

Fort Williams Advisory Commission

Minutes - August 21, 2008

Meeting called to order at 7:05 PM

Present: Dan Chase, Bill Nickerson, Chuck Wilson (chair), Tina Harnden, Maureen McCarthy (secretary), Public Works Director Bob Malley. Absent: Frank Butterworth, Greg Altnauer

Guests: Carol Fritz and Lois Carlson (Charitable Foundation), Nat Thompson, Police Chief Neil Williams

Minutes of July meeting approved with minor spelling/grammatical corrections.

Bob Malley's report:

Bob reviewed the status of the capital budget. We have budgeted \$19,000 for the engineers to study the repair/renovation of the bleachers, \$7,900 of which was carried over from last year.

\$14,200 is set-aside for the consultants re the future of the Goddard Mansion ruins.

\$22,000 is remaining for the interpretive display, while \$34,000 has been budgeted for a study on the current condition/future uses of the batteries.

The park entrance improvements project is expected to use the full budgeted amount, which, with the Portland Headlight Foundation's recent additional donations, totals \$125,000. All of the money for this project is coming from monies earned at the gift shop.

Beach to Beacon went well, as did cleanup. By noon on Sunday all was tidied up.

Bob will work with officials for the Monhegan sailing race next year to better define where they park, and to erect signage to make it clear to park visitors who this group is and that they have permission to use the park.

One of the large oaks by bandstand was recently taken down, due to severe rot. The tree warden feels that there are a lot of issues in the oak stand due to age and soil compaction. He will continue to monitor the health of the trees for public safety.

An accident occurred at Battery Keyes August 16. A man rolled off the roof onto the rocks. Cape Rescue transported him to the hospital. Bob recommends putting up a railing and a warning sign. He noted it's not possible to install railing around the entire roof of the battery. This battery is going to be studied soon for repair/upgrade issues. Bob pointed out that there are risks throughout the park; really not possible to eliminate all risk short of closing the park.

Projects:

Bleacher renovation: Engineers took core samples of sections of the concrete and results should be available next week. Our consultants will be discussing options for repair or rebuilding soon, most likely at our September meeting.

Battery Blair test pits are scheduled for September.

Interpretive Display: The subcommittee did minor editing of the info on the panels. Brad Woodworth will be sending final proofs. Moving the site of the display to Kitty's Point is still under consideration. This location offers a superior vantage point; the fact that a compass rose and some surfacing are in place is a plus. Yet we want to maintain the memorial there as well. Bob will investigate access. Chuck requested we get a look at the design of the stands and a site plan soon.

Main Entrance: Bob is working with Tom Emery on construction plans for the new main gate and entrance paving and posts. With the additional funds approved by the Portland Head Light Foundation, we can complete the project, rather than doing it in phases. September 11 is the bid opening date; selection will be a week later. Work is expected to be started late fall and completed by December.

Collection boxes: The two new boxes are reaping roughly \$6 at the beach and \$13 at central parking lot per day. We need to look at clearer, possibly larger signage on or near the boxes. Original box at the headlight is doing the best of all, \$15 to \$16/day. Dan shared pictures of other collection boxes and their signage. Highlighting the boxes with some plantings had been discussed, but maintenance would be an issue. We do not have one at the playground, where there is heavy traffic, but Bob wondered if repeat, local visitors would donate. Chuck asked that we all go take a look at the boxes with an eye towards better recognition.

Arboretum: Plans were recently presented at a Council workshop and were well received. Carol Fritz said Kathy Bacastow (of the arboretum group) is coming to the next meeting of the Charitable Foundation. It is hoped that the Planning Board may grant final approval at their September 16 or October 21 meeting. Chuck and Tina said they would attend on behalf of the FWAC.

Goddard Mansion: The Town Council would like a decision on plans for the ruins by its November meeting. Chuck noted that the Goddard Mansion is not one of the top priority projects outlined in our timetable, and that the Commission and our consultants are currently consumed with the other projects. Our original intent was to have a plan for the ruins by the end of the year. Bob said we need to focus on wrapping up all the studies by the end of this fiscal year. Mike McGovern wants us to respond on what our time frame is for review and decision on the mansion.

Discussion focused on:

- we have yet to meet with the consultants specifically to discuss their review of and thoughts about the ruins; we doubt they have had time to focus on the mansion yet;
- we need to revisit our thoughts and give the consultants something to go on; the more direction they get the less it will cost us in their time.
- one of the reasons we hired the consultants was to give us creative input from another perspective; we felt our years of discussion on the mansion was no longer productive;

- this will be on the agenda for September, so that we can respond appropriately to the Town Council.

Proposed jazz festival fundraiser:

Carol Fritz, Lois Carlson and Nat Thompson met with us for the second time to discuss their proposal to raise funds for the park by holding a jazz festival, possibly in the summer of 2009. The three recently visited the Newport (RI) jazz festival, which is produced by the same organization the Charitable Foundation is proposing for a festival in the Fort, The Festival Network, and were impressed with how efficiently the event was run. Additionally, they interviewed Newport park and town staff and got very positive feedback about the organization and the event.

