



**Hampton Beach Area Commission  
Meeting Minutes –January 26, 2006  
Hampton Police Station Conference Room**

**In Attendance:**

Fred Rice, Chairman – Town of Hampton  
John Kane – Hampton Beach Village District  
Tom Higgins – Hampton Area Chamber of Commerce  
Doug DePorter –NH Department of Transportation  
Brian Warburton - DRED (Seacoast Parks & Rec)  
Warren Bambury – Rockingham Regional Planning Commission  
Betty Gagne - Seacoast Parks & Rec (Administrative)  
Jamie Steffen – Town Planner, Town of Hampton (Administrative)  
Jim Workman, Selectman – Town of Hampton  
Skip Windemiller – Hampton Beach Village District  
Chris Gamache – DRED (Parks and Recreation)

**Excused:**

Allison McLean - DRED  
Sandrine Thibault –Office of Energy and Planning

Chairman Fred Rice opened the meeting just after 7pm, and announced that the meeting was being video recorded for channel 22. He then gave the attendees a brief history of how the Hampton Beach Area Commission was founded, and introduced all the members of the commission.

The first appointment was a presentation on the plans for the Underwood Bridge by NH DOT Bridge Design staff member Mark Whittemore. He opened his presentation by listing the 3 stages of public involvement for such projects:

First stage: hold a public officials meeting

Second stage: hold a public information meeting

Third stage: hold a public hearing (Mark noted that the third stage is held only when acquiring property, and was not needed as part of this project).

Mark said the overall 10-year plan is to rehab the bridge and paint the existing span. The current bridge was built in 1949 and has been on the state's "red list" since 1999. The bridge is inspected every 8 months, and has been in deterioration since 1983. The existing deck and girders are in poor condition, and there is much pack rust within the plates due to a buildup of moisture. The recommended work should be done within 2 to 3 years.

DOT Bridge Design staff member Steve Boynton presented the 4 options of repairing the bridge:

Option 1: To repair the bridge in the quickest way (one year), it would mean shutting down the bridge in (2) 3-month intervals, during April-May-June and September-October-November. Cost: \$6.3 to 7 million.

Option 2: Do the same work, but in stage construction. Do one lane at a time, with one lane traffic – stop work for busy times. Will take longer (two years). Cost: \$7 to 7.7 million.

Option 3: Do the same work, but put in a temporary bridge on the ocean side. The temp bridge would be built high enough (45 to 48 feet) to accommodate the boats coming in and out of the harbor. The plan would allow the existing bridge to be shut down, and traffic would run over the temp bridge. Cost: \$9.8 to 10.5 million.

Option 4: Complete replacement of the current bridge, constructed high enough that no lift will be needed. Cost: \$18.5 million (2 lanes); \$28 million (4 lanes).

Mark Whittemore then said that DOT is leaning toward one of the rehab plans vs. a complete rebuild. He said the cost would be 80% federal funds/20% state funds.

Fred invited questions and comments from the commission and other attendees.

Tom Higgins remarked that closing the bridge would be impossible, adding that the bridge should be made into 4 lanes, and there would be no net improvement to leave it as a drawbridge.

John Kane said the project would have a severe economic impact on beach business; he added that it wouldn't be fair to the residents. He prefers to wait for a longer time in order to get full construction of a 4-lane bridge.

Jamie Steffen asked what kind of involvement the town would have in deciding on the look of the bridge.

Jim Workman asked if rehabilitating the bridge would take it off the state list for rebuilding.

Chris Gamache commented that rehab option 1 is the least expensive way out, but it would interrupt the usage of the Hampton Beach RV park and the state park. He said option 3 is the best rehab choice for the best interest of the park system.

Skip Windemiller asked how long the rehab repairs would last? Mark's response was that the repaired bridge would last about 20 to 25 years, but that more work may be required on the lift span. Skip said he thinks a new bridge should be built, adding that a partnership could be set up to help with funding. He cited an example of a bridge that was

funded by including a restaurant over the bridge, and paying off the bond with income from the restaurant.

Warren Bambury said the Rockingham Regional Planning Commission has spent several years studying the master plan, and comments were made during that time period that a new bridge should be built. He said \$8 million was put into funding for a new bridge, and should still be where it is, earmarked for the bridge. He added that the 10-year plan has now become a 20-year plan, and that he agrees with Skip's idea of involving private industry. He also asked if there was some way the commission could help DOT with the study of building a new bridge.

Mark Whittimore's response was that replacement contracts take time – more time than can be afforded for this bridge, as it needs to be repaired now. He said they can't take a step back and reconsider complete replacement at this point – it would be too time consuming.

Brian Warburton commented that the economic impact would be a problem. He said that when Route 1 was in need of construction, James Barrington pulled everyone together and looked at what was best for everyone. They went for full construction and it was the best decision. He said it's best to look ahead and make sure all parties involved, including the residents, consider the entire package.

Fred Rice said the commission exists to find solutions, and they need to implement the master plan in the scheme of things. After hearing the presentation, he feels that the commission needs to find out what it will take to get a new bridge, and not how to accommodate a refurbished old bridge. He mentioned that both the state and Federal governments should be involved by appropriating the necessary funds. He also asked if anyone has considered the actual negative cost impact to the economy of simply rehabilitating the old bridge, as compared to the increase in revenues that would result from, and thereby make it worth doing, a new bridge. He asked how long a temporary bridge would be good for. Mark's reply was 1 or 2 years.

Tom Higgins said if you can put in a temporary high bridge, why can't the present bridge be rehabbed to be higher?

