

NMI/Starmet Re-use Planning Committee

Meeting Minutes

September 6, 2019

PRESENT:

Members: Gary Kleiman, Jim Burns, Pam Rockwell, Karl Seidman, Paul Boehm, Andrew Boardman, Steven Ng

OTHERS:

Marcia Rasmussen, Director of Planning & Land Management Department (DPLM)

Garry Waldeck, Massachusetts Dept. of Environmental Protection (MassDEP)

Linda Escobedo (Select Board liaison); Kim Kastens (Acton resident); Todd Benjamin (member of the Concord Housing Authority).

The meeting was called to order at 8:00 am.

An Integrated Strategy for the Site

Each committee member was given five uninterrupted minutes to share their vision, thoughts and ideas for and about the site.

Paul B. led off with two ideas that have been on his mind. First, don't focus solely on industrial/commercial reuse of the property or solely infrastructure support (e.g., solar installation alone) because so much money is being spent to clean up the site to residential standards. Second, consider multi-use spaces for people to enjoy and use such as an indoor recreational facility that could meet the needs of a wide range of Town residents that would not compete with other businesses (e.g., indoor track facility and soccer field). Such an indoor facility could also support an on-site nature education program and passive recreation area that takes advantage of the existing sphagnum/ cranberry bog, enhancing the nature and conservation values of the community. He also found interesting the idea of creating an artisan work space or work shop on the site, which could be added to or become a component of the indoor recreational facility.

Andrew B. stated his belief that the site represents an opportunity to look at what's missing in the community and suggested that the answer is "indoor recreation"; that there is currently no good place to play indoor soccer in the winter and no flexible indoor spaces for year-round use. He expressed reluctance to be too "pie-in-the-sky" when considering that this site might serve as a remote parking location/ transit hub for shuttling workers and visitors into the village centers, opining that extensive study would be needed to insure the success of such a vision. He was also concerned that the type of housing required to meet the needs of the community would be too dense for the site and the necessary infrastructure (water service and wastewater) might not be able to support such density. He stated that the location was too remote for day-to-day public works activities; that public works operations needed to be more centrally located to be efficient and effective (but if required, public works might consider installing a large-scale salt storage facility at the site). He also said he would not oppose light industrial use as a short-term funding option to receive revenue for future re-use/redevelopment.

Pam R. commented that if a large building were constructed at this site, it would be good to consider constructing the building in such a way that it might be used as an emergency shelter in the future (for residents in town or in other communities that may experience ice storm damage or flood/ severe weather events). She also noted that this site could contribute toward power resiliency because of its solar potential (roof-top and parking lot) and with battery storage (due to the site's proximity to the existing CMLP power distribution site on Forest Ridge Road). Her vision for the site would include multiple uses that served a wide swath of resident's needs. She felt that a community center and fieldhouse could provide places to exercise; offices within or around the community center could provide disability and community services; that some retail uses could provide amenities to those using the center and fieldhouse; that housing could be provided on a third floor or above the other uses and covered paths/indoor paths could connect to the nearby Minute Man Arc facility on Forest Ridge Road, as well as other residential developments. She thought this site had potential as a dog park, even though the group studying that issue determined none was needed. She felt that the cranberry bog area was an opportunity to integrate an outdoor classroom/ nature viewing platform into the other uses discussed above.

Jim B. felt that housing should be considered for the site, but he was not ready to say what is needed or how much. He commented that the site is a rather unique property and that there should be sufficient paths and amenities to support residents visiting the site. He suggested that a building supporting start-up businesses (which included maker spaces) could help fund ongoing maintenance and support for uses on the site. He also commented that there may be educational activities that could be incorporate into future reuse planning.

Karl S. observed that such a large, unique site provided an opportunity to advance town goals and principles; that future uses and buildings should connect to the surrounding neighborhoods and commercial areas. He felt that multiple uses or mixed-use development was more appropriate than one singular use; that uses such as a community transit hub, or battery storage, or solar could be integrated with other uses such as recreational and commercial which may serve as amenities that complement residential use.

