



City of Westbrook

DEPARTMENT OF PLANNING

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WESTBROOK PLANNING BOARD TUESDAY, APRIL 15, 2008, 7:00 P.M. WESTBROOK HIGH SCHOOL, ROOM 114 MINUTES

Present: Ed Reidman, Rene Daniel, Dennis Isherwood, Anna Wrobel, Paul Emery, Cory Fleming, Scott Herrick

Absent: Greg Blake, Michael Taylor

Staff: Molly Just, Richard Gouzie

Chairman Reidman called the Westbrook Planning Board meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. in Room 114 of the Westbrook High School.

Public Hearing - Land Use Ordinances – Status of Grandfathered Lots - Referral from the City Council seeking recommendations on a proposed land use policy to eliminate those Ordinance provisions allowing construction of houses on unimproved lots of only 5,000 square feet and/or 50 feet of frontage. The City Council also seeks Planning Board review of the Comprehensive Plan for any inconsistencies with such a change.

Ed Reidman informed the audience that he is going to ask that the Public Hearing be continued as the adequate notices were not delivered.

Rene Daniel moved to continue to the May 6th meeting.

2nd by Dennis Isherwood

Molly Just requested that anyone who has attended this meeting be heard then continue to the next meeting.

Ed Reidman preferred not to do it that way and asked if anyone in the audience attended this meeting for this item and if so would mind attending the new meeting.

No one in the audience minded.

The vote was unanimous in favor 7-0

1. Call to Order

Continuing Business

Rene Daniel moved to recess to workshop.

2nd by Anna Wrobel

The vote was unanimous 7-0

Workshop: Note – Public comment will be accepted during workshop

2. Recess to Workshop

- 3. Recreation, Parks & Open Space Plan – The City is in the process of generating a first ever comprehensive plan for recreation, parks and open space citywide. Public outreach has included 2 community meetings, distribution of a questionnaire to determine current utilization and wants and needs, and participation of a citizen stakeholder committee. The Planning Board is responsible for making a recommendation on the plan to the City Council. The plan will go to the City Council for a final decision.**

Staff Memo reads as follows:

The City is in the process of generating a first ever comprehensive plan for recreation, parks and open space citywide. Public outreach has included 2 community meetings, distribution of a questionnaire to determine current utilization and wants and needs, and participation of a citizen stakeholder committee. The Planning Board is responsible for making a recommendation on the plan to the City Council. The plan will go to the City Council for a final decision.

This narrative describes the elements of the accompanying Concept Plan. Please see the attached documents titled “Draft Concept Plan 4/15/2008” and “Draft Implementation Schedule”. The strategies include many small parks and open spaces within a 1/4 mile walking distance of individual neighborhoods and a few large parks and open spaces spread throughout the City. Parks and open spaces are linked with “green” corridors using on and off road pedestrian and bike trails and paths. The overall objectives and the elements of the Concept Plan are described below. The Presumpscot River is used as the divide to describe the “north” and “south” parts of the City.

Overall Objectives of the Concept Plan:

- Provide a long term vision that allows the City of Westbrook to plan for future growth and have people and companies want to reside within the City in part due to the recreation opportunities that the City has to offer.

- Create a system of parks and open spaces, large and small that are connected through the use of greenways, on- and off-road trails and sidewalks.
- Enhance the existing City owned parks and introduce new parks primarily on what would be City owned land.
- Ensure that under a complete “build out” scenario of the City, there are significant parks, open spaces and recreation opportunities readily available to people living, working or visiting the City of Westbrook.
- Increase the connectivity for pedestrians and bicyclists to existing and future parks and City owned facilities such as schools or a recreation center.
- Develop a bicycle system that is mainly off road, but identify the on road segments for future bike lanes within the right of way.
- Tap into local and regional bicycle planning efforts.
- Obtain easements where necessary to gain access to future parks, open spaces, recreation opportunities and trails.
- Capitalize on existing natural features as open spaces and recreation opportunities, while maintaining and protecting the integrity of those features.
- Use buffering to protect the visual aesthetics of farm fields from redevelopment in the south part of the City and maintain the woodlands with redevelopment in the north part of the City.
- Ensure that the necessary conservation and planning tools for the implementation of the Concept Plan are appropriate for the specific areas throughout the City.

