

**TOWN OF HADDAM
HIGGANUM COVE ADVISORY COMMITTEE
REGULAR MEETING
COMMUNITY CENTER
7 CANDLEWOOD HILL ROAD, HIGGANUM, CT 06441
THURSDAY, 10 AUGUST 2023
APPROVED MINUTES
*Approved as Submitted at the 14 September 2023 Meeting***

ATTENDANCE

A	Peter Baird
X	Sue DeCarli (Arrived 6:04 p.m.)
X	Dorothy Gillespie
X	Tim McCane
X	Ed Schwing, Chairman
A	Tim Teran
X	Dante Ursini
X	Bill Warner, Town Planner, AICP (Arrived 6:02 p.m.)
X	Bunny Hall Batzner, Recording Clerk

GUESTS: Gail Reynolds, Chairman, Conservation Commission, and Kelli and Jon Botteon.

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

1. Public Comments

Ms. Botteon commented about the parking and garbage overflow situation on the falls side of the Cove. The "No Parking" signs have helped, but more needs to be done because it is not stopping individuals from parking on the side of the road. Mr. Ursini stated until the Cove is designated an official park and regulations are in place, the Committee and/or Town cannot enforce the matter.

2. Approval of Minutes

MOTION: Tim McCane motioned to approve the 13 July 2023 minutes as submitted. Dan Ursini second. Motion carried unanimously.

3. Discussion on Park Regulations

Mr. Schwing noted that this matter has been on the agenda a couple of times, there have been some issues, and at this time, there are no park regulations in the Town of Haddam. Mr. Ursini distributed an updated proposal for review.

Mr. Warner stated when the Committee was developed there was discussion about regulations, and it was discovered that there were no regulations for any park in the town. Mr. Warner stated the regulations were drafted, the Committee approved them, and they were sent to the Board of Selectmen (BOS); however, it's unclear as to whether they were approved by the BOS, but a town meeting had not been scheduled. Mr. Warner also stated regulations must be adopted by ordinance to be effective and this has not happened. Mr. Warner stated the regulations were designed to apply to both the Cove and the park on Jail Hill. Mr. Ursini stated his draft highlights the meat of the proposal without people having to read pages of regulations.

Mr. Ursini stated Mr. Baird did provide input and that he would like people to have the ability to enjoy bicycling in the park except on the upper ruins trail. Mrs. Reynolds asked that "Please Clean Up After Your Dog" be included noting that "Curb Your Dog" doesn't mean you have to cleanup. Mr. Ursini stated they could add "Dogs are Welcome – Leash, Curb, and Pick Up After Your Dog". Discussion followed. Mr. Warner stated the Committee/Town needs regulations that can be enforced (needs to be in an ordinance setup). Mr. Ursini stated the rules are posted on the Welcome sign at the entrance to the Cove. Mr. Schwing stated the Committee would like to make sure the rules and the ordinance match. Mr. Warner stated you can encourage people not to climb on rocks, etc., but it's difficult to stop them. Mr. Botteon asked if bikes is meant to be motorbikes. Mr. Ursini stated yes, included on the updated draft.

Mrs. Gillespie asked if the language could be more positive such as please, etc., as people are more receptive to positive language. Mr. Ursini stated his goal is to have something to work on by the next meeting. Mrs. Gillespie mentioned the word "ruins" as its historical. Mr. Botteon stated he didn't realize the ruins were there until they became visible after the cleanup.

For clarity, Mr. Ursini asked which items would need to go before a town vote - rules/regulations, access (residents only, non-residents, charge for access). Mr. McCane stated since the Committee/Town accepted state funding, it has no say in the matter. Mr. Warner stated the Town accepted both state and federal (clean up) monies. Mr. Warner stated the Committee can charge for parking. Mr. Ursini stated that was a part of the budget. Mr. Warner stated the thought was to not have parking on Depot Road, restrict the nine parking spaces on site, and then create 20 parking spaces on the Rossi property.

Mr. Schwing stated any comments that the Committee would like to give back to Mr. Ursini should come through him (Schwing) and then the ordinance will be discussed further after the town meeting for the park designation.

Mrs. Gillespie noted the recycling bin is missing. Mr. Ursini stated the recycling bin was taken away as people were not using it and they were just throwing all their trash into the garbage bins. Mr. Ursini stated this was confirmed with Jim, Pete's Waste; and Jim also confirmed that on the falls side the garbage is overflowing every week, which is good because people are using it even though there may be littering going on. As for the Cove side, the bin is about one-quarter full.

Mrs. Gillespie voiced concern about dirt bikes noting that two large vans were parked in the Cove parking lot with adult males putting on their gear and pulling out their dirt bikes. Mrs. Gillespie stated approximately 10 to 12 of them went down to the river and then they came up the road to access the power lines in Middletown. Mrs. Gillespie stated after review of Connecticut's regulations, all motorized bikes are to be registered and there's only one public location in Connecticut that has dirt bike trails and then one that's private. Mrs. Gillespie stated she is all for people having fun but going back and forth numerous times is obnoxious.

Mr. Warner stated DEEP owns the railroad tracks and they refer to it as a park, but they lease it to the railroad who has exclusive use. Mrs. Reynolds stated perhaps the best solution for the dirt bikes may be to let DEEP/the railroad aware of the situation. Mr. Schwing stated having the regulations in place will be helpful. Mrs. Gillespie stated it's rude, obnoxious, and disrespectful. Mrs. Gillespie stated she could tolerate them if they would just go by slowly once to get to the power lines and return in the same manner. Mr. Warner stated the best thing that could be done is making the area undesirable for dirt bikers such as putting a garden within the ruins or the placement of boulders to deter access. Mrs. Reynolds stated dirt bikers always seem to find ways to move rocks and ruin habitat.

