

MINUTES OF THE SPECIAL MEETING
CITY OF STAMFORD, CONNECTICUT
URBAN REDEVELOPMENT COMMISSION
MONDAY, MAY 22ND, 2006

1. At 10:00AM, Chairman Stephen C. Osman called the special meeting to order. The following were in attendance:

Commissioners:

Stephen C. Osman, Chairman
James I. Nixon, Vice Chairman
Joel P. Mellis, Secy/Treasurer
Edward J. Fuhrman

Staff:

Gerrie Post, Executive Director
Rachel Goldberg, General Counsel
Durelle Alexander

Consultants

Arthur Selkowitz, Chairman
Mill River Conservancy

2. Mill River Corridor

- (a) **Mill River Park Update/Conversation** – Chairman Osman said, “We want to establish a closer relationship with the Collaborative and hear about all the wonderful things that are going on, especially the incredible group effort that has taken place over the past week to build a world-class playground designed by Olin Partnership in the Park.” It was noted that Mill River Project Director Milton Puryear had done an outstanding job in coordinating/accomplishing this effort and making it a success. The new playground will run along the river’s western edge from Tresser Boulevard to West Main Street.

Mr. Selkowitz said, “We’re talking about the first real major element of the new Mill River Park that was built over the last week by a huge contingent of the community, close to 2,000 people over the course of a week. It was a wonderful effort. We had a true community build, with all races, all creeds, all beliefs, City workers, volunteers, students, everyone all working together. The dedication ceremony is scheduled for Sunday, May 28th at 3:00pm. Come and bring your children, bring your grandchildren, and walk into the playground because from the street you really can’t appreciate what we’re doing. This playground is not just a neighborhood playground. This is a community playground. The community built it and the community will use it. There will be programming there on a regular basis. The way it’s been designed it lends itself to magic shows and similar activities – we want to make it a happening place.”

Mr. Selkowitz noted that the Collaborative had been working with the Downtown Special Services District (DSS) to expand their ambassador program for security during important hours that would supplement the City’s efforts to maintain and patrol the Park. He continued, “This playground is very critical because, being the first major element of the Park, it sets the standard and the Collaborative committed to establishing a world-class destination playground for the City of Stamford.”

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Commissioner Nixon asked, "Do you have a full set of videos?" Mr. Selkowitz responded, "We had a videographer on-site as well as people taking still pictures."

Commissioner Mellis asked, "Do your plans include a Recreation Teacher or two that could be at the Park?" Mr. Selkowitz responded, "We hadn't thought about that yet, but as other facilities are added such as replacing the basketball court, this could be addressed." Commissioner Mellis said, "The advantage of having an instructor there to organize activities would give a lot of confidence to the parents as an additional security measure. It could also provide a training mechanism for someone who is in physical education." Land Use Bureau Chief Robin Stein said, "I think this is an excellent suggestion. Our Recreation Division in the City needs to be encouraged to do something like this." Mr. Selkowitz added, "This raises an interesting issue which the Collaborative is starting to address and that is what is the Collaborative's relationship to the City and what is its role? High on the Collaborative's agenda is establishing a contractual relationship with the City to define its role and responsibility with regard to the Park."

Chairman Osman reminded the Commissioners "that the Collaborative was envisioned by the plan that the URC put forth." He said, "Mr. Selkowitz is our representative to the Collaborative and, after many years of having no formal leader at all and operating by consensus, the group consisting of representatives from the City, the West Side Action Group, Friends of Mill River, etc. decided to form a 501.C.3 and name Artie Selkowitz as its Chairman. He is our representative and I thought we needed more communication about all of this. Eventually, we are going to be asked for part of the TIF money to support the Park so I would like you to feel as comfortable about the Park as I do."

Mr. Selkowitz continued, "We've actually expanded our scope and filled the void. The original mandate basically covered the Park itself from Broad Street down to Richmond Hill Avenue. But it became readily apparent that we had a terrific opportunity for Stamford, which is to be able to go from the tip of Stamford Harbor (on both sides of the harbor) to create a three-mile stretch of Greenway that would go all the way up to Scalzi Park." Mr. Selkowitz showed the Commission the original Park site plan prepared by Olin and reviewed the plan for the 26-acres as well as for the expansion of the Mill River Corridor. The plans include a skating rink as a focal point, a great lawn for concerts, a sculpture garden, kayak/canoe facilities, and a summer fountain. It is anticipated that Olin will make a formal presentation to the Commission sometime next month.

