

Friends of Holly Pond – Steering Committee

Notes

May 22, 2013

Participants and Purpose

Approximately 20 Stamford and Darien residents attended. There were no state representatives in attendance, however there was local representation with Darien First Selectman Jayme Stevenson attending. There were no representatives of DEEP.

This was the first meeting of the Holly Pond Steering Committee, formed to include members from Darien and Stamford who are willing to monitor, research, and advocate for progress on Holly Pond issues, including dredging, water quality, the dam, etc. This group will provide information to the entire Friends group for further action.

Topics discussed and activities endorsed

SoundWaters' Executive Director Leigh Shemitz welcomed members of the Committee, summarized the results of the March 27, 2013 meeting, and reviewed the purpose of this Steering Committee. She noted that the State legislators had sent their regrets at not being able to attend the meeting due to the press of events in Hartford at the conclusion of the year's legislative session.

Members of the Committee were invited to introduce themselves, and to indicate what they thought were the most pressing areas of activity for the newly formed "Friends of Holly Pond." These topics are briefly noted for future reference and follow up:

Document Library The document library for this effort may be found at <http://www.soundwaters.org/hollypond>, with a link to a more extensive ongoing collection of documents available at www.soundwaters.omeka.net Note that additional historical documents concerning the Holly Pond, the Holly Pond Dam, or Cove Island may be forwarded to Leigh at leighshemitz@soundwaters.org so that they may be added to the collection

Dredging Issues of dredging – cost, methods, past studies, etc., were discussed in detail. Richard Windels, a guest of Dave Winston, offered historical and technical perspectives.

Wildlife Sanctuary The Cove Island Neighborhood Association has been proactive in establishing the Cove Island Wildlife Sanctuary. The entire 84-acre Cove Island Park and Holly Pond were classified as an "Important Bird Area" or "IBA" in 2001 by Bird Life International, following its nomination by two local birders, Patrick Dugan and Michael Moccio.

Dam While there have been several "emergency repairs" to the dam's gates, the overall condition of the dam is poor – due to leaks and 'slumps' in its structure. An engineering study has been prepared that

outlines an approach to “restoring the dam to its design height,” which would be an opportunity to include a fish-ladder related to current conservation efforts, and an interest by the DEEP for this type of enhancement to the structure. It is anticipated that this effort would restore the “missing” 1.5’ of low-tide height to the pond.

Mill River Project Stamford’s Mill River project was cited as being parallel to this effort in many regards, although several times larger in scope. Particularly, it was discussed as its public-private partnership might be a model and how they developed a larger vision for the community.

Invasives There is a risk of introduction of invasive plant and animal species in the Pond, and there is an increasing incidence of algae and washed-up garbage

Water Quality Water quality remains a high priority of interest, due to the implications for the health of wildlife, residents, and campers in summer sailing and water-sports sponsored by SoundWaters and the Darien YMCA.

Commercial Effect on Pond An effort dedicated to tracing the identity of companies that may have contributed to the pollution in the Pond through industrial waste will continue.

Low Tide A decrease in the low-tide water levels in the Pond has been noted, although direct observation of the dam has failed to identify the specific cause of this deficit.

Yard Debris There is a continuing need to educate the property-owners on the edge of the Pond in regard to preventing the blowing or dumping of yard and leaf debris into the open water.

Grant Possibilities Leigh reviewed the actions that SoundWaters has taken in response to an Army Corps of Engineers request for applications for projects. Two letters have been submitted – one concerning the dredging effort and one concerning the repair of the dam.

Vision Much discussion focused on the need for a broad vision for the Holly Pond project. The group discussed how the Holly Pond project is more than just a dam or dredging project. We need a broader vision and discussed what this might be, including the ecological restoration of a key natural area that is part of an Important Bird Area along the East Coast Flyway.

Next Steps

In order to learn more about the Mill River project and to determine if this project can serve as a model for aspects of the Holly Pond Project, three members met informally on June 14 with Arthur Selkowitz, Chairman of the Mill River Collaborative. They discussed public-private partnerships and creating a broader vision to engage both the community at large and municipal, state and federal funding possibilities. Artie has agreed to meet with the larger Friends of Holly Pond group.

Thanks to Frank Kemp for taking notes.