

Holyoke Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes 05/26/2022 (Remote via Zoom)

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

Conservation Commission Members Absent: Michael Dodge

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

Members of the public present: BOYD WILLEY (removed), Mark Noble (removed); Daniel Nitzsche and Nate Russell (DCAM on behalf of Holyoke Soldiers' Home RDA); Nancy Putnam (DCR);

1. Call to Order

Vice-Chairperson Horan called the meeting to order. He explained there were a number of issues on the agenda, the first being a public hearing that is continued from May 12, 2022, re: Delorean Power.

2. Item No. 1 - Public Hearing (continued) – Notice of Intent (WE186-0294)

Notice of Intent, continued from May 12, 2022.

Applicant: Delorean Power

Representative: BL Companies

Location: 361 Whitney Avenue.

Number: 17600036.

Description: Construction of a battery energy storage system within the buffer zone of vegetative wetlands.

Patrick explained that he, Director Glogower, and Commissioner Moriarty did a site visit to the wetlands to review the plans and look at delineation along the west side of the proposed footprint. There are two major comments from the site visit: First, regarding the delineation between Flags 7 and 8, Director Glogower and Commissioner Moriarty felt that BL had missed an area of skunk cabbage that would push the delineation line further east, which in turn bumps the 50-foot buffer zone further east, closer to the proposed fence line on the SW corner. BL may need to go back to the area and update the site plans.

Second item from the site visit: Comments from the EPA. Patrick opened up to discussion about whether the erosion control plan can be improved or whether it is satisfactory. They did reach out to DEP and ask for specifics on what can be improved on the plan; have not heard back to date.

Chairperson Bowler requested to hear from Commissioner Moriarty or Director Glogower about the site visit with any questions or comments.

Commissioner Moriarty thought the wetland delineation is not clear and the delineator needs to go back and designate the limits of the wetland. This is a big deal in order to move ahead. Also, there were no markings for either the staging area or the actual final location. Other than maps, there were

no stakes out there from the contractor. More time is needed to delineate and mark areas being worked in. Storage will be right near a parking lot that is frequently full of water and near a wetland. She could not tell where the footprint is going to be. Map has measurements, but the wetland is undefined.

Commissioner Moriarty also did not see an O&M Plan (Operations & Management). It is a grassy area being converted into pebbles or pavement, it is right up against wetlands, and plans for mowing and maintenance are needed. Commissioner Moriarty would like to see O&M Plan, delineation done with more clarity, and the two footprints need to be marked.

Director Glogower added that to his knowledge, this project does not require a storm water permit, so that is usually where the O&M Plan would come in. We do have sedimentation and erosion control measures before and after. He encourages the Commission to think about ongoing conditions for the site, so those can be included in the Order of Conditions without an O&M Plan. Director Glogower took a less concerned view of the delineation. The flags are out. There is one area where the delineator should go back out to double check. They did not have their soil corer with them at the time, so had to go by vegetation, and it seemed like a relatively straight line on the delineation. Without coring into the soil, they did not have a very clear idea of the wetland characteristics, but it would be worth checking; a subtle change in delineation could result in necessitating a request for variance or trying to shift the whole operation. It would be helpful to have at least four corner markings for the containers' location. Got a general sense only.

Commissioner Moriarty asked where the energy is coming from - i.e., a solar field? Patrick replied that it is a standalone facility with the energy coming on/off the grid.

Vice-Chairperson Horan asked about where the delineation would effect the design, but felt that Director Glogower already answered that it could. Asked Commissioner Moriarty about the flooding she was referring to. Commissioner Moriarty responded that it is the NW parking lot. A wetland borders two sides of the parking lot. This whole area was very wet to begin with, so in winter and spring, that corner is often covered with water. They should know about it, for the safety of the battery storage.

Vice-Chairperson Horan asked to see the site up on screen one more time. Patrick shared his screen to show the site, explaining placement of another flag will be involved, bumping the 50-foot buffer for the fence line. The question will be whether the corner needs to be adjusted enough to stay out of that 50-foot buffer. Vice-Chairperson Horan commented it doesn't look like it would create a major design change. Others agree. Some minor changes to the layout can be made if necessary and still stay out of the buffer zone but avoid rearranging the footprint.

Chairperson Bowler asked if Patrick thinks it can get done in time for the next meeting. Patrick says that is the goal. Hoping to get BL back out and do field work and delineation before next meeting. Chairperson Bowler thinks another site visit will be needed, so coordination with them will be key, getting new maps if necessary, updates on flagging, etc. She wants to make sure there is time to respond before the next meeting and for Director Glogower to hear from Patrick with an update.

Questions from the public: Boyd Willey and Mark Noble. Mr. Willey asked how many milliamps are the batteries, to which Patrick will need to follow up. Mr. Willey asked what is being powered with the batteries, to which Patrick said that it is a backup power supply to Baystate medical facility. Both men were removed from the meeting.

