

TOWN OF HADDAM  
HIGGANUM COVE ADVISORY COMMITTEE  
MEETING  
COMMUNITY CENTER  
7 CANDLEWOOD HILL ROAD, HIGGANUM, CT 06441  
THURSDAY, 13 JULY 2023  
UNAPPROVED MINUTES  
*Subject to Approval by the Commission*

**ATTENDANCE**

X	Peter Baird
X	Sue DeCarli
X	Dorothy Gillespie
X	Tim McCane
X	Ed Schwing, Chairman
X	Tim Teran
X	Dante Ursini
X	Bill Warner,
X	Bunny Hall Batzner, Recording Clerk

Mr. Schwing, Chairman, called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Mr. Schwing asked that the following two items be added to the agenda: Garbage Can Location and Letter to the Board of Selectmen (BOS). Mr. Baird asked if Upper Trail could also be added.

**MOTION:** Peter Baird motion to approve the 13 July 2023 agenda as amended. Tim Teran second.  
Motion carried unanimously.

**1. Approval of Minutes**

**MOTION:** Dan Ursini motioned to approve the 15 June 2023 minutes as submitted. Tim Teran second.  
Motion carried unanimously.

**2. Public Comments**

There was no public in attendance.

**3. Maintenance of Trees**

Mr. Warner reported the trees have been removed, it looks great, and it makes a big difference. Mr. Warner stated that the contractor was unable to get the last tree that's covered with vines that stands closer to river but will try to get to it eventually. Mr. Warner noted this tree is harder to get to and there currently isn't a plan to cut it.

Mr. Baird stated he tried to walk to the railroad tracks today; however, the path is underwater. Mr. Warner stated the kayak launch is also underwater.

Mr. Ursini stated he was unable to pick up all the remaining trash due to the flooding. Mr. Baird noted there is a significant amount of trash above the falls. Mrs. Gillespie asked if a sign reading "Please Carry Out What You Carry In" could be posted. Mr. McCane and Mrs. Batzner stated there is a "No Dumping" sign in the area. Noted there is no such sign on the Cove side. Matter to be discussed further under #7.

Mr. Baird noted that there are kids jumping off the ruins wall above the arch into the Cove. Mr. Teran stated kids are also jumping off the railroad trestle.

Mr. Ursini stated he took the liberty to use all the wood chips from the recent tree removal and threw them down the bank in the area where all the broken glass is located. Area looks better.

#### **4. Overlook Bid**

Mr. Warner reviewed the draft bid and noted that because an engineer was not hired to develop a specific plan the Request for Proposals will be for "design-build" proposals where applicants will be interviewed and asked how they would do the work. Mr. Warner stated that the way the bid is written the town is not required to take the low bid, but rather whoever is the most qualified.

Mr. Warner stated he included every sketch and picture available into Appendix 2 – noting that the sketch drawn by Mike Gillespie, although light, has the most detail and is available for review in the office; and the other sketches are from Kent + Frost. Discussion followed about minimizing the wall, so it doesn't look massive; whether there was a way to eliminate one of the levels; handrail requirements – wall higher than 29.5 inches requires a safety railing and a structural engineer's seal required for a wall higher than 42 inches. Mr. Warner believes the Committee would want to avoid too many railings.

Looking at Appendix 2, Potential Profile, Mr. Teran asked if a softer look would be achieved if Level 3 were moved back, or a fourth level created. Mr. Warner stated yes, but it would require additional rock, work, and expense and would probably be better off trying to create some tiered grading.

Mr. McCane stated the drawing that he and Mr. Gillespie drew up was to gain ADA funding and to give people with a handicap or older people in town the ability to go down there and enjoy it. Mr. Schwing stated if they wanted to go down further someone could assist them. Mr. McCane stated people who are handicapped or are elderly want to have the freedom to do it themselves. Mr. Warner stated that the ramps will lead them to the location.

Mr. Ursini stated that's the purpose of the ramp. Mr. Warner stated the ramps on the side aren't imposing and it wouldn't affect the giant Sycamore, but it would be right alongside it. Mr. Teran suggested creating a wider space between Level 2 and Level 3 of the overlook and asked if there needed to be access up and down from the overlook – eliminate the stairs between Levels 1 and 2 and Levels 2 and 3. Mr. Warner stated it would create a bigger wall with a railing.

