

MONTAUK CITIZENS' ADVISORY COMMITTEE MEETING
September 11, 2023

Attendance: 22 present (32 members)

Members Present: T. Berger, R. Cortell, L. Cortese, T. Creel, T. Flight, J. Fowkes, D. Freudenthal, B. Grimes, A. Harris, D. Hausman, J. Iacono, J. James, S. Kalimnios, L. Michaels, S. Sennefelder, L. Siedlick, R. Silver, M. Tripp, K. Tyler, M. Waterman, K. Weiss, R. Weiss

Members Absent: L. Barnds, T. Byrne, D. Ceva, J. Chimples, C. Cortese, L. Creegan, L. Daunt, R. Monahan, P. Monte, C. Yula

Guests: Rusty Schmidt (Nelson, Pope & Voorhis "NPV"), Jaime LeDuc (CCOM), Andy Hammer (Biondo & Hammer), Sally Krusch, Tom & Marilyn Bogdan, Jeanne Nielsen, Robert Whalen, Dan Stavola, Theresa Eurell, Lynn Blumenfeld, Christina Cosentino, Jay Schneiderman, Denise DiPaolo (Montauk Library), Maureen Cahill, John Yellen, Joan M McGivern (Twomey Latham), Jeremy Samuelson (TOEH Director of Planning), Michael Wright (EH Press)

Board Liaison: David Lys

The meeting was called to order at 6:03pm with the Pledge of Allegiance and a moment of silence in honor of 9/11.

Benson Reserve Invasive Species Management Plan Presentation: D. Lys introduced the invasive removal plan as part of the TOEH commitment to environmental protection and noted that invasives have been removed in other parts of the Town (bamboo removal; Accabonac and Whalebone Landing). Funding for this project would come from competitive grants from NY State (may not receive award). The Town Board is supportive and wants to inform the community.

Rusty Schmidt, a landscape ecologist with NPV, an environmental engineering firm, with a specialty in invasive species and restoration, presented the proposed project. NPV did a two year study of the site, looking at the history and the current status and assessing the difficulty of removing the invasives there. The top 1/3 (16 acres of the 40 acres closest to OMH) of the site is 95% invasives, the next 1/3 is 50% invasives. The problem is that invasives smother native plants and prevent plant support of insects and native birds whose numbers have declined. Invasives have shallow roots and can cause erosion as they expand. OMH is a NYS "scenic highway" and invasives are blocking the view.

NPV recommends the following: Remove invasives and plant and restore native plants. Maintenance of the site will be long term ("forever" maintenance) and the budget is for 10 years. Removal would be via mini excavator on flat areas nearest the highway, followed by placement of erosion control and seeding the area. On the steeper areas, the proposal is to import goats (2-3 per acre) to graze within 4 enclosures. The goats "love" the invasive plants and will remove 50% or more of the plants; the rest will be done by hand weeding. "Green Goats" will provide the goats which will also need a temporary covered structure because they don't like rain.

The goal of the proposed project is to restore native plants which will enable the return of local birds, insects and Monarch butterflies, stabilize the bluff and improve water quality due to longer root systems of native plants, and re-establish the scenic highway.

The Town Board adopted a resolution on August 8 to support CCOM's grant application to NYS and will conduct a public hearing shortly. No NYS permit is required. The Budget does not call for TOEH funding. CCOM is seeking NYS and private funding and will be responsible for long term monitoring of the site. The 10 year budget is \$865K (85% going to goats and human work; 7% is for NPV monitoring = \$60k over 10 years). Timing is: Phase I (1 year)

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removal, erosion control and goats; Phase II (1 year) planting plants and seeds; Phase III (8 years) maintenance and monitoring.

Jeremy Samuelson, Director of Planning TOEH, said that this site is an "ideal candidate" for invasive management and restoration with a likelihood of success. He noted that this project is exempt from environmental review with no SEQRA issues. Overall, citing, in part, the potential return of the Monarch butterflies, he sees this project as a benefit to the TOEH and the community. D. Lys noted that humans have harmed the natural balance of our environment and environmental protection is the duty of the Town.

Extensive Q&A followed. Members expressed concerns about goat containment (fences will keep them in and they will be checked and watered daily); harm to an historically stable dune; why this gets priority over other pressing environmental needs (it's considered "shovel ready"); goats eating everything (only when they run out of their favorites); disagreement about whether goat fences will violate the 1994 court decision barring fences that prevent public access.

Upon motion by D. Freudenthal, seconded by J. Fowkes, the following resolution was adopted by a vote of 16 aye, 1 nay and 4 abstentions (S. Kalimnios left before the vote) :

RESOLVED, that the Montauk CAC supports the proposed Benson Reserve Habitat Restoration plan.

Minutes of the July meeting were adopted, upon motion by R. Cortell, seconded by S. Sennefelder. There was no August meeting.

Community Organizations:

Montauk United - will host a "Meet the Candidates" for all 6 Town Board candidates on Sunday, October 1 at 3pm at the Montauk Fire House.

MVA - K. Weiss requested better garbage cans (like those in Amagansett) in more reasonable places because the current cans are too small and they are placed in areas where they are not maintained. D. Lys responded that the Town deployed the cans that were available at the time under the capital funding. Next year there will be new larger cans with a rain bonnet and flat lever.

Chamber - J. Fowkes praised Town's weekly maintenance this summer and thanked D. Lys for his support. The 42nd Annual Fall Festival will take place October 7-8 and will include the traditional chowder competition on Saturday as well as bands and rides throughout.

Montauk Fire Department Big Bucks - will take place September 17 according to T. Flight.

Montauk Playhouse - J. Iacono thanked the Town for its support at the Playhouse ground breaking.

Litter Action Committee - R. Silver reported that this Saturday (September 16) will be Cleanup Day with crews being deployed at Gurney's (9am), CCOM (10am) , EH Trails (3pm) and the Train Station. Everyone is encouraged to enroll in the road sponsor program and clean up their own stretches. MBPOA will have cleanup on Sunday.

Old Business:

Airport Subcommittee Report: No report. D. Lys said that there is no update on the environmental study.

Beach Subcommittee - No report.

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Councilperson's Liaison Report:

Lighthouse Restoration - Congratulations to Mia Certic and Joe Gaviola of the Montauk Historical Society on the successful restoration project. **Lifeguards** will no longer be at the beaches after this Sunday (September 17). **Turkey Trot** 5K registration is only on line this year with a \$20 fee. **Otis Avenue** - Fire Commissioners have requested a fire lane and bikes will be impounded. **Star Island** - water quality project means that pump out tank will double in capacity and commercial dock work is underway. **Napeague dead trees** - NYS DEC is in contact with Fish & Wildlife with discussions about ongoing danger of falling trees. **Recreation** - Tennis courts behind Grimes will be closed for two months for pickleball court construction; basketball courts will be replaced beginning September 25. **TOEH 375th Anniversary** - will be celebrated on September 23 with a parade (from the Palm to EHHS) and a festival at 1pm. **Reminder** - Schools are open; please go out and support our sports teams.

Upcoming Town Board Agenda Items: On September 12 there will be a review and update on all grants and potential opportunities under NYS Clean Water Clean Air & Green Jobs Environmental Bond Act. Public Hearing will be held on September 21 on new equipment for the Montauk Fire Department.

The meeting adjourned at 8:00 pm upon motion by R. Cortell, seconded by A. Harris.

The next meeting will be on **Monday, October 2 at 6pm at the Montauk Library.**

Respectfully submitted,
Marcy Wilkov Waterman