Patrick summarized that before the next site visit, the Commission would like to see an updated delineation, staked-out locations for footprint and temporary staging area.

3. Roll Call Vote - Approve Continuance until 6/9/22

Chairperson Bowler requested a motion to continue until the next meeting on June 9. Patrick made the motion, and Commissioner Moriarty seconded. Commissioners voted unanimously to approve the continuance.

4. Item No. 2 - Request for Determination of Applicability -

Applicant: Capital Asset Management and Maintenance

Representative: GZA, Geo Environmental, Incorporated

Location: 110 Cherry St., Holyoke (Soldiers' Home)

Description: Verification of wetland delineation boundaries only

Mr. Dan Nitzsche introduced himself representing DCAM on behalf of Holyoke Soldiers' Home RDA. RDA is specifically for wetland boundary confirmation. The wetland boundary is specifically located along the western boundary, and Mr. Nate Russell is asked to share his screen with the map. Mr. Nitzsche explained that along the western edge of the property, they delineated a wetland resource. There are actually two wetland resources in that area. It is predominantly bordering vegetated wetland (evidenced by soils and plants). There are also some small sections of bank (defined channel, differentiating bank, with no BBW on the edge). Flags start at the SW corner of the property for Flag A1 and continue north until Cherry Street, ending at Flag A26, right at the culvert. From topography, you see it is a natural drainage area that takes water from Soldiers' Home plus adjacent Homestead Ave. properties and conveys water north to a culvert under Cherry. Based on this, the wetland on the property seems to be a bordering vegetated wetland to the bank resource, the culvert, and the small sections of bank. Did field walk two days ago with Director Glogower and Chair.

Chairperson Bowler confirmed she and Director Glogower did go out on a recent site visit. They felt the delineation was done well. Chairperson Bowler commented on the large amount of poison ivy at the site. Concern about neighbors dumping leaves, branches, and whole evergreen trees in the area. Concluded that they are going to send a letter to the residents about the fact that that is a wetland; also considered dumping. Want to send letter to see if that issue can be straightened out.

Director Glogower followed up by adding that they had their soil corers at their visit. Subtle changes in grade mean that you have to make a judgment with the soil. Overall, satisfied with the accuracy of the boundary.

Director Glogower answered a question clarifying that there is a very old stormwater drainage system on the site. Mr. Russell added that that is the existing stormwater drainage system for the Soldiers' Home that was constructed probably the 1950s, so it is considered a paved swale. This collects water

for two areas of the site and conveys it down into what was probably a drainage channel at the time, at Cherry Street. It discharges into what is now a wetland, near Flag A23 or 22, and then enters the municipal drainage around Flag A26. It is the only mechanism for water to exit this area, so Cherry Street forms a natural embankment/dam.

Commissioner Moriarty followed up saying she thought it went under the road and into the wetland and down to Community Field. That was her understanding from the last time they were out there for the I-91 improvements.

Chairperson Bowler reminded the group that what they are being asked is only to verify the delineation where the wetland is on their property. They recognize that whatever project they are going to be working on in that area will require them to come back to the Commission.

Vice-Chairperson Horan asked a question trying to understand where the stream is and what is considered the stream. Mr. Nitzsche clarified that the swales are on the slope of the hillside from the facility down the hill and they do not connect to any wetlands. They just discharge into the wetland that we delineated around Flag 23, 24. The swales are not regulated under the Wetlands Protection Act. They are just conveying storm water. The natural system that they delineated is a natural unlined "bank." There is also BBW along that stream system. Its width varies.

Commissioner Moriarty asked a question clarifying if the intermittent stream is off the property and not part of this project. Mr. Russell explained that it's not riverfront, because that's only for perennial streams, and this one is intermittent. This resource would have 100-foot buffer zone. Vice-Chairperson Horan agreed that it would have been helpful to have the intermittent stream shown, for clarification, from a delineation standpoint.

Mr. Russell elaborated that if you're standing on the SW corner looking north right along the property line, the beginning of the wetland is about 6 feet wide, then goes to 15-20 feet at widest section in middle, then narrows down to a stream again around Flag 18-19, then opens up again in the 21-26 numbers as the BBW flares out a bit, because that is where the water is backing up when the flow of water cannot get into the culvert fast enough. That BBW is the widest part of the BBW on the whole property. Most of the wetland along the stream is probably no more than 25 feet off the property line going east. The BBW extends a larger buffer zone onto the facility than the bank area, which is why the bank is not super well defined out there, because the BBW creates the larger jurisdiction.

Mr. Nitzsche points out the blue line up on screen, which gives the general outline of the flow. He points out the high slope of the wooded portion of the area around the hospital to the wetlands, so that is why the channel is established down where it is.

