

Minutes of The First Meeting of The Schell Bridge Advisory Committee of The Town Of Northfield, MA
on Wednesday, February 22nd, 2017 at 7P.M.
At the Dickinson Memorial Library Community Room

Present were Craig Johnson; Laura Lashway-Chapman; Jon McGowan; Barbara Richardson; Sue Ross; Judy Wagner; Mary Bowen and Steve Stoia – and via Skype : Jerry Wagener and Tim Bowen.

Barbara Richardson, Chair of the Friends of Schell Bridge convened this first meeting of the Schell Advisory Committee, passing out an agenda (attached), and beginning the discussion with a request that everyone introduce themselves. What was evident from the introductions was that there was a great variety of valuable skills in the room as well as considerable and equally valuable history with the Schell Bridge project. Jon McGowan and Jerry Wagener serve on the Engineering Subcommittee of the Friends of Schell Bridge, and Barbara Richardson and Sue Ross of the Friends have been instrumental in keeping communications open with elected officials and keeping the Schell on the front burner of the Town for more than a decade.

Barbara offered some history after the introductions, indicating that after a ten year history of trying to preserve the Bridge (their original mission) . The Friends of The Schell agreed with the Town and the Department of Transportation to a compromise in 2014, where the DOT would replace the Schell with a new bridge and place the new bridge on the exact Connecticut River site, and incorporate some of the historical elements of the unique Schell structure into the new bridge.

Barbara told the Advisory Committee members assembled at the meeting that she had asked the Town's Selectboard to create an official Town Committee – the Schell Bridge Advisory Committee, to be (lifted from the Mission Statement of the Committee) “an advisory group to the Town of Northfield during the design , planning, and construction of the Schell Bridge replacement.” “ The committee will work collaboratively with Northfield officials and town committees, Massachusetts State officials, the Massachusetts Department of Transportation (DOT), Franklin County Regional Council of Governments (FRCOG), WSP Engineering Consultants (Design Firm), the Massachusetts Department of Conservation and Recreation (DCR), and the Friends of Schell Bridge (FSB).”

Barbara passed out the mission statement page (see attached), and both Barbara and Sue Ross continued to underscore that the Friends of the Schell Bridge would work cooperatively with the Advisory Committee.

Barbara also emphasized that this work – the work of the committees- will take several years to complete, as it includes solicitation of possible designs from the community, the actual winning design, the destruction and removal of the existing bridge, the bidding process, and the construction of the new bridge. Mass DOT will come to Town in the Spring to gather design ideas in a public meeting. Our engineers on the Advisory Committee Jerry and John then weighed in on the design, pinpointing the span from shore to shore at 515 feet with 384 feet between the existing piers. The understanding now is that the piers will be replaced in approximately the same locations. Barbara Richardson stated that the bridge will be designed for bicycle and foot traffic with some accessibility for emergency vehicles. Next on the agenda Barbara shared a copy of the letter from Maureen Mullaney, Transportation and GIS Program Manager for the Franklin Regional Council of Governments. The letter attached and dated February 22, 2017, is addressed to Barbara as a member of the Schell Bridge Advisory Committee and demonstrates the FRCOG's support for the project, and Ms. Mullaney's communication with DOT about the work ahead. Specifically, the letter points to the fact that DOT “seems very committed to working with the town and getting input.” She, Ms. Mullaney also points out that “the construction of the project is still listed on the Transportation Improvement Program (and I don't expect it to be removed), which means it's still in line for Federal and State funds with an anticipated bid date in 2021.” The letter goes

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on to say that Senator Stan Rosenberg's office will be responsible for coordinating a Spring meeting in Northfield with the DOT, designers and the Town to gather design input. Ms. Mullaney calls on the Advisory Committee to draft a letter from our Selectboard to District 2 DOT's Patrick Paul, District Highway Director, introducing the committee to him, and offering the committee as a resource to him. Ms. Mullaney offered to draft that letter as well.