Carol addressed concerns over the event expressed by Mike McGovern and staff (**in boldface below**) in a recent six-page memo, which reviewed the proposal using criteria set forth in our Group and Commercial Use policy. During the course of the presentation and subsequent discussion, Commission members also examined the policy and found that while a jazz festival of this size and the organizing group met some of the requirements for approval, there were a number of issues for which we need answers. Chuck reminded the members that failure to meet just one of the criteria would require us to deny the request. The essence of our discussion regarding the areas of concern follows:

On the issue of how the festival could dominate the use of the park to the exclusion of other visitors, Mike McGovern felt that the park would need to be closed to the public during the festival to avoid “tremendous parking and security issues”, and that this would constitute “inappropriately dominating the park”. Carol agreed with the staff’s assessment that it would likely be necessary to close to the park to non-ticket holders during the day(s) of the event. But she felt it was justified to close the park for 1 or 2 days to raise money to keep the park open for 363 days a year at no charge.

Chuck said he was very uncomfortable with limiting park usage to ticket holders only and turning away the public; felt it sets a bad precedent and will be very poorly received, locally, by visitors from away, and by the press. Bob stressed that we needed to bear in mind the history of passive recreation at the park and “not spoil the park” for those users, by allowing too many large events. He also warned that this would open the door for more of these types of events. And he noted we were not talking about just closing the park for two days; there would possibly be 8 days of disruption with set up and take down prior to and following the festival.

Bill and Tina said they felt that Cape voters had rejected fees and so we needed to come up with other ways to raise funds for the park. If this festival could raise significant funds, closing the park to non-paying guests for just these two days was justified. (There was some question as to whether it could be open for walkers in the early morning hours.) Chuck said he wasn’t sure we needed as much money as we may think, with funding from the Museum at Portland Headlight helping with the cost of the new entrance. He also wondered whether the current fiscal climate in town was going to lead to another look at entrance or parking fees for the Fort.

Concerning the number of visitors the park and town could accommodate, Mike McGovern recommended limiting the numbers to 5,000 and Commission members agreed. Carol said they could limit it to 5,000/day for the first year, with the hope that it could be increased in the future. She added that limiting the numbers would also limit revenue from both ticket sales and gift shop sales.

Chuck felt very strongly that if we were to have a music festival at the park, we should start with a much smaller event. "I think for now it is too intense." Lois suggested we could consider starting with a one-day event, but was not sure whether the Festival Network would concur; they could discuss this with them. Concern was generally expressed about the potential for numbers that would overwhelm the park and that there would be a reluctance to go much beyond a maximum of 6000 people.

Parking was another area of concern. There are 1000 spaces at the Fort, less if some of the field parking areas are used for stages or concessions. Carol is suggesting we shuttle most ticket holders from a number of locations including the school campus, South Portland high school, Sprague fields, Wainwright Field off Highland Avenue, SMCC, and the Nazarene Church in South Portland (for Saturday only), totaling an estimated additional 2,000-plus spaces. (The Beach to Beacon uses 24 buses to shuttle 4,000.) Plans would include for publicity to feature a map and information on where to park as well as street signs to parking locations. She noted that adjacent neighborhoods would need to be posted for no parking, and carpooling would be encouraged. Additional staff would be required to assist with parking and traffic management.

Parking and traffic issues consumed a large part of our discussion. Bob Malley said traffic congestion and parking in abutting neighborhoods were going to be huge issues. Chief Williams said he was extremely concerned about traffic back-ups on Shore Road (going all the way up to Rte. 77); festival-goers looking for parking, non-ticket holders, and non-festival goers would all need to be redirected. Parking issues in neighborhoods would be problematic in regards to fire and rescue vehicle access; streets would have to be posted on both sides. Chief Williams added that his department could not be expected to patrol all of the parking areas for theft. Carol said she felt people would come and go throughout the festival, not all at once, which could mitigate traffic issues. The chief said he would prefer if guests were leaving before dark. Carol confirmed that the festival closes at 7 p.m. Chuck said, "I think this is the worst thing that could happen to Shore Rd. during a peak weekend in August. I think it will be a disaster. I could be convinced if staff people felt they could manage this, but they have not expressed that they will be able to deal with the staffing. If the chief came back and said we could do it, I would feel more comfortable."

Nat and Lois said Newport is a small town, with only one road into their park (Fort Adams) and that the Festival Network has good experience handling the traffic and parking issues.

Regarding the requested sale of beer and wine at the event, Carol said the way this was handled at Newport seemed to work well. Consumption of alcohol is restricted to a confined area, and BYOB is banned and enforced with cooler searches. Carol, Nat and

Lois said they saw no evidence of guests being over-served. They felt that allowing controlled availability of alcohol may work better than a ban, which may encourage covert use, such as occurs at the PSO event at the Fort. As far as setting a precedent for this at the park is concerned, Carol suggested the regulations on alcohol could be reworded to allow permission to groups where enforcement could control use. It was not clear whether or not the Fort would see any of the profits of the alcohol sales. Carol said that needed to be negotiated.

