

**Notes on City Council Workshop regarding:
The Development of a Gardiner Common Plan**

A number of residents joined the City Council on Wednesday July 18 2007 for a workshop regarding the Gardiner Common. This working meeting was designed to provide City Councilors the opportunity to review and discuss public comments made at the July 11 2007 public hearing on the appropriate uses for the Gardiner Common and to set a course of action for the development of a Gardiner Common Plan. This plan is part of the City Council's 2008 Goal Statement which states that a plan for the Common is to be completed by the first of the year so as to be part of the 2009 Budget Cycle. City Council and public comments were recorded by Dee Berglund. Councilor At-Large Chuck LeBlanc was not able to attend the meeting.

Mayor Maclean began the workshop by thanking the public for their attendance at this and the week's previous meeting. He indicated that the Council had much to review in the notes from last weeks meeting and were grateful to all who brought their opinions to the table. He then turned the discussion over to Antje Kablitz, a facilitator from Planning Decisions Inc who had led last weeks public hearing on this issue.

Antje Kablitz explained that she saw this Council workshop as a continuation of the previous public hearing regarding the Gardiner Common. For all intensive purposes it was a session dedicated as a working meeting for the Council, where in she would help guide the Councilors through a discussion process similar to what was done last week with the public. She emphasized that the she and the Council were thrilled to see so many members of the public at the workshop, and commended their dedication to the issue. To respect the time limit for the evening's discussion Antje asked that the public's comments on the workshop be limited to the end of the meeting. She then turned to the Council to begin the discussion.

Ms. Kablitz provided the structure for the workshop which would begin with a brief review of the findings from last weeks meeting and then move to a general discussion on findings and next steps. The goal was to (1) understand public and Council sentiment in regards to the Common, how they use it now, what fears they have, and how they want it to be in the future and (2) a discussion by Council in terms of what they heard to be the major issue points and to layout options for addressing those points. She stated that this work would help to guide the development of a plan for the Common to be completed by the first of the year so as to be part of next year's budget cycle.

Ms. Kablitz began by summarizing some of the uses and hopes for the Common that were recorded at the public hearing and from letters received throughout the week. She stated that the Common was a vibrant part of the community, a place used by residents of all ages for walking, exercise, contemplation, family and community gatherings, and play. It is a place where families come to picnic, people walk their dogs, parents bring their kids to play, as well as an area for quiet contemplation and neighborly chats. The public noted in their discussion last week that the Common was very special to them and that they all saw it to be a historic focal point of the City. The hope was that it will continue to be such. They had a common desire to see the Common as a well lit, attractively landscaped green space with benches along well maintained walking paths, with a well and much used kept gazebo and areas for all ages to enjoy.

At this point Antje gave the Council time to share some of their own uses and hopes for the Common...

District 3 Councilor Jean Dellert saw the Common as:

- Central place for all ages.
- A place in need of some necessary changes—
 - Lighting
 - Fountain needs to be preserved
 - Needs to be safe, open accesses
 - Beautification
- The playground is an area used by families
- Parents home-schooling use it (the playground)

District 1 Councilor Rich Nickless uses the Common as:

- A family gathering place
- As part of the Family Daycare
- Some times for events—Day on Common, memorials
- Sees that families with homes with small lots use it for the playgrounds and as a place for kids to play with friends.

District 4 Councilor Phil Hart commented that the Common:

- Entrances need to be enhanced to attract people to walk through
- He noticed while traveling that not many City parks had playground for playing, were used as greens space—nice benches, walking
- He felt that there is a need to find other space for playground

At-Large Councilor Martha Mentall indicated that:

- The playground could be incorporated with schools.

District 2 Councilor Rich Rambo shared his view on the Common project:

- His family was involved with group that built playground

- He felt there was good feedback from Public Hearing on what could be done at the Common
- However, he wondered is the Council is the right group to design the Common; or if there is a need to bring in outside sources for design

Ms. Kablitz answered by stating that a design for the Common was not a goal of this discussion but rather a framework for the continued discussion on what is to be done regarding the Common. This could include looking into the possibility of using outside design consultants.

District 1 Councilor Rich Nickless made comments in regards to the playgrounds being consolidated into schools:

- Playgrounds not available when school is open
- There are color solutions available for a playground in the Common

Jean Dellert:

- Schools may also have liability issues

Rich Rambo:

- Using school playgrounds could be intimidating for young families
- Can we quiet the title to the property to deal with the issues of multiple heirs and their claim to dictate uses on the Common?

At-Large Councilor Bryan Blanchard shared his opinion regarding discussion on the Common:

- He felt that hiring a design consultant was a good idea
- He saw a series of critical questions that needed to be asked:
 - Is space adequately used?
He saw an opportunity to contact graduate school to use students to analyze and recommend changes to the Common.
 - What is the best use of this opportunity?
 - What is the ideal playground for community?
 - Most important issue is Safety: Traffic patterns? Speeds? Road conditions

Mayor MacLean shared his family's uses of the Common:

- His family enjoys being able to walk to Common and uses it all the time for the playground and running.
- Common is a crown jewel in Gardiner.
- He feels there is a need for a long term plan for improvements to Common separate from Playground.
- But also feels that the replacement of playground is a high priority.
- He sees the Common as a great Economic and Community Development tool for the City, understanding that many young families chose communities based on their availability to open space and playgrounds.