5. Roll Call Vote - Delineation - Positive 2A Determination

Chairperson Bowler proposed to vote on the delineation, which would be a positive 2A boundary designations of the resource area described in the reference plan are confirmed as accurate. Director Glogower clarified that the wetlands that are accurate are the boundaries bordering vegetated wetlands. Chairperson Bowler asked for a motion. Commissioner Moriarty made the motion.

Seconded by Commissioner Arnold. Commissioner Perdrizet abstained due to missing some of the conversation. Motion carries.

Chairperson Bowler thanked guests for joining them and wished them luck with the project.

6. Item No. 3 - Discussion - Mt. Tom Invasive Management

Chairperson Bowler introduced Nancy Putnam on behalf of DCR, who provided a summary of 2021 invasive species control efforts at Mt. Tom and has proposals for 2022 plans. Ms. Putnam explained that SWCA is working with the DCR and going out each year to manage the invasive species. She shared some of the monthly duties and some of the recent work done in winter. The plan is to treat it in the late summer/early fall so that the plants will be small when treated and less herbicide will be used. Ms. Putnam described these projects as "ongoing stewardship" and having knowledge of the timing of plant life cycles. She explained this program has been successful and was congratulated by members of the Commission and thanked for the update and for her team's work.

Chairperson Bowler invited Director Glogower to pull up the information on the variance for updating standards. The first item on the variance request was Item No. 1 - Information on Variance, Updating Standards. He discussed that everyone has to fill out a worksheet, but it could be supplemented either on the worksheet or a different document and explained in more detail what the Commission is looking for with variance requests. Chairperson Bowler commented that she liked how Director Glogower defined disturbance, both permanent and temporary, which is generally not presented to the Commission. Chairperson Bowler opened this up for discussion. Vice-Chairperson Horan asked if there are not usually three criteria for a variance, and the group confirmed that there are four. Vice-Chairperson Horan asked if they wanted that listed here as well. Chairperson Bowler commented that there should be four on there, which was confirmed.

Item 2 on the request is Alternative Design. Chairperson Bowler was thinking of having a request to try to list at least two. Director Glogower added that he finds that 2 and 3 are similar. Commissioner Moriarty asked if there was a way of phrasing it so that they do not say there are "no alternatives." Chairperson Bowler suggested putting a numbered list with lines to indicate they are looking for three things. Vice-Chairperson Horan suggested "Options for Alternative Designs, even if they are found to be impractical," so the applicants are obligated to add more information. Commissioner Perdrizet asked a question about how to deal with requests that are too expensive. Director Glogower explained that it's not explicit in the ordinance, but in the regulations for Riverfront, it is very clear about what alternatives need to be considered and which can be rejected by the Commission. One of them is exorbitant expense that would make the project impractical. An estimate of reasonable cost should be provided for Commission to verify. Chairperson Bowler opined that using the phrase "even if impractical" covers monetary as well as logistical barriers. Vice-Chairperson Horan wonders if we have such a form, a form should not preclude them showing a design or sketch. The form merely helps organize the process for the Commission. Vice-Chairperson Horan suggests explaining that this is to benefit the applicant and the Commission to allow them to make sure all necessary information is submitted. Chairperson Bowler suggests adding, "Please include all this information in your variance request" so they will know that the info can be included in it. Vice-Chairperson Horan followed up by wondering if they require that the form be filled out every time, or each component be answered. Chairperson Bowler agrees. An email, letter, or the form would be acceptable, but all the information

is needed with the request. Director Glogower added the concern that letters were inconsistent, but the same form would make things more consistent in format. Director Glogower recommends having a small instruction area to explain importance of form and to attach any applicable designs. Chairperson Bowler agrees and suggests that the worksheet be directed to be attached with any letter request. More discussion was had about how to format the worksheet and whether to include a letter. Vice-Chairperson Horan feels this worksheet should be made the request so that it's pared down, concise, and uniform. The Commission went over the other items on the list. Vice-Chairperson Horan feels that adding too much more information is too wordy. Commissioner Moriarty comments that it gives them the option to "propose" mitigation. Director Glogower shared some examples of what mitigation options people have provided, such as removing surface elsewhere, planting trees, invasive removal. Chairperson Bowler asked under No. 4, how is the Commission defining "within the watershed"? There is no one correct answer. Chairperson Bowler proposed taking a look at this again in the next meeting. Adding signature and date to bottom. Director Glogower is going to review and have it ready to discuss next time.

7. Budget

Commissioner Moriarty commented that the letter makes clear that Director Glogower does multiple jobs and is in need of help. Chairperson Bowler added that one of the next steps is to go back to Aaron and talk with him, because hopefully as of July 1, Director Glogower would have an assistant. Planning has 3 clerks total. They are going to be hiring a new Mass in Motion coordinator position that will now be separate from the senior project manager (so will be 2 different people now). Potential there for getting Director Glogower more help with some of his grant projects. Chairperson Bowler asked if Director Glogower wants to speak with Aaron and Sharon; he agrees to set it up for next week.

