

APPROVED MINUTES
PUBLIC HEARING

Town of Concord
Estabrook Woods Access Study Committee
Meeting
October 24, 2016
Town House Second Floor Hearing Room

Members Present: Sally Schnitzer Bonnie Pohlig
 Polly Reeve Justin King
 Neil Rasmussen Jeff Adams
 Peter Siebert Lisa Pohl
 Kathryn Angell

Also Present: Nick D'Arbeloff (Carlisle liaison)

Public Present: See sign in sheets, attached

Sally Schnitzer called the meeting to order at 7:10 PM. She welcomed all members of the public, and informed those attending that the meeting was being recorded and broadcast live by CCTV.

The co-chairs opened the meeting with a presentation the Committee and its work to date. This included summaries of the challenges that led to the creation of the committee, the issues it is charged with studying, and the patterns of landownership and conservation in the Woods, and an overview of the Committee's Preliminary Recommendations. Handouts of the Preliminary Recommendations and a chart showing current and potential parking capacity at access points in Concord were available for those attending and are attached to these minutes.

The Committee co-chairs reviewed the process for completing their work. After reviewing feedback received at this public hearing, the committee will finalize their recommendations and prepare their final report which will be presented to the Select Board by early December. Sally Schnitzer then invited comments, reactions, and suggestions from the public.

SPEAKERS AND COMMENTS FROM THE PUBLIC

George Carrutte, 148 Peter Spring Road. Signage and information on the internet is especially important. Controlling behavior through limiting parking is only a temporary solution because driving technology is changing so quickly. Uber, Lift, and other innovations will make it increasingly likely that more and more people will not need to park in order to access the woods.

Katie Pohlig, 9 Holden Wood Road. Encouraged the committee to restore some parking on Estabrook Road. She likes the proposal for temporary parking, and expressed sympathy for the neighbors in the area. She suggested establishing and enforcing quiet hours.

Dinah Buechner-Vischer, 299 Estabrook Road. If additional parking spaces are permitted on Estabrook Road, they will be in front of her house. Residents have been very generous in creating parking and in granting conservation restrictions on their properties and welcoming the public. There are very real safety issues on this dead end road that must be considered. In addition to ensuring access of plows and emergency vehicles, water safety must be taken into account. The proposed additional parking spaces are within 20 feet of her well head, and she is concerned that water quality might be affected. There is better public access at other points, where you can access public land immediately. She agrees with the idea to create better parking at Punkatasset.

Susan Frommer, 128 Nimrod Drive. Do not put more parking on Estabrook Road, including temporary parking. This area has become a de facto dog park. She is currently living in the brick house at the Estabrook Road access point, and has had to put up with unruly dogs, rude and intrusive people at all hours of the day and night, and unacceptable noise. In particular, dog waste is a tremendous issue – people do not pick up after their dogs – and leashing regulations are disregarded by 20% of people bringing dogs. There have also been incidents with alcohol and bicycles riding aggressively in packs.

Paul Jameson, 419 College Road. There has been little consideration of the rights of the people to use the old Estabrook Road. He believes that people have the right to walk there because it is an old road, and that this right cannot be taken away.

Eric Green, Devens Street. The top priority needs to be the protection of the Woods as a natural resource. He has not observed a threat to its resource value based on public use, and believes that there needs to be a balance between the rights of landowners and the rights of the public. Expressed appreciation to the Rasmussens for being such excellent stewards. If the town counsel's opinion is correct, he wonders how the town can legitimately restrict long-held access by the public. Urged the committee to be cautious about adding a parking lot to the woods and hopes whatever is built is minimal and rustic. Encourages landowners and the town to put up signage and fences to help control unwanted intrusion, especially by dogs in horse pastures.

Karen Kirsten, 280 Estabrook Road. Treasures the scenic Estabrook Road, and is very concerned about unsafe conditions created by parking cars. Cars turn around in driveways; a dog was killed. Things have improved a lot since the parking restrictions went into place. There is rarely a wait for a space and there are fewer conflicts between dogs and livestock. Supports off road parking at Punkatasset.

Abby White, 851 Monument Street. Recently bought this house, and wants the committee to know that the driveway openings that resulted in the recent curb cuts were deeded when they bought the house. She feels that the current Monument Street parking situation is unsafe, but also has concerns about the proposed lot, particularly related to use at night and the early morning. It will be very important to enforce time and dog regulations.

Liz Wolzman, not from Concord. Keeps horses on Estabrook Road and is here nearly every day. She was attacked by a dog while horseback riding in Estabrook Woods, but observed that 90% of dogs and people are wonderful and under control. 10% are a problem. Likes the leash proposal, and would prefer to have dogs on leash all the time while in the Woods. Since the restrictions have been in place there have rarely been times when people can't find a spot. She would like to see parking continue to be more evenly spread around the woods, including more parking at Monument Farm Road. Why put all the burden on one neighborhood?