Mr. Ursini stated the plan has two purposes – not looking so imposing and it's terraced with picnic tables so people can use it. Mr. Baird stated people will create their own paths. Mr. Ursini stated let's see what the applicants come back with as the Committee can make decisions to take things out along the way. Mr. Warner stated yes.

Mr. Warner stated the Committee can hire an engineer for \$10,000 to review the concept or have people come in and develop it. Mr. Warner noted the Committee isn't obligated to accept any of the proposals. Mr. McCane stated the area could be terraced without the stonework. Mr. Warner agreed, a terraced lawn.

Mr. Schwing asked when the bid would be posted. Mr. Warner stated given that it is local money he could put it on the town's website and in the HK News; and if the Committee would like to go further, it could go in the Hartford Courant. Mr. Warner stated he believes it to be a local job noting that Lee Hunter, and Brian Babbitt, a local stone worker and who helped at the Cove, are interested; and if local funding is being used, would like to keep the contractors local. The Committee agreed as they'd like to keep it local giving people more ownership and not opening it up to the state.

Mr. Warner stated he has two licensed architects in his office noting that Leon Mularski, Zoning Official, is more familiar with structural projects and he indicated with the big slabs of granite wouldn't be moving anywhere (no engineer needed). Mr. Warner stated he's still debating whether to require the applicants have a licensed engineer on their team as it will add additional cost to the town and eliminate a number of



applicants unless they hire an engineer. Mr. Warner stated the people who build these types of overlooks know how to do the work and if needed, he could get a local engineer, like Chris Bell, to stamp the plan.

Mr. Schwing asked if the bid includes the work and material. Mr. Warner stated yes and noted that Mr. Gillespie's plan included a staircase that would allow people without mobility issues to go right down into the Cove. A brief discussion followed regard the bid timelines – pre-bid walk 30 July 2023 and quotes due 12 August 2023.

## **5. Summer Overuse**

Mr. Ursini stated people are spending a lot of time at the site and a lot of them are leaving their trash. Mr. Ursini also stated this was a concern that a number of Committee members had expressed previously as well as wanting to keep the Cove Haddam's park. Mr. Ursini stated the end plan is to have paid parking over on the Rossi property, no parking signs posted on the falls side (signs posted; enforcement needed). Unfortunately, there are some very unpleasant people who show up to use the Cove.

Mr. Warner stated fortunately, the site has not gotten out yet (not listed on various sites.) Mr. Ursini stated he felt the Committee needed a tactical and strategic plan – what do we do now, no parking signs (enforce), etc. Mrs. DeCarli asked who's going to enforce the parking. Discussion followed regarding the installation of guard rail, people parking all the way down the road, and enforcement. Mr. Warner suggested the Committee invite the resident trooper to attend a meeting and explain the situation.

Mr. Ursini stated in Watch Hill, RI they have hired attendants to watch the beaches and they have the authority to write a ticket. They inform people they cannot park in certain areas, but they do not approach people with a ticket. Mr. Warner stated Wadsworth Falls has a summer intern to watch the park. Mrs. Gillespie asked if the trooper is invited to a meeting, could it be held at the Cove so he can become familiar with the area. Mr. Schwing suggested the matter be discussed further under #8 and that it be addressed with the BOS.

Mr. Warner asked if there have been any problems at the Cove lately. Mrs. DeCarli stated the falls are not as bad as is being depicted, it's sporadic. Discussion followed regarding people who are having picnics with coolers and grills and not carrying out their trash and separating the two issues – policing of the Cove and designating it as a park. Mr. Teran stated if the Committee can get the designation done then what will follow is the regulations and management of the park. Mr. Teran stated if the Committee labors the letter with too many restrictions and requirements, it may make it too heavy and he's worried that it will be difficult for people to vote for it easily. Mr. Teran stated if the Committee cries wolf too many times before the Cove is designated, it could be that the BOS may not want to designate it as a park as it will be a burden for the town. Mr. Teran stated the Committee does want to deal with the issue of garbage and overuse, and if they're separated, it will be easier to get it all done.