4. Overlook Bid Update

Mr. Warner reported the bid has been advertised. Mrs. Reynolds asked for an explanation of the overlook location and what is being proposed. Mr. Warner gave a brief explanation.

Mr. Ursini asked if there have been any inquiries. Mr. Warner stated no. Mr. Warner stated once the bids are opened, applicants will be interviewed, and will be selected on best approach not the low bid.

5. Pollinator Garden

Mrs. Gillespie asked Mrs. Reynolds if she had received Mr. Schwing's latest email. A brief discussion followed regarding who the team members would be. Mrs. Reynolds stated she would like to see the proposed garden area(s). Mrs. Gillespie will organize the walk. Mrs. DeCarli stated she had suggested Nancy Balleck be consulted regarding the plantings. A brief discussion followed regarding plantings by the lower foundations and looking for road appeal.

Mr. Warner stated the Committee should stick to the plan of the pollinator garden being in the upper ruins; otherwise, people will start putting plantings all over the place. Mr. Schwing stated the lower foundations will be treated differently – create a lawn area where people can sit and the construction of a pavilion and/or gazebo. Mr. McCane noted that there was also discussion about the removal of a small amount of material from the foundations to allow people to step down and walk through them.

Mrs. DeCarli stated the Committee paid a landscape architect to develop a plan, the plan won an award, and believes the Committee should stick to that plan. Mr. Ursini agreed, noting that receiving input is fine, but the plan should be followed.

Reviewing the 2015 restoration plan, Mrs. Reynolds stated she hopes the restoration area down by the water will be left alone. Mr. Warner stated there are no plans for work down there. Mrs. Reynolds also stated that the purpose of the 2015 plantings was that they wouldn't have to be managed. Mrs. Reynolds stated the thing about smart planting is to make it as low maintenance as possible.

Mr. Warner stated after the Committee took over the Cove, it was decided that a more developed park was desired. Mrs. Reynolds stated the Conservation Commission was not consulted. Mr. Schwing stated the Committee brought in an architect, the idea was to highlight the foundations, and put in an area for people to sit with a gazebo at the bottom. Mrs. Reynolds stated she is not opposed to a lawn area and that she would like to see the site as to where the Committee is contemplating to put plants.

Mrs. Reynolds asked if the Historical Society would still be doing signage. Mr. Ursini stated they are in play. Mr. Schwing stated Steve Gephardt will be working on environmental signage.

6. Miscellaneous

Board of Selectmen's Meeting – Mr. Schwing reported the BOS meeting is scheduled for Monday, 14 August 2023, 6:30 p.m., Town Hall, 21 Field Park Drive. At this meeting, the BOS will address the Committee's request for park designation of the Cove. Mr. Schwing also reported that the Committee is requesting they be made a permanent committee to manage the Cove's environmental and historical qualities. Mr. Schwing stated Bob McGarry, First Selectman, had asked why the Park and Rec Commission could manage the Cove. Mr. Schwing pointed out that in Park and Rec's mission statement repeatedly refers to active recreation (such as ballfields, playground, basketball court, etc.), recreation buildings, apparatus and equipment. This is something the Committee believes should not happen at the Cove. Mr. Schwing stated the Committee will need to have a budget to maintain the Cove appropriately. Mr. Schwing asked that all Committee members try to attend the BOS meeting to support this proposal.

Mrs. Reynolds spoke in regard to a conservation easement and the need for enforcing it. Mr. Warner stated he did not see the Committee wanting another organization overseeing the Cove. Discussion followed.

Mr. Ursini asked if the Committee will ask about the standing of the regulations. Mr. Schwing will submit an email.

Potential HES/Cove Employee– Discussion – Mr. Warner stated that there is \$15,000 in the budget for a caretaker (keeper of the key, unarm/arm the alarm system, overseer) at HES. Mr. Warner suggested that this funding along with some additional money could allow for the hiring of a key holder/light maintenance worker at HES and the Cove. Mr. Warner stated this individual could also tell people they cannot hold birthday parties/picnics in the ruins as just recently happened. Mr. Warner stated it will never stop unless there's an attendant. Mr. Schwing stated he thought it was a great idea and perhaps language could be included in the ordinance. Mr. Warner suggested it not be part of the upcoming BOS meeting. Mrs. Gillespie asked if there was a job description. Mr. Warner stated the money is there and a job description would be developed. Mrs. DeCarli stated the people who had the birthday party picked up everything. Mr. McCane stated he spoke to the individuals about the matter.

Mrs. Reynolds asked if any consideration had been given to using a keypad that releases a key to a building via a code and the code is changed after each use. Mr. Warner stated the whole building is alarmed and doesn't know what the complexity of it would be.

Mr. Schwing asked Mr. Warner if he will be making a proposal or would he like to discuss the matter at another meeting. Mr. Warner stated he could start to draft something up and that the funding has been approved. Mrs. Gillespie stated a job description with specific duties and locations would be required. Mr. Ursini stated the regulations would also need to be in place to allow for some sort of authority to an attendant. Mr. Warner stated he also contemplated some light maintenance such as weed whacking, pick up litter, etc.

7. Adjournment

MOTION: Tim McCane motion to adjourn. Dorothy Gillespie second. Motion carried unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 6:54 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,

Bunny Hall Batzner
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Recording Clerk

The next meeting date to be determined.