

BELMONT CONSERVATION COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES

February 5, 2002

Members Present: M. Flamang, K. Baskin, M. King, M. Weil, L. Allen.  
Associate Members Present: J. Smith, N. Davis, M. Velie

Additional Attendees: Glenn Clancy (Belmont Office of Community Development), Donna Moultrup (Belmont Health Department), Paul Graham and Lee Barber (Belmont Recreation Department).

The meeting was called to order at 7:08 p.m.

Recreation Department - Rock Meadow Dog Proposal

Ms. Moultrup appeared before the Commission to explain the Board of Health's request for permission to let dogs run off the leash at Rock Meadow. A group of people have been running their dogs off-leash at Grove Street between 5:30 and 7:30 AM. They requested a variance from the applicable ordinance so that they could do that. The Board of Health was willing to grant that variance for Grove Street and the Pequotette Park only at that time of the morning. However, the Recreation Department opposed the variance, for many reasons.

Mr. Graham and Mr. Barber appeared on behalf of the Recreation Department. Mr. Graham explained that the "goose-busters" program instituted a few years ago provides for permits for dogs to be off leash at Clay Pit Pond for the purpose of driving the geese away. This would reduce the significant problem caused by goose droppings there. Even when it was first instituted, this involved a very small number of dogs. There is now minimal use of that program.

The request for the variance proposed by the Grove Street dog owners is opposed by the Recreation Department primarily because of the fear that people will not clean up their dogs' droppings and concern that the dogs will jump up on other people, especially children and the elderly. For much of the year, it is dark at that time of morning and owners will not be able to see well enough to control their dogs and to pick up droppings. The fields there are used by children for baseball, softball and soccer. However, the Recreation Department supports the concept of having an area at Rock Meadow where dogs can be run off-leash.

Rock Meadow provides a place where children generally do not play, and there is an area without fields. M. Flamang noted that this request is timely, as the Commission is trying to put a management plan in place for Rock Meadow. Mr. Barber pointed out that the Recreation Department has jurisdiction over the ballfield at Rock Meadow.

M. King asked whether it is the Town's responsibility to provide such a place for dogs to run free. Ms. Moultrup voiced her concern about dogs and people getting bitten. If dog owners are required to have a permit (and maybe pay a fee for the permit), the Health Department has a better chance of determining which dog did the biting and whether that dog has had a rabies inoculation.

Several Commission members pointed out some of the questions raised by this proposal: Should the area be fenced? Cleaned? Should permits be required? Should owners and dogs from towns other than Belmont be allowed to use the area? How many owners and dogs would use it? Can we give it a trial period? Will the abutters complain about parking?

Mr. Barber requested that the Commission work together with the Recreation Department and the Health Department to find a solution, and that he be kept informed.

M. Flamang indicated that the Commission now has a plan in outline form but it will take 3 or 4 months of study to finalize. Mr. Barber requested that the Recreation Department be included in the planning process so that the ballfield can be put into use as soon as possible. The backstop may have to be repositioned and other maintenance steps taken. The Commission agreed to consider the dog run use in the overall plan. Ms. Moultrup offered to share any relevant information with the Commission to assist them.

#### Rock Meadow

M. Flamang submitted an outline of the Management Plan for consideration by the Commission members and the Commission agreed that it will be discussed at the next meeting.

#### McLean Open Space - Conservation Restriction

G. Clancy noted that the McLean Land Management Committee is expecting to hear from the Commission at their own hearing, taking place at the same time, on the question whether the Commission is willing to hold the conservation restriction to be granted under the Memorandum of Understanding between the Town and McLean. The Trustees of Reservations are currently named as the holder of the restriction in the draft Conservation Restriction, but they asked the Town to pay them \$100,000 per year to do it. They may be willing to reduce that number to \$20,000 per year at this point.

The Commission reached a consensus that it would be willing to be the holder of the restriction as a last resort; i.e., only if another holder cannot be found. The Commission determined that K. Baskin would be their spokesperson at the McLean Land Management Committee meeting. The Commission then adjourned to the McLean Land Management Committee meeting.

The Commission was asked to express its views regarding the conservation restriction with respect to the McLean development. K. Baskin was introduced as the spokesperson for the Commission, and she stated the Commission's position as follows: Although the Commission has not had time to consider specific items in the Conservation Restriction, the Commission would consider accepting and holding the easement if the Trustees of Reservations are unwilling or unable to do so.

Ellen O'Brien Cushman stated that the owner of the property, the maintenance of the property and the holder of the restrictions should all be different. The holder of restrictions is the ninth member of the McLean Land Management Committee, and if the Commission is the holder, they would effectively have two seats on the Committee, upsetting the balance. That was the reason that the Trustees of Reservations were named as the restriction holder under the Memorandum of Understanding, and they have always been named as such. R. Foster stated that if the Commission was the holder, they would just hold the restriction and the McLean Land Management Committee would maintain and manage it.

Ellen O'Brien Cushman asked for the Commission's specific comments on the Conservation Restriction. K. Baskin responded that the Commission has not yet had the opportunity to discuss and consolidate individual members' comments. Ellen O'Brien Cushman requested that the Commission respond by the next meeting, February 25, 2002. G. Clancy noted that the Commission does not meet again until March 5, 2002.

The representative of the Trustees of Reservations stated that he understands that there is money for endowment of the Conservation Restriction. The funds for maintenance are separate and he is

concerned that there are insufficient funds to maintain and enforce the Restriction.

[The McLean Land Management Committee then discussed other issues.]

The meeting was then adjourned. The next meeting will be held at the Faculty Dining Room at Chenery Middle School on Tuesday, March 5, 2002.