

**Junction Village Open Space
Task Force**
Meeting Minutes
October 14, 2021
Online Zoom Video Session

Pursuant to a notice and agenda filed with the Town Clerk, the Junction Village Open Space Task Force met at 5:00 p.m. on Oct. 14, 2021, and held a virtual online public meeting via <https://zoom.us>.

Members present: Harry Bartlett, Christa Collins, Sue Felshin (clerk), Carlene Hempel (chair).

Also present: Peter Lowitt, liaison from the Concord Housing Development Corporation (CHDC); Marcia Rasmussen, Director of Planning and Land Management for the Town of Concord; Elizabeth Rust, Director, Regional Housing Services Office (RHSO); Linda Escobedo, Select Board liaison; William (Bill) Murray of PLACES; and approximately 50 members of the public.

The meeting was called to order by Carlene Hempel at 5 p.m.

Introduction:

The Chair opened the forum with introductory remarks:

The Chair introduced the members of the Task Force; she introduced Ms. Rasmussen, Ms. Rust, and Mr. Murray and explained their connection to the Task Force. She gave background on the work of the Task Force: The property in question is 6.5 acres as part of a 12.8-acre parcel at end of Winthrop Street between the Assabet River and MCI Concord. An assisted living facility will be built between two portions of parkland. The Task Force's charge is to engage with the public and plan for public use of the open space portion of the larger site. The Concord Housing Development Corporation (CHDC) has responsibility for the assisted living facility. The Task Force was appointed by the Select Board in 2020.

The Task Force envisions parkland to support all kinds of constituents including residents, users of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail (BFRT), patrons of village businesses, children from daycare and elsewhere, visitors to MCI Concord, and residents of assisted-living facility. The Chair noted that the two concept plans about to be shown by Mr. Murray are not two separate possibilities but rather a selection of design elements that will be ultimately combined into one plan which might be a combination of parts of the two plans and might contain changes based on feedback from the public, the process of following natural resources requirements, etc.

Ms. Hempel introduced Mr. Murray as a registered landscape architect with PLACES, Inc. Mr. Murray performed the original surveying of the property at the start of the Task Force's work, and was then retained for planning. Design objectives were specified by the Task Force: The park must be fully accessible, be compatible with the assisted-living facility, maintain the natural

environment along the river, serve multiple users and uses, acknowledge the historic nature of the property as the site of a Civil War muster and the reformatory, utilize design components that are sensitive to the environment, including using only indigenous plants, and have low maintenance requirements.

Mr. Murray began by describing the site in broad strokes. He went over the current versions of two concept plans, called 1B and 2B.

Concept Plan 1B:

The triangle features an entry plaza with a central piece of art or other landmark. Signage at the entry will note that bikes are not allowed; there will be bike racks and benches. The triangle will feature two small plazas with interpretive panels. The northern of the two will describe the history of the reformatory and MCI Concord and their contributions to the community. The southerly interpretive plaza's panel will describe the use of the site as the pre-Civil War muster site for all of Massachusetts. The triangle will feature three separate wildflower areas—pollinator gardens. There will be an additional very small plaza as a semi-private location, partly shielded from the assisted living facility and the BFRT with plantings.

The path will be lined with split rail across the land of the assisted living facility to make it clear that the direction of travel is across to the eastern portion and not into the assisted living facility. A break in the fence is required for fire rescue access.

The eastern portion will be shielded from MCI Concord and the noise of Route 2 with a dense and deer-resistant evergreen hedge. South of there, there will be an open “savannah” of trees and lightly-mowed grass. Further to the south, the plan shows an earth-form amphitheater whose top will be at ground level. South of the amphitheater is a picnic lawn. To the southeast is a plaza or meet spot with a dramatic view over the river. Moving further to the south, there are two small, secluded, sheltered nooks, one in meadowland and one in the maintained forest. To the south is the existing sumac grove that the Task Force hopes to preserve, although invasives must be cleared. To the southeast of the sumac grove is another plaza overlook with interpretive signage describing the Wild and Scenic river. In the southernmost portion there is a peninsula in the river; this area is a bordering vegetative wetland and floodplain that floods in springtime. The embankment down to the river is steep at almost all points. Looping around to the southwest the path rejoins the rail trail with small plaza with signage (such as “walk bikes,” “leash dogs”), benches, and bike racks. The small black squares on the diagram indicated display devices—plinths for art, or page holders for a “story walk” for children to walk around and read.

Concept Plan 2B:

Some features of plan 2B are the same as on 1B. The main differences are that the entry plaza is smaller and located at the south of the triangle, the path into the site is broken up more with a branch path to the MCI interpretive plaza and a loop to the Civil War muster interpretive plaza. Wildflowers frame the site rather than being a central feature. On the larger eastern portion of the site, instead of an amphitheater, the existing recessed area is interpreted as a lawn with seat wall

around three sides, for passive use and with no defined function. The remainder of the east portion is the same as in the first concept plan.

Slide show:

Mr. Murray displayed a slide show of site photos and possible park components such as signage, bike racks, plaza surfaces, and seating.