Barbara Richardson, continuing with the agenda, told the Advisory Committee members that the role of the Friends of Schell Bridge would be to provide resources to the Advisory Committee, for example the mailing list of 200 members of the Friends. Barbara also stated that no members of the Friends would serve in a leadership role in the Advisory Committee,

Next on the agenda, Sue Ross gave a brief history of the Friends of The Schell Bridge, explained how the committee founded in part by the late and beloved Marie Ferre, was inspired by the beautiful bridge that had such a rich history in Northfield. While the Friends failed to preserve the bridge, the compromise struck with the state will keep the fond memories of the structure alive. Sue credits Senator Stan Rosenberg and to some extent Representative Paul Mark with the brokering of a fundable project. She points out that a bridge on the demolition list would not be eligible for federal funds, but Senator Rosenberg's skillful definition of the request under the banner of health and outdoor recreation, tying the project to the existing trail, hiking and biking trails in Town and beyond made the project viable. However, Sue continued, historic preservation continues to be a priority for the Friends, so the incorporation of historic elements from the Schell into the construction and design of the new bridge is critical to the long lived committee.

Barbara says that the DOT was impressed with the large volunteer pool of the Friends of The Schell that could be tapped for maintaining the bridge after construction. One of the wonderful results of negotiating with the state was that the Department of Conservation will take ownership of the Schell, removing issues of liability from the Town.

Barbara then pointed to the list of "Stake holders" that she had compiled at the bottom of the Agenda, indicating that these groups and organizations could also be viewed as collaborators. This member of the Advisory Committee suggested that the Northfield Area Tourism and Business Association (NATABA) be added to the list of stakeholders as that business group has spent many hours and organization sponsored events "branding" the Town and area for its natural beauty and outdoor recreational resources. The Schell Bridge will be one of the centerpieces of that effort. This member for the sake of disclosure would report that he is the Treasurer of NATABA. This member also cited the economic study prepared by UMASS and commissioned by the Friends and entitled "The Economic Impact of the Restoration of the Schell Bridge" (need copy for Town Hall committee file), stating that the Study exaggerates the impact of the bridge, especially if the bridge is not complimented with additional businesses and attractions (parks on either side of the bridge) that would attract and hold the interests of outdoor enthusiasts, bicyclists, hikers, etc. With an anticipated bid date of 2021, this becomes a chicken or egg dilemma.

Barbara then focused the group on the remaining agenda items, including the election of a Chair and a Clerk/Secretary. Barbara stated that we had a quorum that evening with all members present, and with at least 7 of the 9 sworn in. Barbara opened nominations to the floor for the position of Chair. Judy Wagner was nominated by Barbara, and that nomination was seconded by Sue Ross. With a unanimous vote, Judy was elected Chair of the Schell Bridge Advisory Committee. Judy Wagner will lead the Committee in assisting the Selectboard in securing from the state what we want.

At this point in the meeting, Mary Bowen came into the meeting room. She will sit in for Tim Bowen when he cannot attend.

Sue Ross then drew attention to the October 13th, 2016 publication that was prepared by MassDOT and the design consultants WSP for the public meeting that occurred on the above date in Northfield. The

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publication entitled "Schell Bridge Over Connecticut River Br. No. N-22-002 is a good overview of design possibilities complete with color photos, and a good outline of the process.

Barbara asked for a nomination for Clerk/Secretary, and then asked if this member would serve in that capacity. I asked that I have an opportunity to ask one more question. What I asked was what was happening with the idea of parks on both sides of the bridge. Was any group or organization pursuing this amenity or feature that would for some visitors likely prevent the new bridge from becoming just a pass through for outdoor enthusiasts to Vermont ? I was appreciative of the answer from Jerry Wagoner, who confirmed that he on behalf of the Friends of The Schell was negotiating with the National Christian Foundation about the land on the East side of the bridge for a Park. The ownership of the land on the West side of the bridge was discussed and it was discovered that the Laura Lashway – Chapman Family owns the West bank adjacent to the bridge. Laura is a member of the Advisory Committee.

Glad that this concern of parks for the bridge was being addressed, and would be a subject of a presentation by Jerry at a future Advisory Committee meeting, I agreed to the nomination as Clerk/Secretary and was elected by the Committee to that role.

Barbara Richardson then went over the critically important Open Meeting Laws and Member responsibilities, reminding all the members that they cannot discuss the content of our meetings with other Advisory Committee members outside of our meetings – even through e-mails. All meetings must be held in public spaces, and must be posted 48 hours before the actual meeting to allow the general public notice. See Dan Campbell, Town Clerk for more on these laws.

Finally with our newly elected Chair in place we decided on March 8th for our next meeting. Location to be determined.

Judy adjourned the meeting, and everyone thanked Barbara for calling for the creation of the group.

Respectfully submitted,
Steve Stoia, Clerk/Secretary