

Town Committee on Squibnocket

Draft Minutes

December 2, 2014

Chilmark Town Hall Selectmen's Meeting Room

8am

Present: Jim Malkin (Chair), Allison Burger, Steve Flanders, Billy Meegan, Jane Slater, Janet Weidner, Dan Greenbaum

Also Present: Andy Goldman, David Damroth, Barbara Lee, Rosalie Hornblower, Chris Murphy, Bill Rossi, Tom Wallace, Eric Peters, Chuck Hodgkinson, Jessica Roddy, Donald Poole, Jay Walsh, Alex Aelvin.

Minutes of November 18, 2014 were approved.

Summary of Committee Status: Jim Malkin thanked the Committee for its very intensive and dedicated work in the past week in reviewing and processing the enormous amount of input before the Committee, and noted that the timeline towards a February 9, 2015 Special Town Meeting means that this is the week for the Committee to pull together its thoughts, options, and conclusions. A second meeting is scheduled two days hence, for Thursday, December 4th, at 10:30.

The experts engaged by the Committee have provided their thoughts and observations based on meetings with members of the Committee, a site visit, and access to all the information before the Committee. Jim Malkin pointed out that the US Geological Survey representative stated that a truly long-term, lasting solution with a 130-year horizon would require building a bridge across the Pond through the Blacksmith Valley—anything less will be subject to the tumultuous changes which can be anticipated, but not clearly predicted, over the coming century. Jim Malkin stated that the Committee will be working with a 40-50 year horizon. Another notable recommendation was that, if the Town contemplates dune construction, they would be best-advised to not undertake that construction before sufficient time has passed post-revetment removal, anywhere between 3 months to one year, for the shoreline to have stabilized to its natural level. The expert had also pointed out that a dune may naturally form in this process, but that it is not possible to predict whether the dune would consist of sand, gravel, stone or cobble.

The environmental expert from Epsilon Associates also advised allowing the beach and shoreline to stabilize post-revetment removal, and also emphasized that getting permits for a road-at-grade would be near-impossible. It would require additional approval from the US Army Corps of Engineers, who would require that water be able to pass through such a road.

Jim Malkin then touched upon responses received from the Planning Board regarding the options, barriers and opportunities in connection with the "Big Weldon" property. He noted that virtually all of these would take significant amounts of time to realize, and, while the Town should remain cognizant of opportunities in connection with this property, he felt that the implementation timeline would be

problematic for the Town with respect to the goals of the Committee of secure access, a town beach, and parking for that beach.

Matrix Review: Jim Malkin suggested that the Committee proceed to systematically review the array of options contained in the matrix, discarding those that have been demonstrated to be non- or less-viable, and voicing concerns to be addressed in connection with the remaining options, in order to begin to close in on a possible recommendation. He noted that the experts indicate that it is not desirable to have the beach parking located to the west of the current parking area. If the Big Weldon property is not part of a parking lot solution, that brings us back to the Little Weldon and Orphanos/Jeffers mini-lots on the west side of Squibnocket Road. Work done by FoS shows 22 possible parking spaces on those lots; if we follow the suggestion made last summer by Chris Murphy and reinforced by the experts, namely, to remove the revetment and allow the shoreline to stabilize, it may in fact turn out that there will be additional area suitable for parking to the south of the Weldon-Jeffers/Orphanos lots. This would also answer to the Beach Committee's urging to have the closest possible beach access for elderly and/or handicapped beachgoers. These mini-lots have been indicated to be available at the cost of \$148K each.

CZM Funding Announcement: Jim Malkin announced that the Coastal Zone Management agency has accepted our application for funding, which means that \$280K will be available for this project from CZM.

Access Road Matrix: Each Committee member proceeded to review the matrix-options and voice his/her concerns with each. Billy Meegan suggested that an emergency route through Blacksmith Valley be taken off the table, since the owners declare that they are opposed to such an option. The causeway originally proposed by SFHA ("causeway #1) raises concerns that the scouring and wave action will render the causeway anchors on either end unstable before too long; he noted that causeway proposals #2 and #3 seek to address this concern by moving the causeway further north. As for the dune road proposals, he wondered whether it was possible to locate such a road outside of the possible area of shoreline-stabilization, and noted that, in any case, it seemed likely that some form of pass-through for water would have to be created. Allison Burger felt that the further back from the shore a causeway is located, the longer it will serve, and expressed concern that an at-grade road/dune does not allow water to pass through, to the detriment of wetlands. Jane Slater asked how access could be assured while waiting for the shoreline to stabilize, and that some form of causeway might be required. She stated she is not comfortable with an at-grade road option. Steve Flanders noted that causeways #2 or #3 allow water pass-through, and seem more feasible. Dan Greenbaum felt that the Committee could eliminate causeway #1 from consideration, since its anchors are not likely to survive, especially on the west side of the causeway. He also noted that latest communications indicate that FoS has discarded the road-on-dune proposal, and that, too, could be taken off the table by the Committee. A proposed berm/culvert through the wetland probably faces sufficiently difficult permitting problems, especially given that there appear to be other options for the area, for this to be considered non-viable as well. He wondered, however, whether a *lowered* causeway, instead of a berm/culvert, located as far north as possible without crossing the pond, might provide a solution. This would be at a location very similar to the latest proposed FoS road, but closer to the pond on the western end. It would be a total 600-700' in length, consisting of an at-grade, single-lane road with turnouts, with a 300' middle portion in the form of a low causeway crossing the wetland. He described considerations involved in determining the appropriate lowest causeway height. The height chosen relates to the frequency of washover that can

be anticipated: if we specify washover of only every 100 years, for example, that would imply a very high causeway. If, however, we build to anticipate wash-over once or twice a year, the causeway can be significantly lower, 4'-6' above grade. If the rate or nature of the wash-overs turns out to be untenable, consideration could then be given to a man-made dune – a “sacrificial dune” that would need some replenishment following major weather events, but would serve to protect access. Dan Greenbaum summarized three remaining options on the table: 1) causeways #2 or #3; 2) a dune with at-grade road; or 3) the mixed road/low causeway option just described.

