

Sabin's Pasture Working Group 02/11/08 Meeting Notes

5:30 PM – 7:30 PM, held at East Montpelier Room, Kellogg Library, Main Street, Montpelier VT.

Present: Todd Bailey, Katherine Cooper, Jennifer Hollar, Mary Hooper, Bill Kaplan, Dave Keller, Jennifer Knauer, Rodger Krussman, Jim Libby, Leigh Seddon, Roy Schiff, Jean Vissering, John Waldo, and approximately 3 members of the public.

Part III of Visioning Exercise Facilitated by Jean Vissering, Landscape Architect.

I. Review new Sketch, Development Sections & Development Illustrations

Jean presented a new sketch of proposed conservation and development areas on the property for discussion, and several overlays of what proposed development would look like on the property.

- Open Space and Development Areas illustrating three potential “phases” that might be developed over a 50-100 year time period: Phase I: development starting on Barre Street and moves up hill and east over time. Phase II: development begins in area south of existing farm road (4-5 acres). Phase III: development begins in areas north of existing farm road, and the area between the hemlock stand and the ridge (3-4 acres). If full build-out occurred, there would be 81-92 acres of open space on the property after the completion of Phase III.
- Development sketches incorporated input from the last meeting, and included dense development in the SW corner of property (SW corner includes ~200 units, plus parking). The sketch keeps most of the development below in the road in the eastern portion of the property (Development Phase II and III). Total number of unit is approximately 270-295.
- How much area would development occupy as viewed from off site? Jean offered rough sketches of the development areas as seen from Wheelock, Pleasant View and Phelps Streets.
- Two cross-sections of the development were shown, to illustrate buildings heights and their relation to property slopes and to the height of land and overlooks.

Jean requested feedback from the Working Group as she synthesizes the work of the past three meetings in her final report: **“Articulate where we have consensus and where opinions in the group diverge.”**

Individual Comments from Members of the Working Group:

- Need to define the pros and cons of development in Phases II and III; need to understand the housing need, and the cost to wildlife corridors.
- Prefer to keep the development in the phase one area, but open to development in II and III. Benefit to Phase II & III: meeting a housing need than what is incrementally greater than what can be served by Phase I. Drawback to Phase II & III: need to understand what the costs/compromises would be to the natural areas and wildlife corridors.
- Interested in a second access to property as/if development moves into Phase II and III. What is possible for inroads from other sides of the property?
- It will be counter-productive to create a development on the property adjoining Sabin's Pasture to the East, given goal of creating continuity of wildlife corridors.
- Comfortable with boundaries for Phase I. May be comfortable with Phase II, subject to alternative forms of access to the property and reality-check of plan from engineers for development of Phase II.
- Who owns the easement on the railroad bed, and what does this mean for where the bike path runs through the property? Can we move the bike path? Is there a limit on the number of crossings? Note that the planning process for the bike path may already be underway, and while there may be an opportunity to move the bike path, it is somewhat dependant on making the request before the bike path plans are finalized.
- Any land that gets set aside for development will at some point be developed if it is not part of the conserved area.
- Don't want to see development in Phase II and III. But also realize that it may be impossible to buy the property without the increased development potential. If project will work without Phase II and III (funds, need for housing, etc), than would rather not see final phases developed. *Comment from TPL in response: When thinking about development that won't be built out for 50 years, money derived from Phases II & III on a fifty year build-out will be so heavily discounted by any buyer that it does not really impact the purchase price.*
- Comfortable with Phase I. Hoping that development would be a bit lower elevation, but I can live with it.
- Need a second access road to Phase II development. Phase II makes sense if it is feasible from an engineering standpoint and seems attractive from a developer's point of view. If it adds value—allows TPL to close the deal or increase a developer's interest—OK.
- Would not like to see Phase III developed: so far down the line, and probably too expensive to develop and may negatively impact the living quality of Phase I.
- Like Phase I. Want to keep options open for Phase II —need to see if it is feasible (would it prevent TPL from going forward if Phase II is too expensive/unrealistic for a developer?)
- Like Phase I. Concerned that the development in Phases II & III might be going too far up the hillside. Causes concern about visual impact on other areas of town.