Parks and Open Spaces

(Existing parks and open spaces shown on the Concept Plan as a burnt yellow color and Proposed parks and open spaces shown as a bright orange color)

The rationale for the proposed park system shown on the Concept Plan is based on the assumption that small “neighborhood” parks (1-3 acres) within walking distance are ideal and that a variety of park sizes provides a multitude of experiences and uses; quiet and intimate, singular in nature versus complex and multipurpose. The parks shown on the Concept Plan are linked with trails, greenways and/or sidewalks to establish a system or network of parks throughout the City, thus establishing a chain of “green” spaces.

A quarter mile radius shown as a green dashed circle on the Concept Plan was placed on the plan over the existing parks and facilities to identify what neighborhoods would have a park within walking distance. This informed the Concept Plan where any new additional park open space needed to be located in order to fill in the missing gaps.

Parks and Open Spaces South of the Presumpscot River

The strategy for developing a network of small “neighborhood” parks in the southern half of the City relies on supplementing the park spaces that are already in place such as Riverbank Park.

The park locations are as follows:

1. Beaver Pond (Boat Launch)
2. Saccarrapa Island
3. Lori Lane and Anne Terrace

4. Within the Industrial Park (a trail system)

Parks and Open Spaces North of the Presumpscot River

The proposed parks and open spaces in the northern half of the City are a combination of both large and small size parks. Below outlines the locations for large park locations.

1. City Owned Land (the City Forest) Associated with the Future Recreation Center
2. Land Abutting Methodist Road and the Utility Corridor
3. City Owned Land Associated with the Deer Wintering Grounds (An easement is required to gain public access)
4. Land Associated with the Duck Ponds (dependant on the landowner's willingness to either sell the land to the City, develop a conservation easement, or other appropriate conservation tools)

These proposed parks and open spaces are either wooded, have important ecological significance or have significant topographic change associated with them. In part they provide important passive and active recreation opportunities, but they also protect large tracts from development. Depending on the land's character and topographic change either passive recreation (such as walking paths and trails) or active recreation opportunities (such as multipurpose fields) could be incorporated into the parcels.

The strategy for obtaining a network of small "neighborhood parks" is to establish planning and incentive tools to encourage and/or require developers and landowners to include small parks and open spaces within any future housing development. In the future, as the number of parks and open spaces are realized as part of development, greenways and conservation easements should be considered to connect these small individual parks into a network of green spaces.

The Concept Plan identifies parcels of land that are 10 acres or more and indicates a moderately sized park and open space (1-3 acres) within that parcel as a small bright orange box. While the private landowners of these parcels may not have a vision to develop the land, the Concept Plan is positioned under the assumption that the zoning in this area does allow the land to be developed for housing at some point in time. It might be most appropriate for each individual neighborhood to program "their" park as the neighborhood builds out but the land would be set aside during the development review and approval process.

Recreation Facilities

(Shown as yellow on the Concept Plan)

The Concept Plan identifies the schools and a potential future recreation center at the former Jr. High School as major facilities. This Concept Plan recognizes that the future re-programming and re-development of the Jr. High School as a recreation center is still in debate and needs further internal discussion. For the purposes of this Concept Plan, developing the recreation center at this location is ideal because it is centrally located within the City.

The one facility that the public feels the City is lacking is an indoor hockey rink. A hockey rink could be part of a future recreation center. While including a hockey rink with a recreation center has some merits, there are some concerns about the volume of traffic, parking needs, construction costs and maintenance costs. While there has been no conclusive decision about the location, an indoor hockey rink may be a facility that the City may want to consider in the future. The Concept Plan proposes that the existing rink on Stroudwater Street be covered.

Pedestrian Movement-Greenways, Trails, Sidewalks, and Bike Lanes

(Off-road shown as a red dashed line and on-road shown as an orange dashed line)

The Concept Plan acknowledges and depicts the past and current planning efforts to develop a multimodal trail system through the City of Westbrook. While much of the past efforts have been to extend the Mountain Division Trail and connect to the Portland Trail system, the trails shown on this Concept Plan develop a network connecting neighborhoods, parks, open spaces, and facilities throughout the City. While the trail system depicted on this Concept Plan utilizes off road routes through easements, greenways or utility corridors, certain segments require on-road routes. The road widths along these segments need to be reviewed to better understand the ability to introduce bike lanes within the road right of way.

Greenway and Corridors

Daniel Smith and Paul Cawood Hellmund, in Ecology of Greenways writes, “Greenways are defined as linear open spaces established along either a natural corridor, such as a riverfront, stream valley, or ridgeline, or overland along a railroad right-of-way converted to recreational use, a canal, a scenic road, or other route or, alternately, an open space connector linking parks, nature reserves, cultural features, or historic sites with each other and with populated areas (p.10).” This definition suggests a broad range of greenway types and uses. Greenways also play a role in defining the visual quality of an area.

