

Dear Trustees,

I understand that you will be discussing Harbor Park during your meeting the afternoon of August 16, 2021. I had hoped to attend to share a few thoughts as a Camden resident and library patron, but have a conflict, so am sharing those thoughts via this email instead.

In deciding how to address the infrastructure improvements of the water-adjacent portions of Harbor Park, I believe the Library Trustees should keep the following four points in mind

1. Mary Louise Curtis Bok's primary goal "to open up a view from the harbor of the charming library, with a green shorefront" can easily continue being achieved with a wide range of design choices around Montgomery Dam and its associated sluiceway wall, up to complete removal of both.
2. The design objectives of the Olmsted Brothers, transporting visitors into a quiet, scenic park, secluded from the busy streets of Camden, can also be achieved with a wide range of design choices, including complete removal of the Montgomery dam and its associated sluiceway wall.
3. As you rightfully note, aesthetics should be a leading factor in your design choice consideration. The definition of "aesthetic" is broader than just physical appearance of a project, however, and includes "a set of principles underlying and guiding the work".
4. Olmsted Brothers were called in to revise the design of the shorefront in 1951. With regard to the shore, Mrs. Bok said "I want to put the shore part of it in good condition . . . as you decide is best". That is to say, there is precedent for design revision when it is clear that the park is no longer functioning as well as it could, and that Mrs. Bok left designers with knowledge of what is required to put the shore part "in good condition" with significant flexibility.

Rising sea level is affecting more than what our eyes see when we stand in Harbor Park, or when returning to Camden by watercraft after a day out on the Bay. It is also affecting our sense of aesthetic and what we feel when we see those things. We live in a time where we are constantly reminded of how design choices of the past have led to a complex cascade of environmental consequences including sea level rise. With each passing generation, it is going to become harder and harder to view a man-made park that does not take into consideration its impact on the local ecology to be aesthetically pleasing or a place for peaceful reflection.

The Olmsted Brothers designed a park around a pre-existing dam. We don't have to be so constrained as we revise the design to be "in good condition" in the face of changing storm and sea patterns. What would the Olmsted Brothers choose today, given the options at hand, and our current understanding of design impact on the local ecology? What factors would inform their aesthetic?

For many today, myself included, a redesign of the sea wall and Montgomery dam in view of our changing climate that does not attempt to reduce the negative impact of those features on the local ecology would make harbor park less aesthetically pleasing than the park is today. Instead of reflecting on the natural beauty we are blessed with in the midcoast, I would reflect on a missed opportunity; on mankind's inability to turn off the path of refusing to consider the impact of our design choices on the environment even when it makes economic sense to do so.

Over the coming decade, it is clear that the tide of opinion is only going to shift further towards this aesthetic view as society begins to feel more acutely the impacts of human-caused global warming.

The library's 2020 Annual Report focused on the word "resilient". I ask you to keep this word in mind during this process - seek a design that is resilient to a changing environment; seek a design that allows our local ecology to be resilient in the face of immense pressure from mankind; and finally, trust the resilience of our community that you recognized in that report to allow it to adapt to change. Resilience is always a beautiful aesthetic.

Thank you for your work in maintaining the library as a vital hub of the Midcoast.

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