Director Glogower shared that a personnel director reached out about a Mass Hire program called Youth Works, doing summer to fall placements for people ages 14-24, paid through Mass Hire, to do 20-hour internships, job placements within City departments. Commissioner Moriarty advised that Director Glogower should be specific about what he wants and needs, because the intern will likely need a lot of direction and instruction.

Vice-Chairperson Horan brought up that the dues and subscriptions were cut significantly. He asked if that was because Director Glogower was able to get the software elsewhere. Director Glogower said \$2,500 was towards the software. Last fiscal year's \$1,200 budget was already a reduction from \$2,200 from year before. Further reduced to \$300, which will really only just pay for dues of approximately \$278. Urban Sustainability Directors Network has been partially or completely waiving fees since COVID began. Commissioner Moriarty asked if Director Glogower can argue his need for more money and a bigger budget. Director Glogower says there is nothing more to be done with the budget until the next fiscal year. They can request appropriations that will have to be approved by City Council; transfers from other departments. Commissioner Moriarty believes it is vital. Director Glogower says that each department is struggling with the budget cuts. It can be applied for next fiscal year, but not at the moment. Director Glogower thinks next fiscal year will offer more opportunities to expand the budget. Chairperson Bowler asked if most departments have ended up with cuts, to which Director Glogower responded that this is consistent, and departments who requested a new position did not get their request, except for a DPW position. Education and training also got more than halved. Chairperson Bowler asked if Planning has been cut or could they request money from them, since half

of Director Glogower's job comes under Planning. Director Glogower said he would have to see. Sometimes a position is vacant and a transfer is made.

Vice-Chairperson Horan asked what is the recommendation to make sure they can rebuild next year. Vice-Chairperson Horan is concerned to hear that the mayor didn't give Director Glogower any heads up or discussion before making the cut. Director Glogower brought up the trend of the numbers being reduced. He and Chairperson Bowler met with the mayor and are just trying to get to the level of funding from the previous year, not an increase in funding. Chairperson Bowler stressed the importance of keeping copies of budgets to show where they were before, and perhaps create a chart for a visual presentation of how the budget has sunk. Director Glogower still has not found that remaining \$1,000 that they paid into a Channelmarker program on the CT River (buoys). Their dues have always been \$3,500. City council cut \$1,000 from it from this current fiscal year, so only \$2,500 has been paid to the Channelmarker program. So the money will need to be moved from other line items (which are already reduced) or put in as free money. They are not just losing money for things they need; they are losing the cushion and flexibility to react to any cuts that City Council makes. Vice-Chairperson Horan thinks a letter should be written to the mayor explaining the impact of the already-small budget being so greatly reduced. Chairperson Bowler suggested waiting partway through the year and then sending an optimistic letter to the mayor explaining why it is so important, and is there any money available so this can be paid. Vice-Chairperson Horan thinks the Channelmarker should not be the highlight/only topic of the letter. They should not expect any great change, but should make the mayor aware. Chairperson Bowler wonders if it would help to discuss with Aaron, since he has more of an "in" with the mayor. Director Glogower agrees. Vice-Chairperson Horan agrees but also feels the Commission needs a strategy or this will continue.

Commissioner Perdrizet agrees that this needs to be addressed because it will only get harder to increase the budget again. Their department's work has become increasingly important with climate change. The two items of his greatest concern are taking away ability to educate and train, and for the dues and subscriptions that the Commission will need to do their job and keep up with changes. Cutting those items is shortsighted and will have an effect on their ability to do their job and stay relevant. This should be stated in the letter.

Chairperson Bowler agrees that the best place to start is speaking with Aaron. This is agreed.

8. Item No. 4 - Upcoming Items for 6/9/22 Meeting

Chairperson Bowler requested that they move on to the items for the next meeting. Director Glogower offers that there are two items: 1) An NOI for Long Pond Cove. They are looking for a new order of conditions for the next five years of invasive water chestnut removal. 2) Also a new RDA for trail improvement from Green Acres. A site visit is needed.

Chairperson Bowler commented that she will be away for the next meeting. Vice-Chairperson Horan will be serving as Chair.

Director Glogower commented that AALIYAH and ELI from Green Acres indicated they are available on Monday, June 6, or Tuesday, June 7, to do a site visit. A few people were not available. 1:30 on

Monday, June 6, was set as the time for Director Glogower, Commissioner Moriarty, Commissioner Perdrizet, and possibly others, to do a site visit, meeting by the park.

Chairperson Bowler asked about Minutes and if there was any other business.

9. Adjourn

Commissioner Moriarty moved to adjourn the meeting. The Commission adjourned the meeting.