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Ramp closure foes pack meeting

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Members of the grassroots group "Save Our Ramp" came to the Conservation Commission's public hearing on the Driftway Park Tuesday with one thing in mind: reverting the boat ramp back to the way it was.

The recent placement of granite blocks along the ramp's entry road, preventing trailers from turning around, has spurred some local boaters to take a stand to seek their removal before the long Fourth of July holiday weekend.

"We all have the constitutional right to fish, fowl and navigate in that water," said Marshfield resident Brad White, a local boater and founder of "Save Our Ramp". "We respectfully ask them to remove the blocks."

But Conservation Commission Chairman Michael Clark directed the concern away from the blocks in noting the whole purpose of the meeting was to garner input on the future of the park - an 18-acre park located off the Driftway adjacent to the Herring River - and what improvements can be made to preserve the environmental resource.

"We really want people to take a look at this with an open set of eyes," Clark said. "We want to provide a modern facility with a real interest in identifying a valuable resource. That is what our goal is."

The decision made in April to prohibit boat trailer parking was in part of a long-range plan to create a multi-use launching and park facility under the "Driftway Park/North River Marshes Coastal Access Plan," approved at Town Meeting. It was also spurred by concerns about the trailers causing further damage and erosion to the area.

Under the recent short-term compromise, boaters will have to drop off their boats, park the trailer at an off-site location and drive back to access the ramp. If cars with trailers are found at the park or along the Driftway, police will ticket them with a \$30 fine.

Engineers were on hand Tuesday to discuss future design plans for the park.

Steve Ivas, of Ivas Environmental, said low-impact developments are in the works to prevent harmful storm water runoff and erosion control, and provide riverbank stabilization and the re-vegetation of some areas.

Other recreational options for the park property included a synthetic ballfield, improved picnic area, pathway linkages, pet park, information kiosk, a floating dock, and a concession stand.

According to Comprehensive Environmental, Inc (CEI) engineer Matt Lundstedt, they will come up with a design draft by September, with the final stages to be put together by November. Time frame and completion of the project is still to be determined.

"The actual construction depends on the funding and what we are building," said Lundstedt.

Public input on Tuesday also included interest in handicap accessibility, year-round maintenance and trash pick-up, proper public access and a significant outlet for all boats.

"I want to be sure the park has our interest in mind," said Craig Rosenquist, power boater and president of the grass roots group Save Our Ramp.

It is not the potential of the future park, but the present access restrictions that some local boaters are fighting for, said White.

"I am hoping for this to be bigger, better, smarter and sharper," he said. "We just don't want the takeaway, and this is a major takeaway."

At Tuesday's meeting, White again pitched a previous recommendation to fully open up the ramp this summer: a "first come first serve" policy that only allows single-axle trailers with boats up to 20 feet inside the park.

"There is a short wick and a boiling point when recreation areas go away," White said, noting that the next step will be litigation if his organization doesn't find a more agreeable compromise. "Save Our Ramp is an acronym for 'Safety Over Restriction'."

Walter Zaremba, a canoe and kayaker from Scituate, said he found motorboat trailers to be "obnoxious" since they tend to push away smaller boats that are trying to access the water.

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He fears that letting more cars, large boats and trailers will increase erosion from spinning tires and pollutants like gasoline.

"I see motor crafts doing substantial damage to that parking lot," he said.

But Scituate resident and boater Steve Smith said beside the busy summer weekends, the park is only used 340 days of the year, and erosion problems are not the major source of erosion.

For Peter Benjamin, it's the safety aspect of boating that concerned him the most since he takes his daughter out to go fishing and without ramp access has to redirect near the mouth of the North and South Rivers, which is considered a very dangerous spot and discouraged by many to travel past.

"A lot of this comes down to common sense and courtesy," he said. "It's a park meant for everybody. I used it as a kid, my kids deserve to use it too."

Scituate resident Arthur Johannesen said plans should move ahead with the cooperation and excitement behind both boaters and conservation members down the line, but that the need is still there to get the ramp back in business.

"The boaters bring a lot of good energy to the project," he said. "Just revert the area back for the season. People are very upset. It is almost unnecessary."

According to Clark, grant money and other sources of funding will be heavily sought after to move forward with to provide possibilities for "parking, walking trails, fishing, hunting, picnicking, play and athletic fields, and other recreational opportunities, as well as issues such as natural heritage, historical preservation, environmental educations, and river bank restoration and stabilization."

"We are very serious about getting some of this done in a timely fashion," he said.






To include your own input in the plans of the Driftway Conservation Park, please send ideas to driftway@ceiengineers.com. For more information on "Save Our Ramp" visit www.saveourramp.com.

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