Continued presentation:

The Chair noted that the Task Force invited historical scholars to one of the Task Force's early meetings. Scholars told the Task Force about the history of the reformatory and MCI Concord as an economic engine for Concord. Malcolm Little—later known as Malcolm X—began his conversion to Islam while at MCI Concord.

The Task Force sees an opportunity to stitch together a collection of open spaces in this part of town including this property, the Gerow land, the BFRT, Junction Park, the plaza and mural between Twin Seafood and Concord Teacakes, etc.

In addition to the pollinator habitat, the grass mix for lawn areas will be chosen to encourage pollinators. A swath of lawn will be kept mowed beside paths to keep ticks down. Shade will be provided by some specimen trees. The forest will be left as is except for removing invasives, and the open forest will be allowed to naturalize. The river bank will be untouched except for removing invasives. The low-lying southern portion will be left natural except for removing invasives.

Public comment:

The Chair opened the forum to public comment.

Pamela Dritt of 13 Concord Greene, Unit 4, stated a preference for the Zoom “meeting” format over the “webinar” format that was used for this public forum on the grounds that it means that attendees can't see each other.

Stephen Goodman of 113 Jennie Dugan Rd. asked if the documents shown at the forum would be made available to the public and he asked if there will be access across the Assabet River. He was answered that plans will be posted to the Task Force page on the Town website; there will not be a bridge, but the Town is attempting to install a pedestrian bridge across the Assabet River further to the southeast, from the Baker Avenue Extension business area to a point near Concord Park and the railroad bridge.

Nat Welch of 141 Stow St., co-chair of the Bruce Freeman Rail Trail Advisory Committee (BFRTAC), asked about the naming sequence for the concept plans. He was told that earlier versions were 1A and 2A, and the most recent versions, shown tonight, are 1B and 2B.

Delia Kaye, Director of the Division of Natural Resources, noted that the Natural Resources Commission (NRC) approved the assisted living facility in 2017 and discussed a conservation restriction for both parts of the open space. Given the amount of hard surface shown at the forum for the triangle portion, she suggested that it might not be appropriate to put a conservation restriction on that portion, since it would be hard to get the NRC approval given the amount of structure currently proposed within the 100' boundary, and that the state Department of Environmental Protection won't view the open space parcel as a "disturbed site" despite its condition. She cautioned the Task Force that a trail may be feasible but the amphitheater and other elements will be really challenging to get the NRC to approve. When the NRC talked with the Grantham Group (developer of the assisted-living facility) about trails, invasives removal, and benches for the riverfront parcel, a conservation restriction was needed as part of the order of conditions for that part.

Mr. Welch offered the support of the BFRTAC. He mentioned how the BFRTAC interpreted an old switch with old railroad tracks at the Nashoba Bridge. He suggested that the BFRTAC could possibly work with the Task Force to do something similar to preserve and explain the siding for reformatory and round house. He also asked whether vehicles would cross the rail trail during construction. As a resident, he likes the idea of an amphitheater with comfortable seating, although he recognizes that due to wetlands issues this may not be an option. Ms. Rasmussen thanked him for the suggestion regarding preserving rails and sidings.

Ms. Dritt asked if there would be any natural trails.

Bette Hess of 72 Ridgewood Rd. asked if paths would accommodate strollers and wheelchairs.

Stephan Bader of 7 River St. asked about winter maintenance and whether that is the reason for asphalt paths.

Mr. Murray noted that everything will be ADA compliant. He stated that there will probably be no plowing or lighting.

Ms. Kaye noted that the site will remain a privately owned parcel. She stated that the Town does not assume maintenance responsibility for parkland unless an arrangement is made with the Town or the CHDC. She suggested that the Task Force pause for a time before proceeding with planning given that the Gerow land will soon become available and will have many amenities that don't need to be duplicated. She applauded the historical information but suggested that the eastern portion did not warrant use as a community gathering space.

Mr. Goodman asked about the budget. Ms. Rasmussen answered that the design must be finished. The Task Force is asking the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) for funding but may have to go back to the CPC a second time or more times depending on the final design. The Grantham Group has committed up to \$25,000 for invasive species removal and perhaps could remove some large trash from the site as well.

Mr. Welch how much of the site will be meadow vs. what other uses and noted the danger from ticks in tall grass. Mr. Murray answered that the design doesn't completely rule out non-natives

but there are many pollinator-friendly native plants that will grow in ordinary meadowland (as opposed to wildflower pollinator meadow), e.g., asters.

Ms. Dritt requested that native plants with human-edible fruits be planted.

Dorrie Kehoe of 51 MacArthur Rd. spoke approvingly of Ms. Kaye's suggestion of a pause. She said that the open space planning is predicated on the Grantham Group getting final funding and opined that the CHDC would not be able to fund any maintenance. She further suggested that many people would not be able to walk the distance to the open space parcel to attend performances, there is nowhere to park, and since users of the BFRT would have nowhere to park they would be tempted to stay on their bikes. The Chair noted that the path will be posted as no bikes allowed and there will be bike racks at both entrances. Ms. Rasmussen noted that the 5-foot maximum path width would discourage riding. Ms. Rust noted that the Grantham Group has obtained all their required funding and is currently working to obtain a building permit; furthermore, since it will take five years to remove invasives, there is a natural pause built in to the planning effort.

