scheduled for November, so the pressure for us to respond has eased somewhat. The Selectmen will want our input by November 25, though. At today's meeting, the proponent will describe the proposed project and answer any questions we have. At the next scheduled Commission meeting (November 4), we will hear from those who have studied the area habitat.

New Business

The Commission received a resolution of the Cambridge City Council, which declared the month of October as Alewife Nature Awareness month in the City of Cambridge, acknowledging "this precious natural resource" and commending the work of the Friends of Alewife Reservation in directing public attention to it.

Public Hearing – Proposed Residential Development – O'Neill Properties

Mike Howard of Epsilon Associates appeared on behalf of the owner. He described the proposal of the owner to construct housing on the site. Because of the re-delineation of the wetlands in connection with their previous office/commercial project proposal, there will be less intrusion into the buffer zone under this proposal than under the office/commercial project proposal. He stated that the new proposal shows 0.9 acres, or 15% of the project, within the buffer zone. Impervious areas will now comprise 4% of the project. They have considered the fire road to be impervious for purposes of that calculation, but they could make it more pervious.

Brian Sullivan of Rizzo Associates added that the project would be a 4-story wood structure, with a concrete parking garage at its center. The fire department needs access to the back of the project; therefore, the fire road must surround the project. They can make that of a more pervious material, such as stone dust. The residents can also use it as a walking path.

Upon questioning, he stated that the stormwater detention basins would be grassed areas between the arms of the building. Compensatory storage will be at or above the 1.5 to 1 ratio.

Steve Corridan of O'Neill Properties said that the one area in which the residential project has a greater impact than the office building is the sanitary. However, there should be plenty of capacity. They are currently talking to the City of Cambridge about tying into their system, which is closer to the project. B. Sullivan said that they have discussed the possibility of overflows with the DEP, because they have combined lines (sewer and discharge). A surge tank would hold the overflow. A valve would then release it into the sewer line when capacity is available. An Infiltration/Inflow Fee ("II Fee") would be paid to Belmont as well as Cambridge.

If they cannot tie into the Cambridge sewer system through the Acorn Park sewer line, they would install a small pump station and install a 4-inch main down Acorn Park Drive, down the access road and into the Belmont system. This would empty into the neighborhood by Brighton Road and ultimately into the same Cambridge line as the direct Cambridge connection.

R. Foster pointed out there is already a problem with flooding in that Belmont neighborhood. B. Sullivan replied that Belmont is planning to upgrade the system in that area. R. Foster wondered whether there is a way to pressure Cambridge to allow the tie-in. S. Corridan responded that there is not, but they have been meeting with the Cambridge authorities in an attempt to work it out. He noted that there was opposition stated at public meetings. R. Foster asked for the names of those who opposed the plan. S. Corridan said that he would provide us with the meeting minutes.

He noted that the II Fee is intended to compensate for the overflow from storm events. The Town is mandated by DEP to do a study to determine how much stormwater is being processed by MWRA and a sewer evaluation study. Then those studies are used to determine how to distribute money to upgrade the systems of the various towns in order to reduce the extraneous flows. The II Fees are also used by the towns to generally upgrade their systems.

There was a discussion of wastewater versus stormwater problems in that neighborhood. G. Clancy said that the town is trying to remedy the problems there. They will be doing a closed circuit TV inspection of some of the problem lines. Some of the sanitary sewer mains are broken and will be repaired (re-lined) where necessary. This should take less than two years (perhaps only a year) by his estimation.

B. Sullivan stated that O'Neill would likely help upgrade and upsize the system, in part through the II Fee. G. Clancy noted that the town will receive grant funding from MWRA to divert some 200 contributors to the sanitary system, from sump pumps and downspouts, more appropriately to the stormwater system.

K. Baskin requested that any additional roads be shown. B. Sullivan said that any sewer connection to the Cambridge system would run along Acorn Park Drive, through an easement that they retained on the former Arthur D. Little property. The overflow tank would be on the side of the project, on the drive, so that it can be accessed for maintenance. S. Corridan noted that Mr. Barrell of the Belmont Planning Board had told them that the holding tank was not permitted. They have thoroughly investigated that issue and they believe that it is permitted, if DEP approves it. B. Sullivan stated that he has done that on other projects.

J. Curro stated that he has doubts about the feasibility of tying into the Belmont system. R. Foster agreed; she thinks that O'Neill will have to pay for a faster upgrade if they want to tie in.

S. Sanders stated that we should listen to Cambridge's concerns regarding this issue.

Upon questioning, the O'Neill representatives said that the planned trail to Little Pond would be natural. Vegetation will be cut, but otherwise the trail will be natural, all in accordance with the proposed Open Space Plan.

A Belmont resident asked about the impact on wildlife. K. Baskin noted that the Commission would discuss that at the next meeting. Experts of the Friends of Alewife Reservation will be able to make presentations on November 4.

M. Howard stated that they will list the standards, including those addressing the impact on wildlife, and how they plan to comply. They will offer additional mitigation.

R. Foster stated that the Commission would require more stringent standards than the zoning bylaw on vegetation management and snow removal. The sunken grass swales could be increased. There should be no excess water leaving the site; it should percolate through the soil.

Baskin asked whether the design could be made more compact, with the wings of the building not extending out so far. N. Davis asked whether they have designed a "green" building that meets LEED standards. S. Corridan replied that they were agreeable to attempting that, because it makes the project more palatable and marketable.

M. Velie stated that they should address the Route 2 fill issue at the site. Ernie Kerwin, an architect with the Friends of Alewife Reservation, said that there is a 12 foot differential in grades at the site. How are they planning to address that? They responded that grading or clearing in the buffer zone has been included in their calculation of the impact on the buffer zone. M. Moore asked about decks and balconies. S. Corridan responded that, if they are on the ground floor, they are included in the calculation of pervious areas. It will be a condominium, and condominium associations generally prohibit the construction of decks, but they are willing to include that (prohibition of decks) in the MOA.

Jim Graves of the Belmont Citizens' Forum urged the Commission to discuss the impact of the residential project generally as well. For example, it is bigger, the residents will be present 24 hours a day, the area will be their backyard, and so forth. Ellen Mass of the Friends of Alewife Reservation suggested that the Commission hire a consultant. J. Smith noted that the Town has hired consultants to review the project and the Commission can rely on them.

Elsie Fiore of Arlington stated that she is concerned about the fire road and the barrier around the project and the quality of soil. Carolyn Bishop, Town Meeting Member, pointed out that the residential project as planned will be 60 feet tall, whereas the commercial project was to be 96 feet tall. She suggested that they build a taller building with a smaller footprint.

J. Curro asked whether a chapter 21E survey had been performed. S. Corridan thinks that a Phase I survey has been done.

The meeting was then adjourned. The next meeting will be held on Tuesday, November 4, 2003.

Prepared by:
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Approved 12/2/03