He provided the example that when his wife and son are traveling through other towns they often visit parks and playgrounds and while there she often spends money in the communities.

After discussing hopes and uses of the Common, Ms Kablitz gave a short overview of some of the issues that were voiced at last weeks Public Hearing. She indicated that though the Common is by all account a prized part of Gardiner's community the public provided areas of concern regarding its current use and appearance. (A handout was provided to the Council as well as the public providing the issues and options summarized here.)

Issues in and around the Common as heard at the Public Hearing:

- Lack of proper lighting
- Under maintained landscaping
- The disrepair of the fountains
- The state of the walking paths and the gazebo
- Vandalism
- Noise in the evenings from mostly teenagers
- Skateboarding in the park
- The use of the green space as an impromptu athletic field
- The playground: two issues
 - The general disrepair of the existing playground
 - Its location and whether or not the playground "belong" on the Common

She then opened the discussion to the Council to add (or remove) any issues.

The Council indicated further issues that were in need of review:

- Traffic
- Types of Paving for walking paths. There was some concern over paving which may lead to increased skateboard use.
- Adequacy of Benches
- The cost associated with adequate Police Patrol
- Need for increase Maintenance

In general the Council felt that the list provided covered their major concerns. They felt that all these issues needed further review before any concrete decisions could be made regarding proper next steps.

At this point, Ms Kablitz asked the Council to keep in mind these concerns and look at what the public provided as options for the improvement of the Common.

Options in and around the Common as heard at the Public Hearing:

- Enhancement of landscaping possibly funded through “adopt-the-Common” concept or as part of the local garden club
- Increasing the patrol at night
- Providing adequate lighting that fits the historic character of the green space and also helps to illuminate the “dark corners”
- Fixing the fountains and address the issues of the disconnect between the fountain and the playground (particularly looking at the issues of the woodchips which led to the fountain being turned off)
- Promoting special events such as summer music series to bring more residents to the Common
- Refurbish the walking paths to make them user friendly to residents of all abilities
- Paint the gazebo
- Research the playground in regards to
 - location (some what it to stay, some to more it to another part of the commons, yet other to move it off site to perhaps the OC Woodman lot).
 - The movement of the playground off site raised a few question
 - » The general “need” for a playground in this area or if other school playgrounds could be utilized more
 - » The safety of moving it to the OC Woodman lot
 - » The conflict between student and resident use on school playgrounds
 - Funding, design, materials and placement of new structures with the same footprint as what exists currently

She then opened the discussion to the Council to add (or remove) any options.

The Council indicated further options that were in need of review including:

- Creation of Gateways/Entances
- Portable Cameras for added security

As with issues the Council felt that the list provided covered the options they felt needed to be addressed. Again, the general feeling was that until this was properly studies and investigated and a more detailed analysis was provided they could not make judgment on which options to proceed with.

Ms Kablitz then opened the Council discussion to talk about a process regarding the next step for the development of a Gardiner Common Plan. She indicated

that all information gathered would be presented to the Planning Department (there was some discussion as to who the Planning Department was, it was resolved to include the city planner and all other staff with a vested interest in the development and upkeep of the Common) for review and the development of a preliminary plan. She asked the Council if they felt there were any issues or options which they saw as needing to be addressed first in this process. The Council's response was that they saw the whole concept of issues and options for the plan as needing thorough review and analysis. It was their request that all information be provided to the appropriate staff for review and that staff return to them with a series of options (including the cost of those options) for the Council to address. It was their hope that this would also be brought again before the public so that they could be part of any decision making in regards to the proper options for moving forward. There was some discussion as to the development of a committee to help the staff address concerns but it was felt that the first steps needed were a series of options to be drafted by staff for general discussion before any other work was undertaken.

At this point Ms Kablitz opened the discussion to the public to share their opinion on what had been decided. Public comments included:

Phil Barter:

- Saw 2 major issues—
 - playground and what needs to be done;
 - Common and what needs to be done.
- Council needs to budget separately and decide location of playground. Whether there will be one playground or two locations in town?

Daryl Mashke: (Chair Common Good)

- Location of Playground is only disagreement in community.
- Color (of the Playground) as well as structure can be addressed to meet needs of community and the context of the Common.

Earle Shettleworth:

- There is a need for design of enhancing Common.
- Indicated that there are many Landscaping firms available to help design the Common to meet the communities needs and uses.

Deb Holmes:

- In her travels has seen that every City park has fountains, playgrounds, etc.
- She mentioned the purposeful decision of N Conway to add a playground on their "Commons". It keeps people in town and spending money locally.

Barbara Osterline Heath:

- Indicated that the concept of Playgrounds has changed. She provided the Council with some information on alternatives to “traditional” play structures

Daryl Mashke:

- Indicated she had sent letter with link to web including ideas of how to use Common with best interest of everyone.

Ms. Kablitz thanked the public for their participation and their comments at this and last week's meeting. She indicated that this was not the last time that the public would have a chance to voice their opinion on the Common, that although the process would now be handed to staff for review and the drafting of options for the future use and design of the Common their findings would then be presented to the Council and the Public for review and discussion.

Notes by Antje Kablitz