

Holyoke Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes 12/16/2021 (Remote via Zoom)

Conservation Commission Members Present: Michael Dodge (Chairperson), Bernice Bowler (Vice Chairperson), Jeffrey Horan, Mary Moriarty, John Perdrizet, Chelsea Gazillo, Rosemary Arnold

Conservation Commission Members Absent: None

Staff Present: Yoni Glogower (Holyoke Conservation and Sustainability Director)

Members of the Public Present: Becky Kose (Applicant), Lisa Carrozza (Stantec Consulting), Sean Foster (Stantec Consulting)

1. Call to Order

Chairperson Dodge called the public meeting to order at 6:18 p.m. He explained the protocols of remote public hearings.

2. Item No. 1 - Draft Order of Conditions - Notice of Intent (DEP186-0291)

Applicant: EMB Natural Ventures, LLC

Representative: VHB

Location: 140 and 160 Middle Water Street with parcels as identified on the agenda

Description: Redevelopment of existing buildings and parking lot repaving within Riverfront and 100-foot buffer zone of banks

Chairperson Dodge stated that the purpose of this item was for Director Glogower to go over the Draft Order of Conditions. As the public hearing was closed, Chairperson Dodge reminded everyone that the public can no longer comment on this matter, and Commissioners must direct their questions to Director Glogower. Director Glogower shared the Updated Restoration Plan that John Furman (VHB) provided. He detailed the updates, including the mitigation plans. Vice Chair Bowler asked Director Glogower what was written near the railroad tracks because the text was difficult to read. Director Glogower clarified that it referred to the arborvitae that were to be planted. Commissioner Horan asked if the foundational structure under the debris would be removed, and Director Glogower confirmed that it would.

Director Glogower then shared the Draft Order of Conditions. He listed the three special conditions under the Local Ordinance Permit issued to facilitate mill building redevelopment activities. The conditions are the square footages of the different resource areas, the amount of work to be performed in each, and how much the mitigation area is, combined with the temporary impacts. Approval was contingent on the issuance of a permit from the Holyoke Stormwater Authority and Planning Board, and EMB received both of those approvals. All other necessary permits would need to be acquired. Director Glogower mentioned the variance for work within the 50-foot buffer zone, the proposed mitigation plans, how the Commission deals with issues of compliance, etc. He went over the Massachusetts Wetlands Protection Act's special conditions. He explained that the permit is valid for three years. Director Glogower then listed the pre-construction requirements. He noted that one of the conditions -- "All existing and new debris shall be removed from the site prior to start of work" -- might be confusing to the Applicant as a large portion of the work is the removal of the debris pile. Commissioner Moriarty asked if Director Glogower wanted to highlight this topic and return to it at a later point, and he agreed. Director Glogower explained that erosion control devices shall be placed before construction begins. Also, work on the parking lot located at 160 Middle Water Street shall not take place until the debris pile

is removed and permanent mitigation areas are established, as explained in the 12/3/2021 Riverfront Mitigation Plan.

Vice Chair Bowler asked if VHB would have to meet with Director Glogower before they start removing the debris, and Director Glogower explained that that would be the pre-construction conference. Commissioner Moriarty suggested a change in the wording of the parking lot condition, as the removal of the debris pile would happen first, construction would come second, and mitigation would be the final part of the process. Vice Chair Bowler stated that the wording was confusing and that more detail was needed. Commissioner Perdrizet asked if VHB would have to dig up a section of parking lot and put in drainage underneath it. Director Glogower confirmed this was the case.

Commissioner Moriarty wanted clarification on the meaning of “permanent mitigation area established” and whether that meant that the plants themselves would be established or if the area would simply be marked off. Director Glogower stated, as written, it would mean that the mitigation area would need to be established before construction. However, it could be changed if the Commission felt that condition was not necessary. Commissioner Horan stated that he would be fine with VHB planting at the end of construction. As others agreed, Director Glogower cut that portion.