Mill Brook, Minnow Brook and the Stroudwater and Presumpscot Rivers are significant water corridors running through the City that need to be protected for their value as recreation resources and greenways, as well as for their environmental attributes. These linear open spaces are corridors that are character defining and provide significant aesthetic and environmental assets for the City. Few cities within Maine can say that they have a River Walk along a significant river such as the Presumpscot River. The Concept Plan proposes trails along portions of the Stroudwater River, Mill Brook and Minnow Brook corridors, landowner willing.

The linear qualities of woodlands along Methodist Road are important to maintain because of their character defining characteristics. As future developments are planned along this road, consideration should be taken to ensure that a significant amount of woodlands are preserved along the road frontage to maintain the rural woodland character.

Funding, Conservation & Development Tools for Open Space, Parks and Trails

Clearly the Concept Plan is comprehensive and requires cooperation, funding and long term implementation. The Concept Plan will identify tools to employ in order to make the Concept Plan a reality.

Todd Richardson a Principal with Richardson Associates and a landscape architect presented an overview of the six month process for the preliminary plan. The questionnaire findings were summarized.

Mr. Richardson showed the master plan on a large map. He explained some of the overall concepts over this long term plan.

Mr. Richardson talked about entry points to the City and some ways to convey Recreation Open Space and esthetic qualities to conserve through this plan with attention to vegetation and additional plantings but thinking about locating key areas within the City.

Mr. Richardson discussed how we start to implement the plan with a variety of tools and mechanism as listed.

Mr. Richardson showed critical aspects in time to see the plan implemented in a phased development. A copy is available in the Planning Office.

Molly Just explained the process. The process began in October, with the stake holder committee holding a meeting. In August City staff had reached out to a diverse group of people; residents, business owners and stake holders willing to come together to work, on a voluntary basis, with staff and the consultant team that has been hired, to develop a first ever plan for Parks, Recreation and Open Space City wide. In November the consultants took an inventory of what we currently have in the City, to inform what we have, what we are lacking. At the end of the year, the beginning of the New Year we sent out a questionnaire to an extensive outreach. We did get a good response from a wide range of people. This is the first step in the process to get this plan approved. We would ultimately make it a part of the Comprehensive Plan. There is no section in the Comprehensive Plan that discusses Parks, Recreation and Open Space. We needed to bring the plan forward ask for feedback, make some adjustments, come back before the Board and hope to get a recommendation and go to City of Westbrook Council.

Ed Reidman explained the difference workshop and public hearing. A workshop allows for Public Comment in the initial stages of an application or plan to allow for suggestions or ideas from the residents. A Public Hearing usually is held near the end of the process.

Paul Emery said he was involved with Matthew Eddy dealing with the River Walk. This presentation and the work on the plan are exceptional. As a citizen of Westbrook this is a good step for the City to vision a plan and to be proactive rather than reactive. Great Idea

Cory Fleming asked what was the response rate was on the questionnaire, to the number that was sent out.

Molly Just said we did not actively mail out the questionnaires. In terms of sending out in the traditional sense questionnaires went home with all the Kindergarten through eighth grade students. We reached out through the e-mail chain of neighborhood groups; we had

the questionnaires in meetings like this, Council, Planning, Commission meetings and published in the News paper. We received maybe eighty-eight to one hundred questionnaires. The return was better than when the questionnaire regarding Parks & Recreation went out with the Tax Bill.

Cory Fleming said given the low numbers and the importance of Westbrook's future, wants more responses. Could we work with the Banks and Grocery Stores to inform the Westbrook residents and make them aware of what is going on?

Molly Just said it has been mentioned at the City Council Meetings, the Chamber of Commerce, and the Westbrook Collaborative and have had two community meetings. What I have heard is that there has been very good coverage.

Anna Wrobel commented I understand the numbers of people responding and hear Cory's concerns, but people are flooded with advertisements and other documentation and tend to ignore such items. I think we need to move forward. This visionary plan can change, but we need to start the process. We really need to think about land very carefully.

Ed Reidman asked how deep you went into your research work. Did you check easements?

Todd Richardson said they used GIS on the City web site and Committee members pointed to maps.

Did we get everything? Probably not. Did we get a lot of it? I think so. This is a plan in progress and as people hear about this, they can contact us with additional maps and easement information.

