

CAMDEN RIVERWALK and PUBLIC LANDING PROJECT
PUBLIC FORUM #1
Minutes of Meeting
April 1, 2013

The Public Forum was convened at 6:45 at the Mary Taylor Middle School by Brian Hodges, Director of Development, with an estimated 125 members of the public attending.

1. Introductions & Background: Brian Hodges

Mr. Hodges introduced the various people, committees and organizations participating in the project, noting that the great diversity and scope of representation of Town interests is intended to ensure that all points of view are heard.

- **Town Staff:** Pat Finnigan, Town Manager; Steve Wilson, CEO/Planner; Interim Director of Parks and Recreation Beth Ward; and the entire five-member Select Board (Martine Cates, John French, Jim Heard, Leonard Lookner and Don White)
- **Stakeholders:**
 - **Advisory Team:** Members of the Camden Team are part of the Working Group, along with the Design Team and Town Staff. They include representatives of the Parks and Recreation Committee, Camden-Rockport Pathways Committee, Penobscot Bay Regional Chamber of Commerce, Camden Library Complex, Conservation Commission, Harbor Committee, Downtown Business Group, CEDAC, and a Knox Mill Condos resident representative – there are many residents of Camden within this group
 - **Design Team:** Darin Bryant, TYLin International, Consultants' Project Manager; Sarah Witte, Landscape Architect (Pathways Project); and Dan Bannon, Baker Design Consultants (Public Landing Project)
 - **All** interested residents, business persons, property owners and visitors – many of whom are here this evening to offer comments

Mr. Hodges hopes those in attendance find this group is representative of the Town.

- **Downtown Master Plan:** The genesis of the pathway project comes from the work done for the Downtown Master Plan, and the supportive comments heard during public forums held while gathering public input for that project. The same procedure followed for the Downtown Plan will be followed here, including convening a local advisory committee to work directly with the consultants, and holding multiple public forums to gather public input. That method worked very well in formulating the Downtown Plan that was adopted by the voters; this project is an extension of that Plan.

2. Overview of Process Envisioned Today and for Duration of Our Project: Darin Bryant

- **Project goal:** To develop a master plan for phased implementation over time of the project. They are well aware that this pathway is not something that will be built all at

once, so they are looking at creating a long-range plan that can be built over time. The long-range plan will show what the Town wants to see in the future, but the Team will also develop a short-range plan to show what can be made useable in the near-future as well. There are sections that could be built now by interconnecting with existing infrastructure, and that will be discussed in greater detail

- **Tonight's goal:** The Team wants to give everyone a common ground – a starting off point – by providing information about the existing conditions today, and looking at ideas of what might be possible in the future
- **Opportunities for comment and involvement ~ What is right for Camden :**
There will be a series of public meetings like this one: The next is set for April 22nd and that is when they will concentrate on the Public Landing part of the project; tonight they are focusing on the trail. Later in June there will be two more opportunities for public meetings where everyone can come together to get more information on the project
- **At this time no set alignment or preconceived plan! ~ Belief in the public process and collective wisdom:** Mr. Bryant stressed the point that there is no proposed or preconceived alignment in mind for the pathway. They are here to listen and to gather information. They want to hear Camden's priorities and issues regarding the trail, and they especially want to let everyone know that there are no set plans in place. They are not here to sell the Town on a specific plan, but to learn what it is that will work best for Camden.
- **Project overview:**
 1. **Inventory existing conditions and uses, gather data, base mapping**
In addition to gathering information and data, which will be on-going, the Team will be speaking with property owners as stakeholders and property owners to hear their concerns and gather their input and information on the properties.
 2. **Community input and participation**
This is the first meeting of many to begin this process, and tonight the process of gathering input will look like this:
 - ✓ The Team will make an initial presentation and will show examples from other projects in other towns - knowing that these may not be right for Camden, but wanting to show some ideas of what can be done
 - ✓ Next, they want to hear from everyone what is important here in Camden – what are Camden's likes, wants and hopes for this project; what is important and what are the issues and the concerns: After the presentation they will hear comments from the group as a whole, and then everyone will break out into smaller focus groups where individuals will have a chance to discuss issues and concerns, provide feedback and report back.

3. Schematic Plans:

The next step after the April meetings will be to develop schematic plans of the project that will show both the long-term and short-term goals of the project - one for the trail and one for the Public Landing.