Vice Chair Bowler asked if it could be made clear to the Applicant that the pre-construction conference would have to occur before any work is performed on the property. Director Glogower added that construction could only take place “if all the pre-construction requirements have been met.” Director Glogower continued to read the document. Commissioner Perdrizet asked if the Order of Conditions stated that the developer would need to contact Director Glogower about any potential construction accidents. Director Glogower stated that it does, depending on the severity of the accident.

Director Glogower continued to read the Order of Conditions and asked Commissioners whether to keep the portion about snow removal. Vice Chair Bowler stated that it should stay. Director Glogower read about the Wetlands Protection Act’s request for the riverfront resource area. He then read about how the Applicant has to follow the terms laid out in the Long-term Stormwater Management System Operations and Maintenance Plan filed in March 2021. Lastly, he read the requirements for a Certificate of Compliance and asked if the Commissioners had any questions.

3. Item No. 2 - Roll Call Vote - Approve Order of Conditions

Commissioner Horan made a motion to approve the Order of Conditions for Notice of Intent DEP186-0291. Commissioner Moriarty seconded the motion. Commissioners then voted unanimously to approve the Order of Conditions.

4. Item No. 3 - Public Hearing - Notice of Intent (DEP186-0292)

Applicant: Holyoke Energy Storage 1 LLC c/o Convergent Energy + Power

Representative: Stantec Consulting Service Inc.

Location: Sargeant Street with parcels identified on the agenda

Description: Battery storage construction of an existing paved lot within 100-foot buffer zone of banks.

Chairperson Dodge stated the Commission had not previously held a public hearing on this matter. Applicant Becky Kose (Convergent Energy + Power) gave some background on the project. Convergent Energy were awarded the project by Holyoke Gas and Electric and came to an energy services agreement with them. The property is located on Holyoke Gas and Electric property adjacent to Cabot Street Substation, where the battery

storage system will interconnect. The purpose of the project is to reduce Holyoke System demands during monthly and summer peaks, as well as to provide reliability and resiliency to their grid. In addition, the dispatch of energy from the project will allow Holyoke Gas and Electric to reduce their energy bill and save money on repairs of the service area.

Lisa Carrozza (Stantec) explained that the project is located on Sargeant Street between first- and second-level canal. The site is 1.44 acres, and the project will occupy approximately 5,500 square feet. Carrozza shared her screen so that Commissioners could see the area in question. She showed a figure to illustrate that they are not within any endangered species or rare habitats polygons established by Massachusetts Natural Heritage Division of Fisheries & Wildlife. She shared a figure that showed that they are not within a 100-year flood zone or bordering land subject to flooding.

Lisa Carrozza described the Existing Conditions Plan. She showed a measurement for the 50-foot undisturbed buffer and explained that it is disturbed, as the entire site is paved in asphalt. She showed the 100-foot buffer and the battery energy storage layout. Sean Foster (Stantec) shared the proposed site plan. He explained that they would remove the existing pavement, put in new paths, and reduce the impervious area by putting in a stone reservoir. He explained the site constraints, such as underwater culverts and existing egresses to the building. He explained that the entire area would be enclosed in an 8-foot-high chain-link fence. He stated that they would also install a hydrant, perform underground utilities, add lighting. He discussed their erosion and sediment control items. Foster then shared photos of project site. He explained that Stantec was subject to a Stormwater Management Permit under small development with the Department of Public Works. The City Engineer completed his review and provided a decision with conditions.

