



NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION

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MEMORANDUM

TO: Paul Cramer, Chair, Recreation Commission
FROM: Brandon Schmitt, Director NRC
CC: Matt Chin, Recreation Director, Mark Wolfson, Recreation Commissioner
DATE: January 31, 2024
RE: Morses Pond Beach Design

We want to reiterate our appreciation to Recreation for advancing this much-needed redesign of Morses Pond Beach and Bathhouse. Morses Pond is a natural asset for the Town and efforts to improve the infrastructure and make it more accessible/inclusive to all will be a benefit to the Town.

We anticipate that the NRC will vote on either 1 or 15 February to determine whether the NRC is in support of the allocation of CPC funds to advance this project from feasibility to design stage. We appreciate the feedback to questions that have been submitted to date.

As Weston and Sampson writes, the (Morses Pond Beach and Bathhouse) designs should be simple and sustainable, and in keeping with the inherent historical, environmental, cultural, and social site character.

The NRC has identified the following considerations that need to be addressed:

- 1) **Anticipate wetlands considerations and plan/budget for mitigation.** The NRC wants to ensure early and appropriate coordination with Wetlands Protection Committee to avoid delays later in the process.
 - a. Weston and Sampson indicates that the exact number of trees to be removed will be determined once building designs are finalized. As currently designed, the Morses Pond Beach and Bathroom project appears to remove trees in the wetlands buffer zone, which will require replacement. The plans also appear to result in an increase in impervious surface, which will also trigger a requirement for stormwater mitigation. The replacement of trees to fulfill the Wetlands requirements cannot be counted toward any stormwater mitigation requirements.
 - b. As noted in the feasibility study, Weston & Sampson will replace any trees removed with native tree species, which would also be the NRC's preferred approach.
 - c. If the project increases impervious surfaces by 5%, then there will be a need to produce a stormwater report. There will also likely be a need to decrease both the rate and volume of runoff by 5%.
 - d. If the project disturbs 5,000 square feet or more, then there will also likely be a need to complete a wildlife habitat impact study.
- 2) **Encourage low-impact sustainable design incorporated whenever possible throughout all phases of the project** (including the buildings, the playground, the landscape, the pathways,

etc). Our interest extends to ensuring that appropriate care is taken in the construction process to avoid negative impacts (e.g. use of quality fill, plant material to avoid introduction of invasives).

- a. In this context, the NRC notes the request to add exterior and interior lighting and heating/cooling to the building, which is a change from the current building. The NRC has concerns about lighting, especially outdoor lighting because it disrupts sleep cycles and behavior of plants and animals. If lighting is incorporated into the design, then the NRC will expect that processes/policies and enforcement mechanisms will be presented that minimize the impacts of lighting (e.g. motion controls, limited hours for illumination, limited use of lights, IDA compliant fixtures, etc).
- b. The estimated landscaping allocation of \$150,000 is noted. As the design is refined, the NRC will look forward to additional information about what will be covered by this allocation to ensure sufficient funds, and to avoid duplication in budgeting.
- c. The NRC will also look forward to regular/final review of landscaping plans, including revisions.

3) Impact of potential increases in use during spring and fall seasons on the environment and the neighborhood - The NRC recognizes that Morses Pond is a natural asset for the Town and residents enjoy the Pond in many different ways (passive recreation, hiking, water sports, swimming, beach use, birdwatching, etc). NRC also appreciates the partnership with Recreation on programming the summer events at Morses Pond.

The proposed design includes the potential for changes in the frequency, duration, days and times of use. NRC wants to understand better and appreciates that there is limited data available at this time. NRC will expect changes to be supported by demonstrated need, and not to provide variety in programs that already enjoy access to existing facilities elsewhere. This is because changes and increases in use can negatively affect our important ecosystems at Morses Pond and the most gentle use, while improving existing uses, is the best way to protect our natural asset.

The NRC anticipates that Recreation will present a seasonal [application to use Town parks and conservation](#) for approval for spring and fall seasons.

4) Ownership, maintenance and budgeting of the Morses Pond Beach and Bathhouse

The building ownership is an outstanding question. Assuming that the NRC owns the building and bathhouse, the NRC may propose to lease the buildings to Recreation. In this arrangement, Recreation will assume the responsibility for planning for, budgeting, and ensuring maintenance of the buildings.

5) NRC Engagement with Recreation during subsequent project phases

The NRC seeks to engage with Recreation through a liaison to any working group or sub-committee created to shepherd this process. The NRC also expects Recreation to provide updates at key milestones (to be defined.)

NRC members are encouraged to consider the Criteria for Evaluating Land Use Change (<https://wellesleyma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/1026/NRC-Policy-Manual-2017-Edition-PDF>) (2-9) in the NRC's Law, Policy and Regulation Handbook. NRC Members may also wish to review considerations for the feasibility stage (<https://wellesleyma.gov/DocumentCenter/View/11823/PBC-Proponent-User-Manual>)(p. 7) in the Permanent Building Committee Proponent's Handbook.