- Agree with comments about paying attention to opportunities and disadvantages to development in Phase II and III (traffic through Phase I development, expense, feasibility).
- Phase I: We need to be sure we build something that we all want to live in. How to accomplish a high-density neighborhood that reflects the best of Montpelier? This is the reason for considering Phase II and III development—takes some of the pressure/density off of Phase I area, allowing the development to be consistent with existing development patterns.
- Phase III significantly impacts—negatively—the “neck” of the wildlife corridor. A corridor of at least 500-600 feet in width is required for a viable wildlife corridor.
- City has requested an easement for access to the open space from the College through College land adjacent to Sabin's Pasture. Where will parking be at that entry point? Parking is already tight on College Street—The College would not be able to provide easement and parking, so we should be sure parking for the conservation area is part of the discussion.
- Cityscape/ Streetscape driving down from the College to Barre Street: vistas are important to the feeling of the community, not just to those who explore the property. What will Barre Street look like along street when buildings go up? Are there ways to leave keyholes so that sightlines on to the property from Barre Street are preserved? Design so that there are views into the property that draw people in.
- Not okay with Phases II and III. People are currently using the trails on the eastern part of the property, where these Phases propose development. The steep slope and high meadow is a wonderful view, but isn't used all that much. Phases II and III compromise too much: disrupts trails, adds noise, increases traffic. Development in these areas would severely impact what I think is worth protecting on the property.
- Some portions of II and III are on areas that are currently wooded and/or used as walking areas. Open meadows are a unique resource.
- Could the proposed road to Phases II and III be moved lower down on the slope? (This is not likely due to extremely steep slopes and ledge to the east of the south slope. Moving the road to the northwest would impact the sledding hill.)
- Phase I including 150-200 units is reasonable number of units in this area.
- Is access from Town Hill Road possible? (Resulting impacts to hiking and wildlife corridor were noted.)
- It will be critical to know how a developer would look at these Phases.

In closing, members of the working group emphasized these questions:

- Is this sketch realistic from engineering perspective?
- Is the development in Phases II and III financially necessary?
- Is this sketch the plan that the working group can support as a recommended plan? Are their changes to be made?

Jean reviewed her role for the working group. Her charge was to:

- identify undevelopable land

- identify places that should be conserved (views, special habitats) based on input from the Working Group.
- consider minimum, moderate and maximum densities and present them to the group, taking into account other criteria from the group.

Next Steps:

- Jean will synthesize her work in a report for the Working Group to review. The report will summarize process, show illustrations, sum up areas of agreement and identify areas where members of the Working Group diverged, include questions raised.
 - The report will not include all of the draft sketches the group considered.
 - The report will present integrated conservation and development outcome(s) for the property. What does the land tell us is possible? What are the community desires (as represented by members of the Working Group)?
 - The report will include a statement of community values along with more specific Development and Open Space Criteria that the Working Group recommends should guide future activity on the property.
 - Jean's report will be available to the Working Group in draft form for review and comment. Working Group members will have the opportunity to circulate a draft report among their constituent groups to get feedback before the report is finalized by the Working Group.
 - When the report is in final form, meaning that the plan(s) is one that the Working Group can agree to support, the report will be made available for general public comment.
- Working Group members expressed interest in taking field trips to Hubbard Park and to Sabin's Pasture in order to get a real view of houses, distances, trails.
- TPL will contact an engineer to conduct an analysis of the proposed development areas. Engineering information is critical because it will help define what is on and off the table. If members have specific questions for the engineer, please send them to TPL. Meeting with a developer will also be considered in order to determine the feasibility of various options.
- Members of the Working Group are encouraged to look closely at the revised Development and Open Space Criteria, and to e-mail comments to Jean.
- Next Meeting is scheduled for Monday March 10th, 5:30-7:30 at the Kellogg-Hubbard Library, East Montpelier Room.