Steve N. stated his belief that the site reuse/ redevelopment should be self-sufficient or revenue neutral; that development on the site should help pay for other re-uses of the site. He supported the idea of net-zero construction at this location and felt it was appropriate, given the resources expended so far on the clean-up, to make this site a statement about reuse. He noted that housing is a critical need for the community (and the Commonwealth); that commercial space was needed in Cambridge. He felt that recreational use of the site should be more passive use but that such use includes an educational component. He thought that a mixed use development should embody the concept of "live, work and play" (e.g., co-housing or special needs housing/ we-work or co-work space/ community gathering space or shared recreational facilities).

Gary K. presented his desire to create a balance of uses for the site that illustrated systems-thinking in order to use the site to its full potential. One of the ideas he has been considering is landscape resilience by not impacting areas A2 and A4. He felt it was important to think about development that is compact and densely designed to minimize the footprint (building up and not out). He supported the synergy of providing disability services and housing that could complement the Minute Man Arc facility on an adjacent property as well as considering small infrastructure support for public transit that serves the town (and region).

Priorities/ Goals with respect to the list of ideas for reuse

The committee discussed and agreed that:

- there was an opportunity to allow for multiple, but integrated, uses of the site that met community needs;
- redevelopment re-use should be sustainable, preserve environmental assets inherent in the site, be carbon-neutral and improve landscape resilience;
- find creative ways to fund re-use/ redevelopment (revenue neutral); and
- redevelopment should serve to strengthen community

Update from SKEO

Matt Robbie from SKEO participated remotely via phone. He discussed the 4-page document prepared for the workshop, which provides an overview and summary of the timeline. Included in the handout is the revised map, initially viewed at the June meeting. There was discussion about revising the last page to be a more graphic representation of the 'realm of potential uses' rather than a list that some could assume was prioritized, along with the suggestion that the four main principles for reuse be centered within the potential uses.

Outreach

The committee felt it was important to have specific contact identified to receive comments and ideas from the community. A request was made to set up a committee email address for this purpose and Marcia agreed to investigate this with the Town's IT Department.

The public forum/ workshop is scheduled for Thursday, October 17, based on the availability of committee members, the consultant team and EPA representatives. The second floor Hearing Room at the Town House will be the location because the Harvey Wheeler Community Center was not available.

Marcia R. and Matt R. shared ideas for the public forum/ workshop. Andrew B. suggested using known buildings to help visualize and convey the scale or size of the site (i.e., Hunt Gym, Concord-Carlisle Regional High School, Town House, etc.). After some discussion, the agreed purpose of the forum/ workshop would be to have a path forward with multiple uses that work well together. The draft agenda for the event would be:

- to provide an overview with background information,
- break into small groups to review lists of uses (adding any uses that are missing) and develop optimal scenarios to combine uses,
- then return to the larger group with a representative from each small group sharing or recapping what they feel is the optimal scenario and why.

The committee members thought it may be important to have a follow up meeting or event where the public could learn more about the clean-up of the site, depending on the questions asked during the forum/ workshop.

Committee members were also asked to compile their notes from meetings with town boards and committees and submit them to Marcia Rasmussen, who will compile them into a single document for all to review.

Minutes

Karl S. moved to approve the August minutes as written. Jim B. seconded and all VOTED to approve.

Public Comment

Acton resident Kim Kastens expressed appreciation for the committee's discussion today. She commented that she liked the idea of "live, work and play" as a user-friendly approach to optimize use of the site and that emergency resilience/response was an important forward-looking concept.

Concord resident Todd Benjamin felt that crucial values had been identified. He noted that affordable housing at this location may be challenging and that a revenue-generating reuse solution may be a way to help older Concord residents remain in their homes. He thought the concept of relocating the Harvey Wheeler Community Center to this site in order to create senior housing at the HWCC location in West Concord Village may be valuable.

Select Board member Linda Escobedo appreciated conducting two sessions but cautioned about potential overlap (some people arriving early for the 7:00 event). She felt that having a summary at the end from each group participating in the workshop would be important.

Committee member Pam Rockwell commented that nothing discussed so far by the committee would be a significant revenue generating use that could reduce the property tax burden.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:35 am.

Respectfully submitted,
Pam Rockwell, Clerk