Chairperson Dodge asked if the Commissioners had any questions. Vice Chair Bowler asked if Sean Foster could return to the sheet that showed the concrete washout area and explain how it works. Foster explained the process in detail. Vice Chair Bowler asked Foster to explain what a rectangle on the picture was, and he said that it was the stabilized construction entrance. Commissioner Perdrizet asked for clarification on another part of the picture, and Foster explained that there would be trenching for wiring in that location. Commissioner Perdrizet wondered if the 50-foot buffer zone could be rotated so that less work would be performed within its limits. Foster responded that they tried to rotate it 90 degrees but found that they then encroached on the abutter's building. Commissioner Perdrizet agreed that it should stay in the same location given this information. Vice Chair Bowler voiced concerns that the concrete washout for trucks was partially within the 50-foot buffer and wondered if it could be moved. Foster stated that would be an easy change to make. He asked if the construction entrance should be moved as well, and Vice Chair Bowler requested that they discuss their options for its relocation by the next meeting.

Commissioner Horan stated that the Commission often requests that mitigation be done when there is development within the 50-foot buffer. He asked if there was any possibility for vegetation or a buffer closer to the canal. Foster explained that there is currently a vegetated buffer made up mostly of grass. He pointed out that the driveway does not perfectly line up with the right-of-way access for the canal. He asked the Commission if the right-of-way access restricts them in any way. Lisa Carrozza wondered if there was an opportunity to include a planting strip between the fence and the right-of-way access. Commissioner Horan believed that sounded like a reasonable approach. Becky Kose stated that they would have to discuss that with Holyoke Gas and Electric as they need to use that access drive and the underground utilities in that area as well. Commissioner Horan asked where exactly the utilities were located. Foster shared his screen to show where the utility poles were located. Commissioner Horan then asked they could plant some shrubs in that area, and Kose believed that they could. Director Glogower suggested a wildflower mix rather than shrubs as it is close to the canal wall. Kose asked Foster if that area is a public right-of-way and whether they would need permission to plant there. Foster stated they would do their due diligence and check on possible restrictions beforehand.

Commissioner Moriarty asked if Stantec planned to be involved throughout the entire project or if they were just the design and permitting agent. Becky Kose responded that Stantec were the design and permitting consultants and that a different firm would be in charge of construction. Commissioner Moriarty pointed out that, in the plans (around C-100), there was reference to the owner's agent being the contact person. She wondered if a statement could be added to the plans stating that "The contractor will communicate with the Holyoke Conservation Agent before the start of any work." Kose responded in the affirmative. Commissioner Moriarty then asked who would be responsible for the removal of the battery once it becomes obsolete, as well as if there was a decommissioning plan. Kose responded that Convergent would be responsible for decommissioning and that they have plans for all of their projects. She stated that the contract with their battery supplier provides that Convergent remove and recycle the battery material and that they return the site to its pre-construction condition. Convergent's contract with Holyoke Gas and Electric also requires them to decommission the site. Commissioner Horan asked if that was stated somewhere in the plan, and Foster explained that the plans were focused on proposed work and did not discuss decommissioning. Chairperson Dodge asked if there were any other questions from Commissioners, and there were none.

Chairperson Dodge proposed that they schedule a site visit. Vice Chair Bowler agreed. Becky Kose stated that she would like to inform Holyoke Gas and Electric prior to the Commission performing the site walk. Vice Chair Bowler said that the Commission would like information on the variance request, mitigation information, and other alternatives in writing. Director Glogower proposed that they schedule the site visit for January 10, a few days before the next meeting (January 13). Commissioners and the Stantec representatives agreed to the date. Chairperson Dodge asked if there were any other questions from Commissioners or the public, and there were none.

5. Roll Call Vote - Continue the Public Hearing to 1/13/2022 Meeting

Commissioner Horan made a motion to continue the public hearing to the 1/13/2022 meeting. Commissioners voted unanimously to continue. Chairperson Dodge excused the Applicant and the Stantec representatives. Commissioner Moriarty stated for the record that the Commission asked the Applicant to return with a specific written variance request.

