

BELMONT CONSERVATION COMMISSION  
MEETING MINUTES

February 4, 2003

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

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

Additional Attendees: Glenn Clancy (Belmont Office of Community Development). Also see sign-in sheet.

The meeting was called to order at 7:07 p.m.

Victory Gardens Presentation

The Victory Gardens presentation was moved to the beginning of the meeting at the request of the presenters. Bruce Westgate and Geno Volpe appeared on behalf of the gardeners. B. Westgate reported that enthusiasm is high this year, but there is less interest than in previous years. They still have over 100 gardeners, and they are still self-financing. They currently have \$300 in their account and will need to pay the water bill with that. Over the last three years, \$3,217 has been taken in for the emergency fund. They may need to use that to replace the piping/irrigation system soon.

He has heard that the issue of junk in the garden plots was raised at a previous Commission meeting. He is not aware of it, but anyone complaining can call him. He will also put a notice about it in the spring bulletin distributed to the gardeners. M. Flamang requested on behalf of the Commission that the garden areas have as natural an appearance as possible.

G. Volpe added that he has experienced the theft of 10 or 15 butternut squash from his plot. He also noted that the poison ivy and other invasives are "pretty well under control" in the garden area. The blackberries are getting out of hand in one area. Usually they are mowed down. If the blackberries could be mowed every year instead of every other year, that would help. R. Foster suggested that a volunteer with a weed whacker might help. G. Volpe pointed out that there are one or two acres affected, which is too much for a weed whacker to handle.

B. Westgate hasn't advertised the gardens for the last couple of years, but he is considering it now. K. Baskin suggested that they try to place an article about a gardener in the local newspaper. S. Sanders pointed out that those who are not residents of Belmont could become gardeners, too.

M. King thanked Maria Murphy for organizing the neighbors to clean up trash at Rock Meadow. M. Murphy stated that she mostly finds coffee cups and bags of dog feces. There have been less beer bottles recently and tires and mattresses only occasionally. That has remained the same for the last couple of years.

Public Hearing - Rock Meadow Open Space Use and Management Plan

Flamang announced that he has proposed to the Selectmen that a committee be formed to consider the need for a dog park in Belmont and all possible locations for such a park. The committee would include members of the public who are in favor of such a park and those who

oppose it. Two possible sites are under the management of the Commission (Rock Meadow and Clay Pit Pond). This will be discussed later in the meeting.

### Minutes

The minutes for the meeting of January 7, 2003, were discussed. M. Flamang pointed out that, in the first sentence of the seventeenth paragraph under the heading "Public Hearing - Rock Meadow Open Space Use and Management Plan," the reference to "newer heavy tires" should be changed to "newer knobby tires." S. Sanders noted that, under "Other New Business," the recently adopted amendments referred to were only a portion of those adopted, and that G. Clancy had indicated that he would obtain the remainder for the Commission. The minutes for the meeting of January 7, 2003, with corrections as described above, were adopted. The minutes for the meeting of December 4, 2002, will be provided by M. Velie.

### Discussion of Modification to Prior Notice of Intent - 80 Clifton Street

G. Clancy distributed a drainage report and engineering study provided by Paul and Elaine O'Connell, owners of 80 Clifton Street, as required in the Order of Conditions issued by the Commission in connection with proposed work. The drainage report and engineering study assume that there will be modifications to the work originally proposed. The driveway has been modified, and the proposed vegetated roof has been replaced with additional living space. The owners have substantially complied with the Commission's original requirement that they demonstrate that there is sufficient capacity to recapture the stormwater runoff from the garage roof and the upper part of the drive to recharge the ground and surface water as though a permeable surface, such that the Commission can conclude that it can be treated as replacement area. They have provided for three drywells and a French drain.

J. Smith asked whether the old stone driveway area was to be covered with soil and seeded with appropriate vegetation. G. Clancy recalled that that was not a condition unless the Commission concluded that the replacement area provided was insufficient.

M. Velie asked whether it is appropriate to use the ten-year flood standard. G. Clancy stated that the Town can handle two-year flood levels, so the ten-year standard is fairly rigorous. K. Baskin noted that generally in engineering they do not use the one-hundred-year flood standard.

N. Davis asked about requiring maintenance. That is a standard condition when drywells and catchbasins are being used. S. Sanders suggested that the Commission visit the site to confirm. G. Clancy advised that the Order of Conditions can contain specific benchmarks and require that we inspect and approve before moving beyond the specified benchmarks. For example, we could state that the owners can't proceed to backfill until the Office of Community Development approves. They must notify G. Clancy and he (and any Commission members who wish to) can inspect. R. Foster pointed out that site visits must be arranged with the owners.

The Commission voted to require an amended Notice of Intent. In addition, the Order of Conditions will include a requirement that the Office of Community Development be notified and must approve prior to any backfill.

M. Velie then noted that the figures provided in the summary section of the drainage report provided by the O'Connells do not match the figures given on the following page. G. Clancy will check on that.

### Discussion of Commendation - Ogilby Family Property

This discussion was deferred to a subsequent meeting.

### Public Hearing - Rock Meadow Open Space Use and Management Plan

Numerous written comments which have been collected by G. Clancy and M. Flamang have been distributed to the other members of the Commission. M. Flamang repeated that he has proposed to the Selectmen that the Commission help form and work with a committee of Belmont residents who are interested in researching the need for a dog park in Belmont. In his view, the committee would assess the need, develop criteria for a successful dog park, look at all open land in Belmont to determine whether such a park could be sited in Belmont, and make recommendations based on these assessments. In his view, the Commission should take recommendations for membership of the committee, which would consist of six residents, three of whom have advocated for the dog park and three of whom have advocated against it, along with any interested Commission members and associate members.

