

CONSERVATION COMMISSION MINUTES

April 19, 2021
7:00 p.m. VIA Zoom

PRESENT: Farley Brown, June Pichel Cook, Susie Houston (Sel. Bd. Liaison), Brian Machesney, Diane Morgan, Carol Maroni, Elinor Osborn, Heidi Rich, Stephen Moffatt

ABSENT: Ashley Nunery

ELECTION OF OFFICERS: Stephen was re-elected as chair with Diane being back-up in his absence. Diane was re-elected as treasurer. June was re-elected as secretary.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES: February minutes were approved as presented. March minutes were amended to clarify information presented by Jens Hilke.

VACANCY: The commission thanked John Brodhead for his service on the commission. Steve will convey commission's appreciation. Discussion ensued as to potential candidates to recommend to the Select Board for serving on the commission. Motion made to recommend Brian to fill the vacancy and unanimously approved. Susie will forward Brian's name to the Select Board for appointment at the board's April 20, 2021 meeting.

Brian thanked the board for its consideration and spoke of the importance conservation is to the community.

TOWN MEETING UPDATE: Stephen noted the article to add funds to the Craftsbury Conservation Fund was approved but felt that the commission needs to do more education and outreach in the community in letting people know what the commission is doing. The commission needs to make its focus clearer.

What conservation means was a question as it has a multitude of understandings. It was suggested having a discussion of that nature would help clarify the commission's goals. The town website information shows: background and history; major goal; specific tasks; Natural Heritage; links to Craftsbury Conservation Fund and guidelines, natural resources information, and to Town Plan.

Discussion centered on revisiting goals and/or re-establishing, to be an agenda item for next meeting. Conservation commissions are legislative committee set up by 24 V.S.A., Chapter 118. A link to the statutes will be added to the town website and an updating of commission membership.

Susie noted that conservation was one of the three top priorities that came out of the community visit meetings. A Land Protection Task Force was formed after the community visit several years ago but eventually dissolved as what it pursued was duplicative of work being done by other town committees. Carol noted the taskforce had done an extensive survey that is posted on the Craftsbury Town Website. Carol will send

a link to the commission members for their review. Placing the Land Protection Task Force survey and Community Visit Report on the commission section of the website was suggested.

STANDING COMMITTEES: Diane and Elinor have drafted a document pertaining to standing committees for review at next meeting. Discussion covered ad hoc versus standing committees, role of sub-committees and open meeting law, calling of meetings and agendas. Whether standing committees would help streamline the work of the commission is the issue. Farley indicated the Planning Commission has ad hoc committees. Susie said the select board was hoping to approve guidelines at its meeting on the open meeting law to present to town committees.

Carol suggested having both standing committees and ad hoc committees could provide a workable framework. The commission's goals need to be clarified and then the types of committees established from that point.

ACT 171: What role the commission will take in regard to the legislation is uncertain until goals are clarified. The question of ACT 171 involving the Planning Commission, Conservation Commission, and Select Board, particularly the role of the Conservation Commission was raised. Susie, Farley, and Stephen will begin a dialogue to address this issue.

Farley reported the Town Plan Revision is due 2024 and the Planning Commission is reviewing what needs to be done to address updating the plan. The goal is to have that completed by the end of the year. The Conservation Commission is primarily responsible for the Natural Heritage section of the plan. How ACT 171 is to be embedded in the Town Plan is being reviewed by the Planning Commission.

Carol noted the work the commission can do is separate from the Planning Commission. Jens Hilke identified some areas in town as important in view of ACT 171 goals. The Conservation Commission can look at what areas could be conserved and role the Craftsbury Conservation Fund can have in that. Hilke presented a lot of information as an overview, the commission now has to do its homework specifically. The State has mapping that identify important areas and it is a question of prioritizing parcels.

Elinor reported that it was recommended to the Hardwick Conservation Commission to have professionals involved in mapping and identifying important areas as it would have more impact legally. Hilke did not indicate that information in his presentation and Farley will try to find out from Jens Hilke or Andrew Wood what the need of legal professional services means.

MEMORIAL BENCH: Steve reported the memorial bench costs have escalated exponentially to an estimated \$300. He reported the materials had been purchased by Harry Miller who will be building the Leopold bench. A motion was made to request \$300 from the Select Board and passed unanimously. Susie will present the request to the board at its meeting. If denied, Stephen indicated he would pay for the bench.

OTHER BUSINESS: Protocols to amend an agenda to keep us within the hour meeting time were suggested. Identifying items on the agenda as informational, discussion, or action items may help. Adding public's access time is a component of addressing the open meeting law. Agenda items can be added up to 48 hours before a meeting. Within the 48-hour window an agenda item can be added only if there is a time sensitive issue that needs a resolution before the next meeting. Susie indicated that transparency is essential, and a framework is needed for people to be able to connect to what is transpiring.

Stephen reported that some work has been done by Jim Moffatt on one side of town and on the other side of town by Rob Libby on identifying ash trees on public roads. County Forester Jared Nunery has sent out more information on ash trees and stressed the importance for public involvement.

Elinor reported on the knotweed growth at the demonstration site. She raised question if more native plants be planted at the site, continue cutting knotweed, or cover with hardware cloth. The problematic areas are the steep berm created by the town and other steep slopes. Hardware cloth may be the best solution. If planting is done, then watering and weeding has to be overseen by someone. Elinor would like to have a commission member stewardship program with 2-week intervals beginning in June for the site. Money was made available from Fish & Wildlife in Barton for clearing knotweed, plantings from Intervale, and assistance with the planting. Contact was Pete Emerson. Elinor will investigate.

Future meetings: Discussion on in-person or to continue on Zoom. No decision. Farley will serve as back- up for Carol in administering Zoom meetings. Carol will email to Farley the screen shots and passwords previously sent to Stephen and June, needed to open the meeting.

The commission will meet on May 17, at 7:00 p.m. via Zoom.

June Pichel Cook, Secretary