Andy Puchrik of 164 Belknap St. asked if there would be restrooms, and Ms. Dritt asked if there would be trash containers and picnic tables. They were answered that there will be no restrooms and the site will probably be carry-in-carry-out. There will be picnic tables to the south of the recessed amphitheater or lawn area and in the triangle area; grass will be mowed around the picnic tables. Mr. Puchrik further asked if there was oil residue from trucks; Mr. Murray replied that no significant stains have been seen and much has washed away, but he can't answer definitively and would need to look into it further.

Greg Higgins of 51 Cottage Lane asked if there would be a canoe landing and whether dead trees would be removed from river. He was answered that a landing is not currently planned as over 90% of the river has a very steep dangerous bank. Ms. Kaye noted that it is not customary to remove dead trees unless they form an obstruction across the entirety of the river; dead trees make good wildlife habitat.

Mr. Puchrik asked for further clarification on the difference between the two concept plans. Mr. Murray noted significant differences in the triangular piece. Plan 2B is more "biomorphic" whereas 1B has more-linear plazas. Additionally, there is the difference between the amphitheater vs. a recessed lawn. The Task Force would like to see the space used as an outdoor classroom, storybook path venue, and passive recreation. Ms. Hempel noted the Town's transcendentalist roots and the possibility for use as a "lyceum." The Task Force is taking the opportunity to show concepts to the community and get feedback. It will be a multi-year process and will necessarily change. For example, many people love the idea of an amphitheater but since one third of the existing recessed area for the amphitheater is within the 100' riparian zone, it is doubtful that it will remain in the plan.

Pam Rockwell of 1810 Main St. stated her concern that the path along the river is overdevelopment, that one should not be able to see any non-natural features from the river, and that an amphitheater with many people is not respectful of the natural river and will be inaccessible due to the lack of nearby parking. She opined that an existing path along the

Nashoba Brook to the end of the train station parking lot and a gathering spot there, which is used by CCHS students and others—makes similar features on the Junction Village site redundant. She asked whether the existing path on the site would be paved. She was told that the existing path is a short length related to MCI; it is closer to the river than the proposed path and at the extreme north of the site; the amphitheater or lawn area is proposed for an existing depression and therefore people using it would not be visible from the river; other than the two overlooks, nothing would be visible from the river. Ms. Rockwell asked why a paved path is proposed in the 100' wetlands exclusion zone? Mr. Murray noted that the Wetlands Protection Act also addresses recreation and park users would enjoy being able to see the river from the path. The Task Force is trying to optimize for different users. Ms. Rockwell suggested reaching out to OARS. Ms. Collins said the Task Force is doing so.

Kevin Neijstrom of 316 Commonwealth Ave. asked whether there would be places for children to play.

Simon Cataldo of 40 Hosmer Rd. asked what state approvals are required. A conservation restriction has to be reviewed and approved by the state Executive Office of Energy and Environmental Affairs. Mr. Murray said the Town would need approval under the Wetlands Protection Act; if that approval was appealed the Town might have to get review in accordance with the Massachusetts Environmental Policy Act. If any state funding is used there could be additional requirements. It would primarily be a matter of getting approval under the State Wetlands Act and from the NRC. There are no known endangered species on the property. The Assabet River is not considered an Outstanding Resource water at this time.

Gary Kleiman of 57 Central St. asked about connections to a broader trail network. He suggested that this might be the right time to seek an easement across Department of Corrections land and to get a pedestrian bridge over Route 2 into the Transportation Improvement Program.

Ms. Rasmussen noted that anyone can email her with questions that didn't get answered at the forum.

Mr. Clayton asked if Mr. Murray's scope of services includes preparing a detailed plan and budget and an ongoing schedule of maintenance and restoration of the proposed parkland area. Mr. Murray answered affirmatively. Part of the planning will be to create an agreement for crossing the rail trail and the crossing assisted living property. The Task Force will seek specific comments from other entities such as other committees. In January the Task Force will present a more specific plan, hopefully by then broken into phases for implementation.

Ms. Rust noted that some forum attendees have commented about going to look at the property. She reminded everyone that the property is not open to the public at this time. The CHDC is trying to set up site walk and discourages any other access.

Answering a question from Barbara Pike of 118 Border Rd. about construction vehicles crossing the BFRT, Ms. Rasmussen said that construction for the Christopher Heights assisted living facility will use the service road along the BFRT rather than crossing the BFRT at Winthrop St.,

or may access the site around the far (i.e., east) side of MCI Concord, and hopefully the open space work can use the same access.

Concluding remarks:

Ms. Hempel concluded the forum by saying that this special site will bring more people into a walkable place near the Village center. The Task Force doesn't intend to overprogram the site. She invited everyone to view agendas and attend meetings. Newly rendered plans will be available for public review soon, and the next public forum is expected in January.

Respectfully submitted,
Sue Felshin

List of Exhibits

- Concept plan 1B
- Concept plan 2B
- Slide show with site photos and examples of possible furnishings (benches, kiosks, signage, etc.)