Ed Reidman asked about the River Walk that is built on a sewer right of way. Portland Water District owns right of ways but allowed us to build on the easement. Portland Water District also owns easement along the river from Route 302 to the treatment plant. The City has easement going through in areas where there would just be a trail. Did you consider some along Stroudwater and Millbrook?

Todd Richardson said they looked at some easements and you are identifying some of the complexities of such a large plan, trying to put all these pieces together.

Ed Reidman asked for a comparison to other communities with issues as just mentioned. Does the City of Westbrook have more or less to start with?

Todd Richardson said what is formally protected and what is formally identified for those types of uses thinks it is under serving the community. But if you look at the demographics of Westbrook and the growth that it is receiving, I think that the idea for quality of life for retaining existing residents and potentially attracting future businesses in relation to Open Space and Recreation a lot of the people value this. I do feel it is under served and also believe in the survey and the people we spoke to particularly to the value of that

individually. Putting all that together, this initial plan is what is in front of you this evening.

Paul Emery said he grew up in South Portland and I lived in the area of Trails, and would be delighted if the City of Westbrook could duplicate our own version of a trail system.

Councilor Kramer said he echoes everything what has been said about the positive impact this report will do. I am very pleased and feel it is more important now due to the Snyder proposal that is talked about in the Stroudwater area. Not only plan is positive and as it might have a significant impact to the entire City especially the down town area. While discussing the down town area and how we have tried to attract businesses, if we see the economy improve we will be allowing businesses to come here, instead of enticing them. This kind of a plan is important to help us make our decisions about who comes, and what conditions do they come to the City.

The second reason 20 years ago I was here, Council members wanted to survey City owned parcels in order to sell off the land. Fortunately the sale of land did not happen. While the sale of City land was being discussed, Wes McKeague a great forester that worked for the City suggested not selling a parcel on Rocky Hill. He wanted to turn that parcel into an arboretum and build walking paths. Even today we could improve on the trails in that area, for walking, snowshoeing and cross country skiing. In survey asked what you like now what might be more productive is if we suggested what might be done in another survey. Then ask for interests so we expand the thinking of people with regard to Recreation and Open Space.

I request that you add some attention to, looking at the Rocky Hill area and beyond, to see if that would be a feasible location for an arboretum. I think that there would be some local business that may sponsor or help with the development of the project even add to the project, add landscaping plant trees and flowers in a nice walking park. I like the idea of neighborhood parks, but getting away from the residential area would be advantageous as it a little more remote more outdoors. You get the feeling of northern Maine as it is a little remote and would be more suitable for an arboretum. Mr. McKeague worked very hard for the City and I would like an arboretum in his memory. It would be unique to other communities as other communities may not have the resource in that respect. It would be highly supported by certain industries, in the timber, paper or landscaping areas.

I hope you add some of my requests to the plan and thank you, I can not wait to see final report when it comes to the Council.

Roger Burly said he is the past president of Portland Trails and current chair of the Portland Land Bank.

I have left about seven additional trail requests with your consultant. Some committees are keen on the trail development through the City of Westbrook. I am currently working on Sebago to the Sea Trail.

I commend the work that has been done and urge to go full bore ahead with this, certainly with as much understanding and participation with the citizenry of the City. You can not go fast enough in this process, you all saw the Press Herald concerning the financial issues in Portland. The Parks and Open Space budget in the City of Portland was

cut at a rate anywhere from 2 to 10 times more than any other department in the City of Portland.

We have been having many meetings to try and reorganize the Parks & Open Space Department in the City of Portland, as to not allow all the 20 years of work to be thrown away. Portland Trails is the rock that will hold Portland recreational and open space together. We are active in Falmouth and Westbrook; we want to continue to do what ever Portland Trails can to collaborate within the City.

I commend you for what you are doing and urge to go forward thoughtfully, but at full speed with this master plan.

Beth Paulson - Olmstead 245 Methodist Road a member of the Parks, Recreation and Open Space Committee and a representative for a large land owner. One thing that was mentioned that confused me was in our mission statement there was a bullet that mentioned voluntary participation from large landowners. One item I heard the consultants say was they would be working with landowners and sometimes with the not too willing landowners. Could you tell me what you meant by that?

Todd Richardson said he will try to respond to that. As you may recognize not every land owner has the same feelings when it pertains to Parks, Recreation and Open Space when it pertains to there property. Historically Cities and communities have tried to work closely with those land owners, in trying to see there point of view and to find solutions for other properties or other types of agreements where there can be a consensus as to how to move forward in private landowners and City wide land interests.