Land Use Bureau Robin Stein briefly outlined the other phases currently being worked on in addition to the Park and the first phase of the trail, including:

- (a) continuing the trail all the way to Richmond Hill, hoping to be able to go underneath Tresser Boulevard;
- (b) relocating the basketball court from the north side of Tresser Boulevard one block south to the corner of Greenwich Avenue and Richmond Hill;

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- (c) continuing work on restoring the river, an Army Corps of Engineers project calling for the removal of the Mill River dam and restoration of the stream and banks from downtown to Stamford Harbor.

Mr. Stein noted that removing the dam would reduce the flooding risk in downtown Stamford by lowering the water level and subsequently lower the cost of flood insurance. He also noted that the dredging, because of contamination, is approximately a \$1.5 million dollar project that the Army Corps of Engineers is undertaking. Mr. Stein added, "We have two challenges at the moment. One is getting a permit from the State Department of Environmental Protection, which due to staff reductions, is a very slow process. The second is that we need Congress to appropriate the money for the actual construction."

Mr. Stein concluded, "The Main Street pedestrian bridge, which has been closed to vehicular traffic for several years, is still an issue before the Board of Representatives. The City designed a pedestrian bridge but our consultants, Olin, think that a really beautiful bridge could be another one of the 'world-class' features." Mr. Selkowitz said that Olin has come up with a concept to light this bridge and some of the others in the area, such as the railroad bridge, so the Park and the neighborhood would be lit up at night. The Collaborative is in the process of looking for a benefactor.

Chairman Osman noted that the Collaborative has raised a great deal of money to date. Mr. Selkowitz said, "Because the design of the Park had to be world-class, we needed a really top design firm so we raised about \$220,000 toward the cost. That was a very significant gesture on the part of the Collaborative and we continue to raise money for the playground." An initial membership program was developed for donors to the Park, including students/seniors, supporters, sponsors, partners, patrons, builders & founders. However, it was noted that the Collaborative would have to reach out to a broader community base to raise money and keep going. Mr. Selkowitz told the Commission that his main concern is "maintaining the park with active program activities on a long-term basis." The Collaborative would like to manage the park but still needs to determine how much money will be needed in this regard and how it is going to be raised. Mr. Selkowitz explained that he envisions the Collaborative moving forward into a "more developmental mode." Discussion followed re: various fund-raising approaches and the importance of "sustainability." Major fund raising efforts will not commence until the plans for Mill River Park and the river are finalized.

A discussion ensued on the relocation of the basketball courts. Commissioner Nixon suggested installing a sign denoting the "future site of the basketball court" so people would know it was being replaced." Everyone agreed that this suggestion should be implemented.

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Additional items briefly discussed included:

- (a) relocation of the cherry trees in the newly planned cherry tree grove;
- (b) the possibility of private recreation in the Park, such as a carousel;
- (c) inclusion of food kiosks/concessions in the Park;
- (d) locating a restaurant/café by the West Main Street Bridge overlooking the Park and the river; and
- (e) a memorial requested by a 9/11 group that would be designed in conjunction with Olin and consist of 11 elm trees planted in and around the existing cemetery.


Chairman Osman thanked everyone for participating in this “conversation.” No motions were made and no votes were taken. Collaborative Chairman Selkowitz concluded, “I want you to know how much we appreciate your support. This is a wonderful ‘legacy project’ for the City of Stamford.”

3. Adjournment

There will be Special Meetings on Wednesday, May 24, 2006 at 8:30AM and Wednesday, June 14, 2006 at 8:30AM.

Having completed the business for which this special meeting was convened, Commissioner Nixon made a motion to adjourn. The motion was carried and the meeting was adjourned at 11:18AM.

Respectfully submitted,



Joel P. Mellis
Secretary/Treasurer