Michael Henschman, 1 Greenfield Lane. Distributed a handout itemizing his concerns with parking on Monument Street (attached). Believes an off-road lot at this spot is essential, but must address the issue of unsafe turning around. Pointed out that, due to new "no parking" signs, the number of on street parking spots at Punkatasset is now seven.

Andy Biewener, 353 Deacon Haynes Road and Director of Harvard Field Station. Wanted to emphasize that the Woods are nearly all private land that was preserved for conservation, research, and teaching. It is critical to treat the woods with respect. A minority of users engage in unacceptable behavior, and they create a challenge. Harvard understands that the Woods are there to be enjoyed, but we all need to understand that their primary role is for conservation, research, and education.

Tom Sadtler, 51 Chestnut Street. He is a frequent walker in the Woods. Using the Chamberlin Woods access is not the same experience as entering at Estabrook Road. It is confusing and trails lead to private property. Since the restrictions have been put in place, he has stopped using the Estabrook Road access point. He feels it is a mistake to assume that there is enough room to meet demand now, because some people just aren't going there who would otherwise. Don't confuse parking with poor behavior. Signage is important, and needs to be clear.

Michael Dettelbach, 89 Assabet Avenue. He also stopped using the Estabrook Road access point when the parking restrictions were put in place. Each entrance provides a different experience. Dog waste is a big problem, and some people just don't pack it out. Education is critical, and he doesn't believe that the number of parking spaces has an impact on bad behavior. He would like to see the issue of parking separated from the issue of poor behavior.

Anna West Winter, 393 Estabrook Road. Thanks the committee, and commends them for proposing more parking at Punkatasset, where there is potentially land for an off street lot and direct access to public land. She spoke about the large number of dogs who visit the woods. 80% of visitors bring dogs with them resulting in upwards of 12,000 dogs per year. Dogs create waste and disturb wildlife. Mass Audubon and Great Meadows do not allow dogs, because of conflicts with conservation values, and Harvard and private landowners may need to consider limiting dog access as well.

Ellie Bemis, 858 Monument Street. Likes the two dogs per person limit. Feels that the situation on Estabrook Road has been a nightmare, and is concerned that the problem will just move to Punkatasset. Although she agrees that the Apthorp land is an appropriate place for a parking

area, she wonders if 20 cars is too many. Would 10-15 be better? Despite direct access to town land, a large lot would bring large numbers of people to Harvard's land, which was preserved for conservation and field study. It's okay to limit growth, and smaller parking areas are more appropriate. Also, consider outlawing bikes in the Woods.

Susannah Read, 366 Estabrook Road. Stated that the Rasmussens and Reads should not be called "abutters" as they are owners of the abandoned road. Courtesy seems to be on the decline, but since restrictions have been in place, the situation has improved. There is never a long wait for a parking spot and no need for more parking than currently exists has been demonstrated. Elderly people have started coming to Estabrook Road by bus now that dogs are more reliably under control. Would like to see a parking area built at the entrance to Punkatasset.

Patricia Geyer, 260 Estabrook Road. The Police Chief determined that the parking restrictions on Estabrook Road were needed, and it is much safer now. Safety must be the top concern, and we must also protect the wetlands along Estabrook Road. Additional parking would lead to silted runoff going into the wetlands.

Dean Banfield, 73 Walden Terrace. Wonders how the committee arrived at the number of two dogs per person. Why not three? Encouraged the committee to revisit the town dog bylaw discussion.

Pam Howell, 668 Annursnac Hill. The Estabrook Woods are a great place to take a dog unleashed. Dog owners should encourage one another to pick up after their dogs. She hasn't had a problem parking since the restrictions went into effect. The more we build, the more people will come. It's really okay if there isn't enough room for you to park from time to time. Maybe there is enough parking for the woods right now.

Luis Berrizbeitia, 410 Lexington Road. A problem with behavior has been given a parking solution, which is not appropriate. Private owners shouldn't be allowed to control access. The current owners are responsible and generous but we do not know what will happen in the future. It would be a bad precedent to give landowners the ability to close access. The resource needs to be protected but we shouldn't limit the access of citizens. It would be okay to prohibit dogs if it were for the long term health of the woods.

David Santomenna, Trustees of Reservations. Thanked the committee for their thoughtful recommendations. On behalf of the Trustees, he is looking forward to working with the Select Board on the Apthorp Land.

Sally Schnitzer thanked David Santomenna for following our committee's process so closely, and for his interest in being part of a solution. She also thanked members of the public for attending the hearing and sharing their perspectives. The Committee will meet again to consider any possible amendments to the Preliminary Recommendations before making them final and sending them to the Select Board.

The hearing was adjourned at 9:10 PM.

Attached:

Presentation given by the Chairs.

Power Point Slides

Sign in Sheets

Parking Chart

Handout from Michael Henschman