Beth Paulson - Olmstead 245 Methodist Road said that is where she has an issue. In the committee meetings Ms. Paulson-Olmstead said it was discussed and targeted to include voluntary landowner participation, so no one felt the pressure of feeling land confiscation, along the brooks or any other location, just so the plan could connect the dots. Private landowner rights would be respected.

Ms. Paulson-Olmstead lives on the Methodist Road and has concerns about overlay districts which are part of the new site "views". My family owns much of the lands you are discussing, so again personal property rights.

Another concern is trying to get easements over Utility lines; Portland Water District and Central Maine Power may have additional restrictions due to homeland security.

I want to caution you when negotiating with larger property owners. My family has owned our property since 1935 and we have a huge commitment to our property. We have not held on to the property to have everyone take our property over.

Jamie Goddard 65 Lincoln Street commends the plan. Mr. Goddard suggested that the existing facilities be upgraded before moving forward with new facilities. You are loosing a boat ramp at Lincoln Street. I commend the thought of linking River Walk Park and both sides of the river.

As you may be aware, I had an Ice Cream Cart in the City Park and safety is a big issue in the park as only one entrance allowed for vending carts and sometimes needed to park on the street. Another item you may have overlooked is public restrooms.

I would like to see what has been done at Riverbank Park cloned on the north end of the City of Westbrook.

Mr. Goddard agreed with Councilor Kramer on his comment to the Arboretum As a member of National – International Site of Agriculture and work for Yale Cordage and I agree that local businesses would be interested.

Instead of the Dog Park near the Junior High, I suggest you rent plots for vegetable gardens to help the children learn about agriculture and other resources.

Debra Rummary 533 Stroudwater Street commends the plan and has a couple of questions. While this is a land plan, I am glad to see the Presumpscot included as my husband and I have kayaked up the river and it is gorgeous. We have seen bald eagles. I am glad to see the rehabilitation of the existing dock or launch is part of this. I do not know if Friends of the Presumpscot River is still...

*editors note, someone from the audience said that was part of Sebago to the Sea.

Debra Rummary 533 Stroudwater Street wanted to thank Council Kramer for introducing the sensitivity around land issues around the Stroudwater Street area. I want to commend the plan for recognizing the green way corridors which is consistent with chapter seven of the Comprehensive Plan.

Jeff Varriochione I am not a resident of Westbrook, I live in Gorham, but I am a stream biologist for the Maine Department of Environmental Protection. I am involved with a committee that has been examining information about Millbrook, the watershed running from Highland Lake to the Presumpscot. I am pleased to what I am seeing in the plan. The plan recognizes land protection around the brooks and streams and is an important feature of your plan as this will protect water quality and fisheries. The Maine Department of Recourses values the brook because it has a healthy fish population running between Highland Lake and the Ocean. The Maine department of Inland Fisheries considers it a valuable resource for Brook Trout and Brown Trout.

You have a unique resource in Millbrook and am encouraged as to what I see in the plan.

Roger Burly said in Portland two thousand citizens valued parks and open space just behind Public Safety services. Parks and recreation is the third valued service in the City of Portland. I support you for the work you have done.

Ed Reidman any Board comments

Anna Wrobel asked if community gardens would be considered active or passive recreation but I concur with Jamie Goddard and thank him for the idea of the community gardens.

The issue of connectivity needs to create green corridors throughout the City of Westbrook. I am aware of a green corridor in Queens New York and if three million people in Queens could manage a green corridor, the City of Westbrook can manage a green corridor in some shape or form.

Christine Burke 15 Fairfield Avenue said what gets her out and walking is a dog. Not just a fenced in area, but a place that you can walk with your dog. Please take that into consideration.

Ed Reidman any further comments? Seeing none, can I have a motion returning to regular session?

Rene Daniel moved to return to Regular Session.

2nd by **Anna Wrobel**

Unanimous in favor 7-0

Rene Daniel commended the City Planner, Molly Just for the past site walk at Austin Street. Did yourself well – Thank You

Molly Just thanked Mr. Reidman for facilitating the site walk.

Adjourn

4. Resume Regular Session

5. Adjourn

*Respectfully submitted by Linda Gain PECE Secretary
MINUTES MAY NOT BE TRANSCRIBED VERBATIM. SECTIONS MAY BE PARAPHRASED FOR CLARITY. A COMPLETE RECORDING MAY BE OBTAINED BY CONTACTING ENGINEERING, PLANNING AND CODE ENFORCEMENT at 207-854-9105 ext. 220 and lgain@westbrook.me.us. THANK YOU*