Mr. Warner stated he could ask First Selectman Bob McGarry to speak to the resident troopers and have them park in the area so there's at least a presence.

## **6. Pollinator Garden**

Mrs. Gillespie reviewed the information she had emailed to the Committee. Mrs. Gillespie stated pollinator gardens can be built in various places – parking lots (noted the Town of Chester), strips, etc., and the fact that there are a lot of non-native plants that are not invasive, but they bloom throughout the year providing a lot of color (probably would thrive in the area of the Welcome sign and the benches). Mrs. Gillespie asked if the Committee would like to spread the plantings throughout the field (along the edges), create a designated pollinator strip garden, or just incorporate it into the natural landscape.

Mrs. Gillespie stated she and a friend viewed the site and the shrubs on the plan were not visible (shrubs are no longer there). Mr. Warner stated the area has been cut to create a lawn area. Mrs. Gillespie stated the Committee needs to be careful that they do not plant some plantings that are so invasive that



they out compete the natural plantings. Mr. Warner stated he envisioned on the sides of the path the more decorative stuff, down in the hole along the slope more native pollinator plants (a lot of invasives on the slope). Mrs. Gillespie stated the invasives, such as mugwort, Japanese knotweed, and Virginia creeper, that are growing on the slope need to be removed.

Mr. Teran stated perhaps a more detailed plan is needed. Mrs. Gillespie agreed and reviewed potential people who could lend guidance and laborers. Mr. Teran stated there are three items that need to be considered – a plan, the installation, and maintenance (biggest challenge). Mrs. Gillespie stated if plants are chosen carefully, they will take care of themselves.

Mrs. Gillespie asked Mr. Teran for the list of names/emails collected at the site walk in April. Mr. Teran and Mr. Baird stated they will assist with this matter.

Mr. Baird noted there's a balance between naturally beautiful areas and public access areas and that this should be kept in mind.

Mrs. Gillespie stated the more you can get people, kids especially, out into nature the better, because they will not value what they do not experience and understand. This is an opportunity to not only preserve the site but to educate people as well as the next generation. Mrs. DeCarli noted that the Eagle Scouts put the steps in on the falls side, but they can certainly help with other projects. Mrs. Gillespie stated although she is not a gardener, she is an outdoor person, a good organizer, and can get along with most people and listen to them without criticizing.

Mrs. Gillespie stated a timeline needs to be developed but asked the Committee what they would like to see – a strip garden, rocks in pit area with colorful plants in bloom (need to put bulbs in this fall and would be a great project for kids), organize labor, etc. Mr. Teran stated if the Committee had a plan such as what types of plants and quantities needed (donations from other peoples' gardens or purchase or a combination) it would be helpful. Mrs. Gillespie noted it all doesn't have to be done in one sitting. Mr. Warner stated there has to be some sort of competitive bid process such as putting out a design-build to garden centers. Mrs. DeCarli suggested Nancy Ballek be invited to look at the site to provide suggestions. Mr. Warner again spoke of a competitive process noting that Town and Country Nurseries be considered as well as others.

**MOTION:** Dorothy Gillespie motioned to have Bill Warner, Town Planner, develop a bid for a planting plan. Dan Ursini second. Motion carried unanimously.

Mr. Warner stated he will work in the idea of volunteer labor and minimum maintenance requirements (what to do and when), etc.

## **7. Garbage Can Location**

Mr. Ursini asked if the garbage cans could be moved away from the Welcome sign and relocated to the area of the animal waste disposal bin. Mrs. DeCarli stated the Committee needs to take Pete's Waste Removal into consideration (time and easy access). Mr. Ursini asked if there should be a couple of receptacles over on the falls side. Discussion followed regarding the type of garbage cans to have, how to secure them, and digging a slot to stabilize the cans near the animal waste container.

Mr. McCane stated he built the Welcome sign to be two sided so information could be put on it and not to have garbage cans or anything around it.

**MOTION:** Dan Ursini motioned to relocate the existing garbage cans that are next to the Welcome sign and will speak to Pete (Pete's Waste Removal) regarding the relocation; and if agreeable to the relocation, Mr. Ursini will dig the slot out. Ed Schwing second. Motion carried unanimously.



