

Gully Hill Easement Committee
February 2, 2017
Council Chambers
Draft Minutes

Meeting called to order at 5:00 p.m.

In attendance:

Committee: Councilors Candace Bouchard, Mark Coen, Jennifer Kretovic, and Mayor Pro-Tem Dan St. Hilaire

Staff: City Manager Thomas Aspell, City Planner Heather Shank, Assistant City Planner Beth Fenstermacher, and Parks & Recreation Director David Gill

Approval of the January 24, 2017 minutes

Mayor Pro-Tem St. Hilaire moved approval; Councilor Coen seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Discussion with Parks & Recreation Director David Gill

Councilor Bouchard introduced David Gill, Parks & Recreation Director, to provide an overview of the recreation opportunities at Gully Hill, Terrill Park, and Kiwanis Park/Everett Arena.

Mr. Gill stated that they have been looking at the Terrill Park and Everett Arena sites for several years and see the Merrimack River Greenway Trail (MRGT) and downtown improvements as opportunities to provide access to the riverfront. Mr. Gill presented slides that showed possible connections between Terrill Park and Kiwanis Park. Mr. Gill stated that there is a need to provide safe, off road bike trails for families and kids to use.

Mr. Gill stated that currently there is no need for additional athletic fields. He noted opportunities for improvements at Gully Hill property include the placement of historical markers, bird watching, fishing areas, exercise stations, events along the "riverwalk" including food trucks, fun run, etc. He stated that there could be trail head parking behind the shopping center and parking at Terrill Park.

Mr. Gill stated that the Council approved Parks to work with the Everett Arena Advisory Committee to look at opportunities for improving the Kiwanis Park/Arena site. Mr. Gill noted that elements of the proposed master plan for Kiwanis Park include the relocation of the fire training ground to an off-site location, relocation of the skate park, more open space for events, a half shell for performances, "green" parking spaces for overflow parking, improved entrance with pro shop, and increased community use.

Mr. Gill presented a slide with images of design elements for Kiwanis park.

Mr. Gill concluded that the City has a great opportunity to connect all of the spaces and would like to see the City create something special along the corridor.

Councilor Kretovic questioned that additional fields are not needed as she has heard from some constituents that there is a need for additional soccer, baseball or softball fields and courts for tennis, and pickleball. Mr. Gill answered that there are 27 public parks, 6 new pickleball courts, and they are looking at Rolfe Park and the new Community Center is beginning construction in the spring. He stated that high schools have priority practice times from 3 to 6. He is not aware of any groups that they are turning down for access, practice times may be the only conflict.

Councilor Coen asked if Mr. Gill sees great value in Kiwanis Park and Everett Arena site 10-40 years into the future. Mr. Gill stated that if the population of school age children grows there will be a need for more parks and fields. Mr. Gill stated that staff has not looked at best locations for event areas or future parks.

Councilor Coen asked if the existing boat ramp is in jeopardy. Mr. Gill stated that the boat ramp was recently dredged and is useable now.

Councilor Coen asked if the continued agricultural use of the Gully Hill land is valuable for aesthetic purposes, does it make sense to have land in agricultural use adjacent to park activities. Mr. Gill stated that every park in the city has a balance of active and passive use, and he recommends that all parks have that balance of different uses to meet needs of multi-age, gender, and ethnicity. Mr. Gill gave examples of parks in the City that have a portion in active use, and the rest remains in natural state, such as White Park and Rolfe Park.

With no further questions, Councilor Bouchard thanked Mr. Gill for his presentation and proceeded to the next agenda item.

Recommendations

Councilor Bouchard asked committee members to start the discussion and provide recommendations.

Councilor Kretovic stated that they should look at the original intent for why the land was purchased. She stated that she is leaning towards putting it out to bid for continued agricultural use, but not placing it under a long term easement.

Mayor Pro-tem St. Hilaire read into record a portion of the June 2007 City Council public hearing minutes regarding the acquisition of a parcel of the Gully Hill area. During the 2007 public hearing, Mayor Pro-tem St. Hilaire asked whether the land could be used for recreation purposes in the future, and Conservation Commission Chair Kit Morgan responded at that time "unless there is a conservation easement of other restriction placed on the land it could be used for any public recreational purpose that is allowed whether it was purchased through the conservation fund as long as it is an open space public use."

Mayor Pro-tem St. Hilaire stated that Council agreed to the land acquisition with the understanding it could be used as public open space in the future. Mayor Pro-tem St. Hilaire noted that he liked David Gill's suggestion of balancing the uses. He agreed that the boat ramp is useable, but not ideal. He further noted that it is not likely that any improvements will happen anytime soon and it is not appropriate to hold up the land, and he agrees that the land should remain as farming for now.

Councilor Coen questioned what acreage would entice farmers to continue farming the land and what lease time frame works for farmers. He noted how Concord has changed and wonders how Concord will continue to change and an easement is forever, and we don't know what the needs of the City will be. Councilor Coen stated he agrees that a coordinated overall plan is a great idea and is excited about Parks & Recreation ideas presented, but likes that the site is in agricultural use now. Mayor Pro-tem St. Hilaire stated that the City has always talked about connecting the river to the downtown and this is an ideal point for a pedestrian bridge over the bridge. He emphasized that this is a plan for the future.

Councilor Kretovic stated that she agrees with the idea of the footbridge and thinks the I-93 expansion is the next big opportunity for this area; however, the best use right now is for the farmers.

Councilor Bouchard stated that she agrees with Councilor Kretovic. She noted that the proposed greenway trail will connect people to the river, and it is great that we can see cornfields in a short walk from Main Street. She stated that she was struck that milk from the cows that are fed from this corn goes to the Hood plant, supplying jobs and local food. Councilor Bouchard stated that there are no plans for what to do at this point at Gully Hill, but the City is working on significant plans for Kiwanis and Terrill Parks, and the best thing right now is to keep farming the Gully Hill land.

Mayor Pro-tem St. Hilaire mad a motion that the Committee instruct the City Manager to bring a recommendation to City Council to lease the land for agricultural purposes for no more than a 3 year lease, that there be no easement and no further involvement with the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests, and with the preference to allow for summer fireworks if feasible.

Councilor Kretovic expressed concern that the 3 years may be too short. Mayor Pro-tem St. Hilaire suggested that an option be added to renew after 3 years for a 2 year increment subject to City Council approval. Councilor Kretovic was in agreement with the suggestion.

Mayor Pro-tem St. Hilaire amended the motion; Councilor Coen seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Meeting adjourned at 5:40 p.m.