

BELMONT CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MEETING MINUTES

April 2, 2002

Members Present: M. Flamang, K. Baskin, M. King, R. Foster, M. Weil, J. Curro, L. Allen.
Associate Members Present: J. Smith, M. Velie

Additional Attendees: Glenn Clancy (Belmont Office of Community Development), John P. Maguranis (Belmont Animal Control Officer), Lucille Dressler (Shade Tree), Helen S. (Nita) Montero (93 Somerset Street), Anne Allen (neighbor of Nita Montero), Sinclair Weeks (neighbor of Nita Montero), Joe Finn (volunteer maintaining birdhouses at Rock Meadow and Clay Pit Pond).

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 p.m.

Minutes and Old Business

The minutes of February 5, 2002 were approved.

The minutes of March 5, 2002 were approved, with the following changes: Lucille Dressler's name will be corrected in the list of attendees of the meeting; K. Baskin's name will be corrected on page 3 under Rock Meadow Management Plan; and on page 1 on the third line under the discussion of water main installation on the McLean property, the words "path; that" will be corrected to read "pathway, which".

R. Foster noted that the minutes discuss the gradual encroachment of underbrush into the meadow. She suggested that the Victory Gardeners be trained to cut back the brush and brambles. The Audubon Society could show them which invasive plants to eliminate.

G. Clancy and M. Weil will attend the DEP site visit to the Armenian Church on April 9. K. Baskin suggested that the Commission point out to the DEP that they appealed the one thing they themselves suggested they could do (planting the bushes). M. Weil noted that there was recently an area roped off on the Armenian Church site.

Animal Control Officer - Rock Meadow Enforcement Issues

Mr. Maguranis is frequently at Rock Meadow. He can keep an eye on things because he is there every day. He would be willing to empty a trash barrel if we put one up there. However, there has been dumping of trash (perhaps by residents of other towns) when we had a barrel there previously.

He has seen varied wildlife there, including mink, deer, owls, red-tail hawks, turkey vultures, foxes, coyotes and woodchucks. He does not think that dogs should be allowed to run off the leash at Rock Meadow, because it would disturb the wildlife. Some of these animals have dens that could be disturbed by the dogs. He has found mink fetuses dug up in the meadow. It must have been done by a domesticated dog, because a wild animal would have eaten them. He also does not think that a ballpark should be established and used up there. He writes more citations for dogs off the leash at Rock Meadow and at Habitat than the rest of town.

As for the activities of people at Rock Meadow, he has seen motorbikes, but mostly walkers and dogwalkers. The motorbikes definitely are causing damage.

G. Clancy pointed out that we need rules and regulations that are adopted by Town Meeting - that will

be sufficient to make them enforceable. Tickets can be issued by the police. Also, a use and management plan is necessary in order to get funding under the town budget.

This Saturday (April 6) at 10:00 a.m., the Commission will walk through Rock Meadow. Mr. Magarunis will attend. The raindate is April 20.

R. Foster found some pictures of Rock Meadow taken in 1965, and passed them around for viewing. She noted that the property was deeded for conservation and recreation purposes, not as a wildlife or bird sanctuary.

Mr. Magarunis stated that he believes any dog run, if permitted there, should be fenced off from the rest of Rock Meadow. He has seen signs of partying there, such as beer bottles and cans. Paintball goes on there, too. He has seen many splatters of paint. This is a recent phenomenon.

Public Hearing - Notice of Intent - 97 Somerset Street

Helen (Nita) Montero has lived at 97 Somerset Street for 33 years. She is now, for the first time, having a problem with Atkins Brook. Because of silt buildup and invasive plants, the brook is now flooding. The culvert under Somerset adds to the problem. It is only 3 ½ feet wide. The upper part of Atkins Brook and the pond are being worked on now by an abutter.

Sinclair Weeks stated that the goal of the proposed work would be to reintroduce rocks to the bank of the stream, not as riprap but restoring a natural look. They would also remove the invasive plants and plant native wetland vegetation. G. Clancy stated that the culvert there has had a maintenance grate added within the last year. He thinks it's a stone culvert.

The water now floods over the bank and has caused damage to the lawn. K. Baskin asked whether sediment will be removed. Mr. Weeks said it will not be dredged out significantly, and he will add sandy loam on the sides of the stream. Using a bobcat and plywood path to get it in, he will remove the plant debris during a low flow period, perhaps August.

Ms. Montero expressed concern that there may be two feet of silt in the culvert now. G. Clancy will have the highway department go in to reestablish the bottom and the stream can be restored to that level.

L. Allen stated that the Commission must decide whether the work is allowed, and if so, would need more details. He is concerned that replanting will take a while to establish itself. Mr. Weeks indicated that they can sod the area. They won't have the lawn grass come right up to the stream bank.

The Commission approved the requested Order of Conditions, on the condition that the stream bed be brought level with the bottom of the culvert, that a plywood path be used for any equipment, that there is no dredging occurring when the water is flowing, and that a buffer be planted between the lawn and stream.

Report of Joe Finn Regarding Rock Meadow Bird Boxes

Joe Finn reported that twelve tree swallows, with 50 or so offspring, and two pair of bluebirds, with 11 offspring, are using the boxes. He has 5 or 6 boxes there now, and would like to put in all new boxes. He would increase the number to 15 at the most, and would place them in a pattern that is not obtrusive. He may be able to put more boxes for bluebirds further out. The Commission agreed that he should do that if he is willing.

The kestrel box is too close to the Victory Gardens. He would like to take that one down and add another in a more remote area. The kestrels usually do not eat birds; instead, they eat crickets and voles.

He also reported that he has seen paintball splatters on the boxes. He requested permission to cut a few clumps of brush to improve the birds' feeding area, which the Commission granted. He also requested permission to have Gino Volpe, one of the gardeners, assist in killing the swallows he traps. The Commission approved the request, provided that Mr. Volpe is duly licensed to do so.

He will remove the two boxes he has at Clay Pit Pond because the public and dogs and geese interfere with the birds there.

Rock Meadow Management Plan

M. Flamang presented a grid on which he has presented the various competing proposed uses. The Commission will be determining how much space is needed for each of these uses.

The Commission discussed some of the proposed uses, as follows: G. Clancy stated that he has discussed the dog run areas provided in other towns with Ellen in the Belmont Health Department. She indicated that the minimum allotted in other towns is 1.3 acres. She also suggested that the Pump House Lane area be considered for this use.

We have also had a problem with animal waste. Under the Town's waste management contract, the contractor will not pick it up.

It was the consensus of the Commission that, if permitted, a dog run area must be subject to some specific rules and controls.

The ballfield was also discussed. The existing layout may not be regulation size.

New Business

Davis sent an e-mail to the Commission suggesting that there may be a violation of the Order of Conditions issued with respect to 150 Somerset Street. G. Clancy will investigate to determine whether there is such a violation.

The meeting was then adjourned. The next meeting will be held at the Faculty Dining Room at Chenery Middle School on Tuesday, May 7, 2002.