

# Groton Greenway Committee

February 7, 2012 Meeting Minutes

Location: Groton Town Hall, 173 Main Street, Groton, MA  
Time: 7:00 PM  
Note taker: Fran Stanley  
Members Present: David Pitkin, Fran Stanley, Marion Stoddart  
Other Attendees: David Manugian (spokesman for Greenway), Community Preservation Committee  
Members Michael Roberts, Bob DeGroot, Bruce Easom, Laurie Smigelski, Carolyn Perkins, Richard Hewitt as well as Kathy Baker and Adam Burnet (former Friends of Fitch's Bridge member)

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## Fitch's Bridge Replacement

The Groton Greenway Committee (Greenway) with David Manugian as its spokesman met with the Community Preservation Committee (CPC) to discuss Fitch's Bridge. David Manugian explained that it will be more expensive to restore the bridge rather than replace it. Using federal and state funds which requires work to Mass Highway standards, restoring the bridge may cost two million dollars or more with as much as one million dollars spend on lead abatement alone. Using local funds only, remembering that Community Preservation Act funds would not be considered local since a state match is involved, restoration may cost one and one half million dollars. Replacing the bridge with a prefabricated concrete bridge is cheaper and may run from eight hundred fifty thousand dollars to one million dollars.

David Manugian has been working on restoring the Fitch's Bridge connection across the Nashua River for eight years. Marion Stoddart has put in even more years. Former Friends of Fitch's Bridge member Adam Burnett attended the meeting. Marion Stoddart, Fran Stanley, David Pitkin and David Manugian shared their desire to move forward and find a way to present a Fitch's Bridge project to town meeting to see if the project might gain residents' financial support. Points made by Greenway members in support of this position included:

1. Fitch's Bridge is in the Master Plan.
2. Project has been studied for many years.
3. Local private fundraising has yielded modest results (around \$3,000).
4. Multiyear search for funding from alternative sources was not successful (tried several federal avenues, the Commonwealth, foundations).
5. Deferral may lose opportunity for project to be done while town residents who remember enjoying the use of the bridge are still alive.
6. Deferral may increase costs due to inflationary nature of future projects and increased permitting requirements.
7. Existing Fitch's Bridge is an attractive nuisance (see also continuing lead hazard to people and environment).
8. If Fitch's Bridge collapses, Town must pay to remove the bridge (Commonwealth refuses to pay this expense.)

CPC members were generally open to restoring Fitch's Bridge connection. Richard Hewitt noted some residents' general concerns about the Surrenden Farms CPA project --- both the large size of the project and the multi year commitment --- aspects that are apt to be true for a successfully funded Fitch's Bridge project. Also, the financing of Surrenden Farms has already maxed out the bonding against future CPA revenue. Other CPC members, such as Carolyn Perkins, also expressed reservations about the large cost of the project given the difficult economic times.

CPC member Bruce Easom stated his preference to spend two million dollars to restore the bridge rather than one million dollars to replace the bridge. George Wheatley was absent from this meeting but offered through others who were present his suggestion of a dedicated Fitch's Bridge endowment fund which would benefit both Fitch's Bridge and fund the restoration of Squannacook Hall.

Several CPC members observed that Town Meeting voters may be more receptive to a large request for local funding if it were accompanied by a show of an alternative financial commitment (preferably a sizeable amount) that

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could share a portion of the costs. Although finding a funding partner may be optimal, the project has not been able to garner such support despite concerted efforts to do so.

Other advice included a reminder to educate and build public support before asking Town Meeting to vote on a funding warrant article. Groton Electric Light Department surveys were mentioned as a possible means of reaching out to Town residents. Bruce Easom mentioned fifty thousand dollar Department of Conservation and Recreation trail grants.

Note that the CPA state match is forty percent but may be only thirty percent going forward into the next fiscal year. Given the higher costs of building to Mass Highway standards if state or federal funds are used, it may not save townspeople any money to fund through the Community Preservation Act.

The CPC concluded its Greenway agenda item by inviting the Greenway to return to a future meeting of the CPC to further explore Fitch's Bridge options.

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The Greenway posted paper signs on the meeting room door redirecting the public to join the Greenway for a continuation of its meeting down the hallway to another meeting room on the first floor of Town Hall.

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Greenway members directed Fran Stanley to send a letter of thanks to the CPC noting that it has decided not to apply for CPA funds this year. Trail approaches after the bridge is replaced/restored may be an small enough project with no Mass Highway downside to consider making a discrete future CPA application.

Adam Burnett recommended that the Greenway consider the possibility of using weathering steel in lieu of prefabricated concrete bridge material. Weathering steel may meet the need while offering a more pleasing and historically similar aspect.<sup>1</sup>

Greenway members and David Manugian discussed and decided to speak the Town Manager and Board of Selectmen (BOS). The BOS may have a preference in terms of whether the Greenway puts a Fitch's Bridge warrant article for a debt exclusion in the Fall 2012 town meeting or Spring 2013 town meeting. The Greenway could submit for approximately one million dollars for a new bridge or approximately two million dollars to be spent on restoring the old bridge.

Should the Town fund replacement of the bridge, David Manugian also previewed the idea of setting aside the old bridge (by crane) in a nearby location of the Historic Commission's choosing. Once placed, the Historic Commission could undertake to restore the historic bridge. This project could proceed at any pace with the thought of eventually replacing the new bridge with the restored old bridge.

Minutes by Fran Stanley.

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<sup>1</sup> Internet search provides this description – "Weathering steel is a high strength low alloy steel that in suitable environments forms an adherent protective rust 'patina' to prevent further corrosion. The corrosion rate is so low that bridges fabricated from unpainted weathering steel can achieve a 120 year design life with only nominal maintenance. Hence, a well detailed weathering steel bridge in an appropriate environment can provide an attractive, very low maintenance, economic solution in many locations." See also 1988 Federal Highway Administration Technical Advisory on the subject at <http://www.fhwa.dot.gov/bridge/t514022.cfm>.