Members of the Commission and the police chief expressed a range of concerns. Chuck was not in favor of breaking policy to allow alcohol in the park, regardless of whether or not it was done in the name of raising funds for the park. Chief Williams wondered how it would be policed and suggested we check with the town attorney concerning drinking in public. Bill, Dan and Tina were more willing to allow it if it were in fact well monitored in a confined area. Bob said we have worked hard to be consistent with the alcohol ban, though there have been many requests over the years, and he cautioned against changing the policy.

The town questioned whether the gift shop and headlight museum would suffer reduced sales with the park being closed for two days to non-festival goers. Carol said they expected the large crowds could in fact increase patronage for those two days.

As to the affect the festival could have on abutting neighborhoods, members of the Charitable Foundation have spoken with “a few people in...Delano Park and Cape Cottage and have received only positive responses” to the proposed festival.

Chief Williams said he felt sure many abutters would not support this event. He suggested a questionnaire be mailed to residents in the affected areas to gauge reaction prior to considering approval. Maureen, Bob and Chuck expressed serious concerns about neighbors’ reactions especially in regards to traffic and parking. Dan said he thought many Cape residents would support the festival as a rare opportunity to enjoy high-caliber musical talent so close to home, and that it would be an educational and cultural occasion for students from our high school jazz program. He said he’d like to see more events at the Fort, not fundraisers, but events for the community.

Police enforcement and availability were issues raised by Mike McGovern and staff. Carol said that the Festival Network covers the cost of police enforcement both inside and outside the park, and that shuttling from off-site parking lots could minimize traffic and enforcement issues.

The police chief said his small department is severely stressed by the Beach to Beacon event and that finding sufficient additional personnel from other towns is extremely difficult in the summer, even for a one-day event, let alone for two. Also, police communications equipment is not uniform from town to town; some radios cannot talk to others, so relying on police from other departments was not a given. “The more you reach out, the more you lose control,” he said. He offered he would “work with you to do the best we can” if this were approved, but stressed that he preferred we “start small” with a reduced scale, one-day event.

Coordinating sufficient volunteers to help with such a large event was another concern. Carol said the Fort Williams Charitable Foundation would handle this and that

they have been in touch with the volunteer coordinator for the Beach to Beacon. Chuck and the police chief noted that the Beach to Beacon was a different kind of event that inspired volunteers for charity, and that garnering enough volunteers for this event, in the summer, close in the calendar to the road race, could be a challenge. Beach to Beacon has over 600 volunteers for half a day, so the numbers needed would be significantly higher for 2 full days.

Wear and tear on the park was discussed. Carol said the Festival Network has said they will repair and re-sod where necessary, and staff in Newport were impressed with the condition in which Fort Adams was left following the event.

Bob expressed concern about overuse of the park.

Electrical Service. Carol said the Festival Network uses portable generators.

Other areas of concern discussed included:

How much money could a jazz festival raise; was it “worth it”?

Carol said the Newport Festival raised approx. \$150,000 for Fort Adams Park during the 2-day event. Ticket prices were \$75 for one day, \$135 for two days. Premium tickets were \$500 and \$800 (two days). But Nat felt we would charge less for an event here in Maine. The host traditionally reaps \$1 - \$2 from each ticket, and possibly more from beer and wine sales. Carol felt they could negotiate for a larger share of the ticket price; she said an event at the Fort could possibly raise \$50,000 the first year, and increase in future years. A one day festival was estimated to bring in closer to \$30,000.

Timing of the event as related to the Beach to Beacon and other events in the area.

Bill wondered whether holding the festival the same weekend as the B2B would reduce extended stress on the town and park and expand the race festivities. But Bob and the police chief thought the size of the combined crowds would be unmanageable, “total chaos”. Tina stressed that we not hold the event on a weekend before or after the Beach to Beacon, to give the town time to recoup. The proposed date is the second weekend in August. Chief Williams noted that is the same weekend as the cancer triathlon at SMCC, and so that would eliminate that location for parking/shuttling and help from South Portland Public Safety personnel. Carol and Lois felt the date was not set in stone.

Bob, Chuck and the Chief also felt strongly that we needed more time to work out the details and that summer 2009 was probably too soon.

Organizers from the Festival Network have not yet visited the park.

Bob felt very strongly that event organizers needed to visit the park before deciding on the venue. Nat and Lois said they were intending to and that they felt all of these concerns would be addressed adequately, but that the Festival Network needed some degree of interest, if not preliminary approval before they’d commit the time to take the project further. The Commission felt that there were too many questions to be answered and was not close to ruling on the event (especially with two members absent).

FWAC Minutes 08/21/08

Page 7

As the general consensus was that there were significant unanswered questions, a motion was made. **It was moved and unanimously approved that we continue to explore the concept of a jazz festival at Fort Williams as proposed by the Charitable Foundation in conjunction with the Festival Network subject to logistical details being worked out with event organizers and town staff.**

Meeting adjourned at 10:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Maureen McCarthy
Tina Harnden