

9/16/2021

Good afternoon. My name is Robin Harlow. I am a long term resident of Camden with deep historic roots and a great understanding and appreciation of the outdoors. I'd like to add my comments to the public comment section of today's meeting.

I do support freeing the Megunticook River to improve the ecology of the watershed as a whole by allowing natural fish recolonization, improving water quality, minimizing flood risk and restoration of natural sediment transport. The dam itself is not the purpose of my comments today. Since the Library Trustees' responsibility is overseeing Harbor Park and its important historical and scenic aspects I narrow the conversation to Frederick Law Olmsted and his design theory and Harbor Park.

Concerned by 1850 that people were trapped in the urban environment of the Industrial Age Olmsted began designing open spaces for communities. He was into sustainable design and environmental conservation long before it was in vogue. He wrote "The design should conserve the natural features of the site to the greatest extent possible and provide for continued ecological health of the area". He urged us to "Respect the genius of the Place" as every site has ecologically and spiritually unique qualities.

Clearly the degradation of the sea wall of Harbor Park and the park benches sitting all too often in deep ocean water is a problem we cannot ignore. The water is changing the land which is dictating design change. Olmsted wanted the land to dictate design. In fact, the Boston park systems were engineered by Olmsted to enhance the city's drainage and control flooding. An idea we are all only now rediscovering and is applicable in Camden today.

In 2003 Riverside, IL was grappling with a very similar issue although not with the added complication of sea level rise. Their Frederick Law Olmsted Society who is dedicated to sustaining Olmsted's vision for Riverside (as you the Library Trustees are Harbor Park) determined they should support the river project as it was entirely within Olmsted's vision. They felt the River Park was a living landmark and required evolutionary changes to maintain and improve its quality over time. They considered the project a positive evolutionary change.

I believe this is where we are in Camden. Rising sea levels are literally pounding at our Harbor Park door. Increasingly alarming rainfall events send so much water down to the harbor it is disintegrating the sea wall. The threats of never before seen flooding such as in Europe and New York are real. We have no real choice but to act. Olmsted was guided by concern for humanity, nature and sense of community with innovative thoughtful work. I ask you to represent him well. Please consider working with the town in freeing the Megunticook River back to its natural state to benefit us all.

Thank you for your time and attention.

Robin Harlow