6. Item No. 4 - Formal Vote - Approve Minutes from 9/2 and 9/23

Chairperson Dodge asked if Commissioners had a chance to review the minutes. Vice Chair Bowler asked how much detail should be put into the minutes and wondered who should complete them. Chairperson Dodge stated that he and Director Glogower discussed contracting a third-party vendor to complete the minutes. Vice Chair Bowler asked what funds would be used for this, and Director Glogower explained that there are funds set up for permitting fees that could possibly be used for administrative assistance. Vice Chair Bowler wondered how many pages a full transcript of a meeting would be, and Commissioner Horan suggested that they request a transcript to find out. Commissioner Gazillo proposed that, given the trickiness of condensing information appropriately, they hire an intern or an AmeriCorps VISTA to take the minutes. Director Glogower wondered if municipalities can get AmeriCorps positions, and Commissioner Gazillo stated that they could in the past.

Chairperson Dodge asked Director Glogower how other Commissions in the city handle this issue. Glogower stated that, while some Commissions type up their own minutes, he would like to hire a transcription service and see how it goes. He also wanted to find out if they would qualify for work study with Holyoke Community College. Director Glogower recommended that they eventually hire a full-time clerical position/conservation

assistant. Commissioner Gazillo pointed out the fact that Governor Baker signed a \$4 billion ARPA proposal, which states that some ARPA funds can be used for environmental infrastructure if they will “provide grants to municipalities or a group of municipalities to hire a sustainability coordinator to organize, secure funding, implement, and monitor projects related to state climate adaptation and energy programs.” Commissioner Horan asked Commissioner Gazillo if she had anything else to add, and she said that she was able to secure funding for soil health.

Chairperson Dodge asked if Commissioners were ready to vote on the minutes, and Vice Chair Bowler stated it would need to be tabled until the next meeting.

7. Item No. 5 - Discussion - Letters of Support for the 2021 CPA Project
Location: Gloutak Woods and Anniversary Hill Park

Director Glogower said that he is working on the proposals for the two projects. He finished a draft of the narrative for Gloutak Woods and offered to share it with the Commission. He noted the premise of each project: 1) the trail work at Gloutak Woods in collaboration with Greenagers, and 2) for Anniversary Hill Park, the funding to serve as a match for the final site design specifications and construction. Director Glogower asked the Commission if they would consider writing letters of support for one or both of those projects and opened the floor up for comment. Commissioner Moriarty asked if Commissioners should write letters individually or as a group. Director Glogower responded that the Commission should write them together. Chairperson Dodge asked if they could use as a previously-supported project’s letter as a template to guide them, and Director Glogower stated that he could draft one for the Commission.

8. Roll Call Vote - Approval of Letters of Support

Commissioner Horan moved for the Commission to write letters of support for the projects, and Commissioners voted unanimously to approve the motion.

9. Item No. 6 - Upcoming Items for Tentative Meeting on 1/13/2022

Chairperson Dodge reminded the Commission that they would need to post two meetings for January 13. The first meeting would be an organizational meeting, where the Commission would elect a new Chairperson and Vice Chairperson. The second meeting would be a regular business meeting of the Holyoke Conservation Commission, which would include the continued public hearing and any other projects that Director Glogower wants to discuss. Director Glogower stated that, at this point, they had not received any new applications or items; however, new Applicants would have until 12/30 to submit.

Vice Chair Bowler asked what the first course of action would be for the 9/2 and 9/23 minutes. Vice Chair Bowler suggested that Director Glogower edit the previous minutes and request a transcript for the October meeting.

10. Item No. 7 - Mail/Other Items Not Reasonably Anticipated by the Chair

Commissioner Moriarty asked if Director Glogower could inform new Applicants that the Commission would like contractors to communicate with the Conservation Agent prior to work being performed. Commissioner Horan asked Director Glogower if that would be easy to implement or if that clause was already included in local ordinances. Director Glogower stated that he would look into it. He then explained that they have a project checklist that is typically included with the Notice of Intent and that updating that checklist might suffice. Vice Chair Bowler added that there should be something in writing about a variance request. Director Glogower stated that he could create a worksheet that covers the variance in the new year.

11. Adjourn

The Commission voted unanimously to adjourn the meeting.