4. Assess Economic Impacts

Included in the Final Report will be an assessment of the Economic Impacts of the project, both for the Public Landing and the trail. How the projects might impact economically the Town, whether it be businesses, property owners or others, will be studied as well.

5. Preliminary Cost Estimate

Cost estimates for both projects will be part of the Final Report as well.

6. Implementation Plan: Funding, Easements, Permits

Part of the Final Report will also include an Implementation Plan -- a roadmap for what will be needed in the future in order to move forward.

- **Upcoming Forum April 22 re. Public Landing: Dan Bannon**

The meeting on the 22nd will be to gather information on the best uses of the Public Landing. While it is part of the whole project, it is also a separate part of the project with its own unique opportunities, constraints, and issues as related to the total project. To gather input about these issues and concerns, they will hold a separate meeting devoted entirely to the Public Landing project on April 22nd, and using a similar process to gather input they want to hear from users of the facilities about what the needs are like how much parking is needed there or are there other uses that should be incorporated there.

3. Orientation to the Megunticook Corridor and potential Riverwalk: Sarah Witte

Ms. Witte, a Landscape Architect with Dewan and Associates, introduced her segment of the presentation - explaining the concept design tool and the design approach she will employ when she prepares the schematic design for the pathway.

- **“Emerald Necklace” concept**

Ms. Witte suggested that participants consider the concept of the Riverwalk as a series of places and spaces linked together. Then think about what are those special places, and how can they be put together using sidewalks or other connectors to form a pathway. This idea of identifying places first, then finding ways to link them is a concept originating with Frederick Law Olmstead, who called these places “gems”. A plan linking gems together is now referred to as an “emerald necklace”, and although the concept has been employed in many places, the original Emerald Necklace is in Boston. It links the Commons to the fens, and then following the river connecting green spaces into one long pathway all the way to the Arnold Arboretum, and it is now over seven

miles long. In addition to preserving a greenway through an urban environment, it also provides floodplains, habitat and recreation.

Another example of the concept of connecting segments is Portland's Back Bay. Here the Trail Association started with a plan for a pathway 50 miles long; it is now well beyond 100 miles of connected trails. There is also a plan, recently revitalized, for an East Coast Greenway connecting trails from Florida to Maine; there is a great deal of interest in trails and the benefits they provide. When developing the concept for such projects, Ms. Witte advises planners to remember that the key terms are "Be Bold" and "Be Patient": Think what is best for future generations – Be Bold; but, realize that you won't be able to put all the pieces in place at one time. Keep the focus on the future and keep making progress. Be Bold first, then Be Patient.

Camden already has an Olmstead legacy in Harbor Park and the Amphitheatre, part of the Library's complex which was recently granted status as a National Landmark. Applying Olmstead's emerald necklace legacy to this Camden project would seem to be a good fit. And, that is how she begun thinking about the concept of the Riverwalk - by first identifying some of Camden's gems along the Megunticook River corridor.

- **Tour from Shirrtail Point to Harbor**, highlighting 'gems'
Her approach to the project is to divide the trail into four sections:
Section 1 begins at Shirrtail Point Park on Megunticook Lake and includes – heading downstream --the general areas along the river in between; the Coastal Mountains Land Trust property; and the Seabright Park and Trail.
Section 2 includes the wood wetlands downstream of the dams; the Megunticook Market neighborhood; and the Tannery Site.
Section 3 includes the wetlands behind the Middle School; the woody wetland area near the Town's water treatment facility; and the lower floodplain behind the residences on Mechanic Street.
Section 4 includes the Mill Pond; the river below the dam to Washington Street as it moves under buildings and streets to the flower bridge and the bridge on Main Street and the falls – this particular section and the way the river moves through the downtown under streets ending in a waterfall, is unique to Camden.
- **Project Benefits:**
Community Benefits:
 - Increase Livability
 - Places for casual meetings
 - Foster community involvement
 - Provide accessible recreation
 - Connect people and places
 - "Eyes" on the street – the more people that use the trail the safer they are

Transportation Benefits:

- Reduce congestion and parking
- Provide alternatives to cars
- Decrease traffic
- Provide alternatives to people who do not own or drive a car

Health Benefits:

- Lower the risk of heart disease
- Lower blood pressure
- Reduce high cholesterol
- Help control body weight
- Reduce risk of diabetes

Economic Benefits: There will be more discussion about this later in the process, but it is already known that in towns with good trail systems there are benefits:

- Reduced cost of medical care and sick leave
- Maintains the independence of elders and reduces the cost of institutional care
- Creates affordable transportation options – can reduce the 13% slice of household income spent on cars

4. Design approach with visual examples: Sarah Witte

- See corridor in terms of **SEGMENTS**:
There may be pieces that come along easily and some that come along later, but if they are considered as pieces you can start to think about how to put them together. These connectors are identified with signage so people know where they are and where to go; connectors may be a pathway, but they also may be sidewalks.
- **CONTEXT SENSITIVE DESIGN**: neighborhoods, systems:
Paying attention to who is here and what is right for them and design for that reality – kids riding bikes to school have certain requirements as do places where there is snow in the winter.
- **PLACES and SPACES** along the pathway:
These connections link not only spaces but places like businesses – they are good for everyone.
- **SAFETY** for users, depends on visibility:
Install trail signs so people know where to go. The Team hopes to work on finding a brand for the trail that would help people identify where points of access are. Safety, too, depends of the trail being used by other people, and the easier it is to find, the more users there will be.

- **ACCESSIBILITY** for all users: information and detailing:
There are places where the Team will have to address water or street crossings and grade, and they will need to find ways to make these places universally accessible.
- **MAINTAINABILITY and CONSTRUCTABILITY** by Town or Pathway Volunteers:
Designs need to feature ease of construction and materials need to be chosen so they are long-lasting and more easily maintained.
- **CONNECTIVITY and VISION FOR EXPANSION:**
It should be kept in mind that there are outlying areas that may be connected by the trail someday, and that inter-connectivity should be part of the vision for the future.
- **AMENITIES:**
Seating, picnic areas, interpretive signs, trail markers, artwork: Creating various places to sit and meet friends along the trail is something people really like. Amenities like this can be put in the “Be Patient” category – something to plan for the future.
- **PHASING:** be bold and then be patient:
Using the example of the East Coast Greenway, Ms. Witte reminded the group that some bold plans go dormant, but then come to life again – Be Patient.
- **LOCAL TALENT:** Public works and utilities:
Many people care about trails and will be glad to help out with maintaining the trail – scouts, neighbors, “Friends” – it is a great activity for kids and families to do together.
- **NATURAL RESOURCES** orientation, coordination with schools:
The hope here is that the Library and the Middle School will be involved in taking advantage of the year-round learning opportunities that exist in the woods and wetlands.
- **GREEN DESIGN:** what does this look like for Camden?
This is one purpose of this meeting – to determine what kind of trail Camden would like to see.

5. Opportunities and constraints: Whole Group format: Sarah Witte

- **Opportunities and strengths in Camden:**
 - Pathway’s proximity to Town
 - Waterfronts
 - Walkable neighborhoods
 - Open space
 - Historic structures
 - Dramatic river views

- **Some issues faced in designing pathways:**

- Narrow sidewalks – especially in winter
- No sidewalks
- Lack of curbing
- Heavy traffic
- Steep drop-offs
- No room for the pathway
- Inappropriate detailing
- Utility structures
- Environmental concerns
- Poison Ivy

- **Things to keep in mind:**

- Pathway users: Safety, accessibility, information
- Private properties: Privacy & Security
- Environmental: wetlands, floodplains, steep slopes

Ms. Witte’s Power Point presentation will be available on the Town’s website at: <http://www.camdenmaine.gov> . Follow the Riverwalk and Public Landing link from the Banner; on the project home page find the link to Community Meetings.

- **Whole Group Comment:**

Nancy Caudle-Johnson: She explained that she has been involved in conservation issues for twenty years, most recently spearheading the Tannery Riverwalk pathway project to a Town vote as a member of the Conservation Commission. For the past few years she has been advocating for the Town to retain the 2.7-acre Tannery property for public use. There is an easement on the rear of this property for the pathway, and she believes that it will be difficult to find a business that wants to buy the property with that pathway in place. This is a perfect place to welcome people to the entire pathway, and to educate visitors about the pathway and the river. It is also the only Town-owned property in this part of Town where there is a view of both the river and the mountains.