Janet Weidner asked for confirmation that this low-causeway/road option would not involve beach traffic, and whether it would be one-lane or two. Dan Greenbaum confirmed Squibnocket Farms-only traffic, and felt that one lane would be sufficient on the 300' low causeway spanning the wetland, while turnouts would be provided on the roadway to east and west.

Jim Malkin summarized that our 40-50 year solution would be to move access as far north as possible; that it appears it is necessary to provide for some flow-through under a roadway; that beach parking would not be accessed via this roadway, and that revetment removal will go a long way towards addressing the Committee's charge for a bathing beach, and may even create a dune. Of the options before the Committee at this point, he felt most comfortable with Dan's road/low causeway suggestion. He noted that the anchors of the original causeway proposal may not stand up to the effects of revetment removal, and building a dune prior to stabilization of the shoreline could suffer a similar fate. He also observed that there will never be complete agreement among all experts, even when they are working from the same data. In conclusion, he felt comfortable with an at-grade road plus low-causeway, located as far north as possible. He did not support burying utilities under the pond, and in response to questions from the audience, explained that even with the available drilling technology, it would be disruptive to the environment and require an extremely difficult and involved permitting process.

Parking Matrix: The Committee then turned to the parking lot matrix. Billy Meegan considered that the Vytlacil lot should be taken off the table, given a number of complicating factors (historic house, multiple owners, difficult terrain, etc). If “Big Weldon” is considered for the medium-to-long term, rather than the current situation, and there is clear agreement that beach parking should not be located west of the current parking lot, that leaves the Weldon-Orphanos/Jeffers mini-lots for parking. Allison Burger agreed that the Vytlacil lot would pose great difficulties, and that, if Big Weldon is too difficult as well, we are looking at the W-OJ lots for parking. Jane Slater expressed her strong desire to see the historic house on the Vytlacil property maintained and undisturbed. She explained that this is one of the few remaining fisherman's shacks removed from Noman's and floated over to Squibnocket Beach. She hoped there would be land left on the south side of W-OJ to supplement a beach parking area. Janet Weidner noted the disadvantageous topography of the Vytlacil property (steep grade, greater distance), and agreed that W-OJ provides the most obvious option, but also suggested that the Committee keep assessing the possibility of Big Weldon, even if that would be further in the future. She also reminded the Committee that the W-OJ lots were assessed for their visibility during the Committee's site visits and had the least “visual impact” on properties in the area. Steve Flanders acknowledged that the W-OJ appeared to be the most feasible option and stated that he was not in favor of investing very large sums for acquisition, but that the Big Weldon property may be a valuable option for the future. Dan Greenbaum concurred with previous speakers, looking to the two small lots for the immediate future, while keeping Big Weldon and the Vytlacil properties in mind for the distant future. Jim Malkin said he

had nothing to add, and that it appears that W-OJ lots are the best parking option. It now remains to concretize this option and relate it to road/access options under consideration.

Jim Malkin will meet with John Keene to begin to assess costs and number of spaces for the W-OJ lots. Janet Weidner and Dan Greenbaum will meet to connect the parking proposal with the three remaining possible access options, namely road-at-grade with low causeway, at-grade road all the way, and causeway #2 or #3.

Jim Malkin summed up today's meeting and suggested a way to proceed: by the next meeting of the Committee this coming Thursday, he will develop a preliminary potential recommendation, which the Committee can review in detail and react to. Janet and Dan will meet to integrate parking and access considerations, and all members will carefully review information before the Committee to identify any questions we could pose to the experts. The Committee agreed with the suggested process. The goal will be to reach a preliminary consensus at the coming meeting on Thursday, and to send out a mailing with the preliminary consensus recommendation to all town residents, inviting them to a public meeting to get input. On December 18th, the Committee will hold its public information meeting at the Chilmark Community Center, to present its work and hear reactions from the public. At its meeting on January 5th, the Committee could finalize its recommendation. Jim Malkin reminded the Committee of requirements for advance notification and submissions for a Special Town Meeting.

Chris Murphy encouraged the Committee to not allow concerns over the difficulty of permitting to get in the way of the best solution: if a road-at-grade is indeed the best solution, permitting hurdles can be overcome. Rosalie Hornblower reminded the Committee that not all residents of the Squibnocket Farms area support the construction of the causeway solutions put forward by the SFHA.

Billy Meegan expressed his encouragement with the Committee's work at today's meeting: he was pleased to see a possible solution that would allow for flow-through. Above all, he reminded that Committee that changes are going to happen, not all of them entirely foreseeable, and that keeping options open is important. Jim Malkin felt that the Committee is approaching a near-win/win, in that the Committee has found merit in elements of all proposals and is finding ways to address serious concerns that have been raised by experts and observers alike. The Committee will reconvene in 48 hours.

The meeting was adjourned at 09:23.