State Rep Nancy Stiles expressed concern about the safety of the existing bridge, and felt the temp bridge should be constructed so that it can stand long enough to allow for construction of a new, permanent bridge.

Town Manager James Barrington said the state's interest in the bridge would plummet if a rehab is done. He feels that federal money should be received to build a new bridge. He also mentioned how evacuation in the event of a natural disaster or emergency would be stalled if the drawbridge were opened for boats, malfunction, or any other reason.

Jack Kopka pointed out that the bridge is only a few miles from a nuclear plant, and wanted to know if that counted for anything.

Charlie Preston asked if it was possible to add width to the existing abutments and build a new bridge right over the old one. He pointed out that a 4-lane bridge is needed, but a drawbridge is not.

Mike Scanlon mentioned a possible need for a 5-lane (emergency lane) bridge.

Mark Whittemore summarized that the bridge is environmentally and historically significant. DOT made the commitment to preserve the bridge. He also mentioned that it would take at least five years to work out a full plan for bridge replacement (4 lanes, no drawbridge). Fred asked why DOT had made such a decision on its own to “save” the bridge, when no town agency had made any such request, and suggested that such an effort might be ill-advised, given the impact it would have on the local economy.

Fred said the bridge design people should try to “dig a little deeper” within their present resources into the design of a complete replacement of the bridge. He said the commission will form a task force to explore the economic impacts of the various bridge rehab and replacement options.

Tom Higgins asked if DOT could supply him with a copy of the 10 worst NH bridges (with solutions to fixing them).

Doug DePorter inquired whether there was a “band-aid” approach to preserve the present bridge for 5 years. Fred thinks money can be earmarked or committed within a 5-year period if there is a concerted effort to do so.

Brian Warburton finished that segment of the meeting by mentioning the Federal government’s funding of a huge bridge in Alaska at a cost of \$250 million, which serves an island with only 50 people on it.

The second appointment was a presentation by Shannon Alther of TMS Architects on a 10-unit condo complex to be built at 18-20 Keefe Ave. At the conclusion, Fred Rice told him that the commission does not have the power to make decisions on proposed building designs, but that the Zoning and Development sub-committee can make recommendations which it feel will enhance properties. He urged Shannon to leave his contact info with Skip Windemiller, so Skip could set up a meeting to further review his plans and make suggestions.

#### Old Business:

- a. Skip W. gave a report on review of the 465 Ocean Boulevard project, saying that very little could be done to have the project meet needed goals, since it is small, and has little visual impact on Ocean Blvd.
- b. Fred Rice gave a report on the Superior Court Ruling on the Breckenridge. He read a letter from Town Attorney Mark Gerreald, which complimented the

- HBAC's work in recommending the project as meeting all of the Master Plan's goals.
- c. Jamie Steffen gave a report on the proposed warrant articles:
    - i. First floor retail on Ocean Blvd. went through with one small wording change.
    - ii. Establishment of a FAR 4 area did not go through. Fred stated that it was not a major setback, since the entire FAR issue is complex, and needs to be developed and presented more clearly in its entirety next year.
    - iii. Parking for condo conversions went through.
  - d. Warren Bambury gave an update about the museum fundraiser. The date is set for March 26<sup>th</sup> and the event will be held at the Galley Hatch Conference Center at the Inn of Hampton. It will be a sampling of Seacoast area restaurants. Tickets will be available soon. Fred encouraged Warren to actively pursue organization of the event, and to ask commission members for support, as needed.

New Business:

- a. All minutes and meeting agendas will be posted on the town website.
- b. Fred distributed the HBAC subcommittee assignment list, and stated that it is just a worksheet, which is flexible and open to changes. The Planning Board was added to the Zoning Board as a point of coordination for the Zoning and Development subcommittee; Parks personnel (Brian Warburton and Chris Gamache) were removed from the Zoning and Development subcommittee; and it was decided, instead of forming a special subcommittee to deal with the bridge issue, that it would be added to the Transportation and Parking subcommittee. Fred added himself to that committee. The committees were urged by Fred to read and review the Master Plan.
- c. Fred broached the idea of holding a special public forum to discuss beach issues. His idea was to ask the public for positive comments only, and seek solutions to problems. The purpose of the forum would be to seek positive input from the general public.

Brian Warburton did not think such a forum was necessarily a good idea. He was concerned that such a forum might give some individuals the chance to use it as a sounding board to complain about unrelated issues. Fred assured him that the subject matter would be kept positive. After a brief discussion, it was the decision of the commission that the forum would be held at the next meeting on February 22<sup>nd</sup>, at 7:00pm in the Selectmen's Meeting Room at Town Hall.

Fred then read an e-mail he had received from commission member Sandrine Thibault, where she encouraged the commission to establish guidelines for its design review of properties. She recommended the commission develop a strategic plan with an implementation schedule to help prioritize and clarify all the projects that are being worked on. Skip will head up the effort on the design guidelines, and Fred will put together a first draft of a strategic plan, which the commission can then review and modify. Skip asked if there would be any objection to his inviting local architects to serve as advisors to the subcommittee, so that there was more professional input to the commission's recommendations. The members agreed that it would be a good idea.

The minutes from the December 1<sup>st</sup> meeting were reviewed, and one change was made. A sentence was eliminated.

There were no questions from the public.

Brian Warburton announced at the conclusion of the meeting that his assistant, Betty Gagne, had been promoted to work in the Division of Travel and Tourism office, and that this would be her last meeting.

The meeting adjourned at 9:10pm.