K. Baskin expressed her concern that the Commission hasn't yet made a decision regarding the dog park. She stated that the Commission should prohibit dog park use only if the Commission determined that a dog park was not appropriate. We should be stewards of conservation, and perhaps a leadership role on this proposed committee would conflict with that role. The Commission also has not addressed the issue of whether recreational fields are appropriate for Rock Meadow. M. Flamang stated that we need to determine the parameters before we can make those decisions, and the committee would be doing that.

M. King agreed that the Commission may be opening itself up to requests for other uses as well as the dog park. It also may attract off leash dogs on the remainder of Rock Meadow. She suggested that the MDC skating rink site may be available for a dog park. She is also concerned about coyotes at Rock Meadow. A coyote has been spotted there, and she fears that having a dog park will attract more coyotes.

K. Baskin stated that the Commission should prohibit the dog park use at Rock Meadow; otherwise, the Plan and the formation of the proposed committee will leave the public with the impression that it is something we are considering. J. Smith disagrees. She does not think it is necessary to make a determination whether or not the dog park should be permitted. That can be decided later, even after the Plan has been adopted.

S. Sanders agrees that we should get on with the issues we have before us. K. Baskin asserted that the Commission should not be taking the lead in forming a committee to consider a dog park in Belmont. M. King thanked M. Flamang for putting together a draft Plan, which required a significant amount of work. However, she thinks the selectmen should form and select the committee. M. Flamang said that he is in favor of having the Commission form the committee and help find a site, if a dog park is found to be feasible. J. Smith stated that she thinks the Commission's role should be to receive any requests that such a committee determines are appropriate, but not to participate in forming the committee. G. Clancy suggested that the Commission finalize the Plan, but it need not remain static. The public should know where the committee stands on these issues. M. King suggested that the selectmen could form the committee and name members from the Conservation Commission, the Recreation Department, the Health Department, etc.

M. Flamang indicated that we would begin to go through the draft Plan provision by provision at this point in the meeting. M. Velie suggested adding language indicating that one of the purposes is to enhance the ecology, and offered to draft it. S. Sanders pointed out that the Plan should not refer to “attacking” invasive plants. Instead, we should seek a balance. He submitted a list of species and their favorable attributes. K. Baskin advocated striking conclusion number 7, and referring to competing uses.

After discussion regarding references to a dog park, it was the consensus of the Commission that a dog park would not be mentioned in the Plan.

Conclusion 8 was questioned - should the Plan prohibit sports fields? M. Flamang demonstrated on the trail map why there is no area of dry land large enough for a regulation-size field at Rock Meadow. S. Sanders pointed out that regular maintenance of any field will be harmful to the wetlands, even aside from any disturbance to wetlands from construction of such a field. He also proposes adding language to the Plan regarding the stewardship of conservation, which he offered to draft.

J. Smith proposed that, due to time constraints, the discussion focus on the proposed by-law for the remainder of this meeting, and the remainder of the Plan be discussed at a later meeting. She pointed out that Section 28.4 states that the activities prohibited in that section can be allowed if the express approval of the Commission is obtained. Someone noted that the fine for violation of such an ordinance is limited by law to \$100. After a brief discussion, it was decided that the penalty for a violation should be \$100 plus the replacement cost of any property damaged.

The question of nighttime use of Rock Meadow was raised. Should stargazing be permitted? J. Smith indicated that enforcement is easier if nighttime use is prohibited, because the police cannot see what users are actually doing. S. Sanders stated that in the past he has called the police to let them know when he has conducted owl walks. He is in favor of loosening up the prohibition of nighttime use. The Commission determined that the prohibition should remain in place, because those who wish to use Rock Meadow at night can always request permission from the Commission.

The reference to a dog park in subsection M. of Section 28.4 will be removed.

It was also determined that the by-law will govern only the Rock Meadow Conservation Area, as that is the only area currently under the Commission’s jurisdiction. M. Flamang then closed the discussion of the draft Use and Management Plan for tonight.

#### New Business - First Armenian Church

G. Clancy noted that the Church had appealed their Order of Conditions to the DEP, which has now issued a Superseding Order stating that the planting of shrubs was the only significant condition that must be complied with, in spite of the fact that the Church had failed to obtain approval from the Commission prior to doing the work on their parking lot.

#### Other New Business

S. Sanders reported that he had attended a meeting of the Spy Pond group in Arlington. They are placing storm drain markers which are affixed to the stone above storm drains. Their markers say “Only rain down the drain - Flows to Spy Pond.” He proposes that we do the same in Belmont.

That is being done by school children in the Chenery Middle School area. G. Clancy offered to provide him with a map of the storm drains in Belmont.

A hearing on a request from the Unitarian Church is scheduled for next month. M. Flamang will recuse himself from that hearing. It was determined that R. Foster will act as chairman for that meeting.

N. Davis reported that cutting of invasives such as bittersweet, buckthorn, wild roses and brambles should take place in the winter months. We need volunteers for that. She will place a notice requesting volunteers. Tom Walsh, the Town's tree warden, will do the chemical treatment.

The meeting was then adjourned at 9:30 p.m. The next meeting will be held at the Faculty Dining Room at Chenery Middle School on Tuesday, March 4, 2003.

Prepared by:  
Johanna Smith