Leonard Lookner: In doing research on Frederick Law Olmstead, he was impressed to learn that many cities have used the emerald necklace concept to plan connected pathways. He agrees that the Riverwalk would have positive benefits: It would help resolve parking issues – it would connect the school’s parking lot that is empty in the summer to downtown; it would give people a way to get to and from other parking lots as well; it would offer schools and organizations opportunities for education; and, it would, best of all, create a pleasant way to walk to Town.

Jane LaFleur: A pathway is a successful way of “place-making” that help keep visitors in town longer because there are more things to do. In addition, the Riverwalk offers an opportunity for residents by having a new place to go to meet and to do things with families and friends.

She also told of an interactive signage system she saw recently that uses counting steps to direct people to and from various destinations that was especially fun for kids and families – something taken to a very simple level was a great success. Ms. Witte agreed that information on signs is important. She recently heard of signs that offer information on grades and terrain so people will know if they are capable of making that trip before they get started.

Kristin Nelson: She is the nurse at the Middle School and cautioned everyone that they can expect skateboarders will want to use the pathway because they skateboard everywhere.

She added that right now the river is not accessible from the school because the bank is too steep; it would be wonderful to finally have access from the school that was safe. She also supports a safe bike route for kids to Shirttail.

Anita Brosius-Scott: There are already many places to walk in the area, but there is a great need for a trail in natural areas that can be used by everyone from the fit to the mobility-challenged; currently there are not any places in the downtown where everyone has access to nature.

Peals Robel: She lives on the river and has great concerns about how this might affect her: Will she have any liability if the pathway comes by her house? She is most concerned about the invasion of her privacy, and about the potential of pavement along the river.

Beedy Parker: She is concerned about the ability to prevent erosion in some places along the river if a trail is built into the banking. Erosion has a tremendous impact on water quality, and she hopes that every consideration will be given to designing and planting so erosion is not a problem. Sometime the goal to make areas accessible outweighs consideration of not getting to places that are very sensitive. Perhaps there might be two routes in some of the more sensitive areas – one that would be accessible and one, in the most sensitive parts, that is not accessible.

Charlie Graham: He lives on the river and boats up and down never seeing anyone else. He thinks that the pathway is a great idea, and boating as way to see this area should be encouraged.

Pat McLean: She is concerned that the Town is already flooded with signs, and hopes that the plan will keep signs to a minimum and that the signs that are there will be unobtrusive.

6. Break-out groups: 30 minutes: Led by Facilitators:

Mr. Hodges introduced the facilitators - Beth Ward, Gene McKeever, Staci Coomer, Barrie Pribyl, Cassie Snyder, Meg Quijano, Steve Wilson, and Darin Bryant – who asked their group to discuss the following questions:

- a) Where are the Very Special Places in Camden, for you, especially within the Riverwalk corridor, between Megunticook Lake and the Harbor?
- b) What are your concerns with a pathway system and what would you like the Design Team to know as they begin to look at the design solutions?
- c) What pedestrian details or concepts have you seen in other communities that you think might be successful here?
- d) What do you think are the best ways to encourage people to use a pathway system in Camden?

7. Gather and report: Sarah Witte

- Group's strongest thoughts and feelings?
- Concerns? Questions? Big ideas?

Ms. Witte stated that in 25 years of doing public workshops and charettes she has never been so impressed. She is so impressed with the sensitivity to the issues and to each other seen such a turn-out and never witnessed so much sensitivity to concerns. The Town is not only sensitive to the issues that are out there, but they are ready and willing to take them on. She has no doubt that the Town will find appropriate solutions to the problems because that is what they want to do.

The reports back to the group are compiled in a separate document that is attached to the Minutes. The document is also available on the project website as “small-group-feedback”.

8. Wrap-up: Brian Hodges

Mr. Hodges suggested that there were ways to follow this project and obtain information about meetings: Sign up for the Downtown Newsletter from the website - go to the website and click on Riverwalk and Public Landing on the top banner. On the homepage of the project will be all the documents from all the meetings as well as agendas for upcoming meetings and other important announcements

He reminded attendees of the April 22nd meeting which will be held at the Celebration of Life Church in the Knox Mill building on the corner of Washington Street and the entrance to the rear parking lot across from the Public Safety parking lot.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00 pm

Respectfully submitted, Jeanne Hollingsworth, Recording Secretary