The Committee discussed the cost of pick up (Town pays for the service) and the addition of two cans on the falls side.

## **8. Letter to the Board of Selectmen (BOS)**

Mr. Schwing reported he had sent the letter too late for it to be considered at the 10 July 2023 BOS meeting. Mr. Schwing stated Mr. McGarry responded right away to his email indicating that he would read the letter during the meeting; and that Kate Anderson discussed the letter at the 12 July 2023 EDC meeting. Mr. Schwing stated Mr. McGarry indicated that he's interested in the proposal and the letter will be discussed at the 14 August 2023 BOS meeting. Mr. Schwing asked that the Committee attend this meeting as there will be two items discussed: 1) to put the designation in the deed (being discussed with the Town's attorney) and 2) making the Committee permanent. Mr. McGarry would need to discuss why it should or should not be a part of the Park & Rec Commission. Mr. Schwing spoke in regard to using Portland's park as a model. Mr. Schwing will put it in writing for review by the Committee before the BOS meeting. Mr. Schwing stated he believes the Committee becoming permanent is important.

Mr. Baird stated he likes the Town of Portland's model – created a non-profit, allows for it to be managed in an organized manner, and it takes the politics out of it. Mr. Warner stated the real distinction is passive vs. active recreation – Park & Rec is active recreation, and the Cove is a passive park. Mrs. Gillespie stated there's going to be a need to maintain the Cove and it may be too much to put on Park & Rec's plate. Mr. Warner stated the town does not have a Park and Recreation Department (maintenance); whereas Portland works because they have a non-profit as well as their Park and Rec Department.

Mr. Schwing stated Park & Rec has a lot of land on Jail Hill Road (Great Hill Athletic Fields and the land across from it) and there are no trails or anything else being done with the property. The Committee agreed. Mr. Schwing stated he's aware that a Park & Rec chairman had attend a BOS meeting and asked why Park & Rec is not in charge of the Cove. Mr. Schwing noted that two members of Park & Rec are also members of the HK Recreational Authority whose focus is sports.

Mr. Baird stated he would like to see the Committee expand their scope by finding a way to connect to the Reservoir, HES, Swan Hill, etc. The Cove is passive recreation and not organized sports.

Mr. Schwing asked the Committee to submit their ideas and he would incorporate them into the package. Mr. Teran stated the magnitude of activity that the Committee is talking about is significant and the thought that there would not be a permanent Committee watching over all these actions is concerning. Mr. Warner noted that the Committee also has a \$385,000 budget.

## **9. Upper Trail**

Mr. Baird stated he's glad that the Upper Trail area had been cleaned up and made more accessible as he believes it will be a key entry point. Mr. Baird asked if the Upper Trail will be maintain and marked more clearly, especially after the pollinator garden is put in. Mr. Warner stated where there are no trees a unique marker will be installed; but where there is a tree, a marker will be placed directly on the tree.

Mrs. Gillespie stated people are finding it difficult to access the kayak launch; and asked if there is anything planned to make access easier. Mr. Baird stated he has pictures of a public kayak rack located in Essex where people pay a fee to securely keep their kayak. Mr. Warner stated he always thought that down by the kayak launch against the wall would be a perfect place for a rack. Mr. Baird will supply a copy of the rack, locking mechanism, and the rules.

Mrs. Gillespie asked about mapping the water way especially that it's tidal noting that people are finding it difficult to navigate, getting out of the marsh, getting to the river, and what to do once they get to the river. Mrs. Gillespie stated another person asked her about walking the railroad tracks and she told them that the Committee did not have anything to do with the railroad tracks. Mr. Schwing stated it's a safety

issues especially where the trains run, but also the bridge is very dangerous. Mr. Warner stated the tracks are a state park. Discussion followed regarding liability.

Mrs. DeCarli asked Mr. Warner where the directional signs are. Mr. Warner stated that if the signpost had been installed, it would have been crushed when the tree fell.

#### **10. Adjournment**

**MOTION:** Tim Teran motion to adjourn. Tim McCane second. Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 7:13 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Bunny Hall Batzner*  
Bunny Hall Batzner  
Recording Clerk

**The next regular meeting is scheduled for Thursday, 10 August 2023, 6:00 p.m.**