

Ferrisburgh Conservation Commission Meeting
April 9, 2024
Minutes Approved

Members present in person: Craig Heindel, Barry Estabrook, Jen Cirillo, Don Dewees
Members attending remotely: Matt Gorton
Members Absent: Joe Nelson, Amy Dohner
Guest: Jeanne Kelly

Craig opened the meeting at 7:04 p.m.

Draft minutes of 2024-03-12 weren't available; Craig forgot to prepare them; we will review them at our May meeting.

Treasurer's Report: Craig reported that there was over \$1,000 on hand.

Planning Commission applications updates: Craig said that there was nothing new to report.

Zoning Board updates:

Application No, 24-022 (R. Ayer) Agricultural Enterprise, Livestock; property ID#: 04/01/15.11; 525 Ashley Rd. Craig and Don attended the recent ZBA hearing on this proposed project. They stated to the ZBA that they appreciated that no land use changes would affect the steep slope down to Lewis Creek, and that they saw no major conservation concerns regarding the project. They suggested some possible conditions if the application is granted approval, such as requiring that a Nutrient Management Plan be prepared and followed for the pastures that the new owner would acquire; that there be careful manure management for the barnyard area [now that a large number of cattle might be housed temporarily in the barn, as part of the proposed commercial operation] so that manure is not released into the adjacent Lewis Creek; and that the farm operations and commercial operations meet all Required Agricultural Practices of the Ag Agency.

- a. Application No. 24-025 (Mr. W. Robin) Single-Family Home (Replacement); property ID#: 14/02/48; 188 Sleepy Hollow Lane. Craig and Don attended the recent ZBA hearing on this application. They stated to the applicants that they appreciated that the proposed footprint of their replacement house would be no closer to Otter Creek than the current house, that no structure is proposed to be placed in the FEMA flood zone, and that they will obtain a fully-complying state wastewater permit – so the Conservation Commission supports the proposed project. Craig noted that he requested that the ZBA include a permit condition that the state's Low Risk Erosion Control Handbook be adhered to during construction, and that the CC supports a ZBA member's requests that exterior lighting be as minimal as possible on the river side of the buildings, and that all exterior lighting be down-shaded.

Mid-Champlain Valley Regional Conservation Partnership (RCP), Leopold bench project: Jen reported that she had been in contact with Laura Farrell, the RCP Coordinator, and that the benches might be constructed in May at a volunteer's workshop, possibly at Rokeby Museum. She will keep the Conservation Commission posted as details become available. The RCP has received a grant that would be adequate to pay for about ten benches.

Conservation Commission Website: Jen will check in with Amy to determine whether she is still able and interested in being the curator, and if so, she and Amy will arrange for training by town office personnel in how to access and update our website.

Town Forest Management Plan Update: Craig confirmed that Andrea Shortsleeve, Private Lands Habitat Biologist at the Vermont Fish and Wildlife Department, and Tim Duclos, Forest Program Senior Associate at Audubon Vermont will join some CC members for a site visit to the town forest from 1:00 to about 4:00 pm on April 24. We noted that we are looking forward to their input on management objectives and how to implement them, including whether there are species of greatest conservation need that could benefit from specific management methods.

Bridget Butler Slow Birding Fieldtrip update: Jen said that Amy had forwarded a message from Bridget confirming that she will lead a slow birding session from 9:00 am to noon on June 2 at the Little Otter Creek Wildlife Management Area accessed off Greenbush Rd. Bridget asked that the event be limited to 15 participants. Total cost to the Conservation Commission will be \$367 [Bridget's fee of \$300, and \$67 mileage]; we will use a portion of our budget to cover these costs, so there will be no charge to participants. Participants are encouraged to bring their own field-chairs and binoculars, although Bridget said she will bring some loaners. Joe volunteered to manage the sign-up details, with help from Jen. Commission members who have not been on a previous Bridget Butler bird walk are encouraged to participate. To encourage members of the other town boards to participate, we will offer up to 5 early sign-up slots for them and CC members who haven't participated in the past. Craig will send this notice to town board members, and he'll post the full announcement on FPF when some appropriate wording is available.

Shade Tree Preservation Plan: Don is on the Shade Tree Committee. He reported that they recently met to go through what should be in the plan. Joe reported at that meeting that the committee had received a grant sufficient to pay for about 20 trees to be planted on town properties -- and at the elementary school, which will involve students. The trees will come from Boro Hill Nursery and will be planted by a professional landscaper. The committee is hoping to have a draft version of the plan ready in the next several weeks, for review by the Selectboard. Then a public hearing will be held.

Future Presentations/Programs: We discussed numerous ideas, none of which are finalized at this point. The ideas are:

Agriculture and water quality: Craig noted that the Champlain Valley Farmers Coalition had recently sponsored a workshop in Middlebury on this topic, so he wondered if it would be too soon for us to sponsor a similar workshop. Jen noted that that workshop was geared to farmers, so she will approach Brooke Small of the coalition to see if they could present something more geared toward the general public. Craig wondered whether we could hold the presentation at a

local farm, where the attendees could see some on-farm conservation practices first-hand – he thought that the state Ag Agency or local Natural Resources Conservation District personnel could suggest a farmer who would be willing to host the event; Allan Brisson of Allandra Farm might be interested in demonstrating his manure injection system. Don mentioned that Riverwatch might have some good farm contacts. Jen suggested that it would be best to have it on a Wednesday or Thursday evening, to get maximum participation. Craig suggested that another worthwhile presentation topic might be on flood resilience; possibly co-sponsoring with VTDEC or ACRPC. Jen suggested a presentation on Lake Champlain fisheries, like we had discussed before Jaziah moved out of town. Matt suggested a presentation on turtles in the town and Champlain Valley. Craig suggested that a presentation on conservation planning would be timely, given the current efforts to update the town plan -- perhaps given by Jens Hawkins-Hilke, Conservation Planner at Vermont Fish and Wildlife.

Town Plan Update. Craig said that Don and he had attended the recent meeting of the Planning Commission to go over suggestions from the Conservation Commission including our proposed topics and re-organization of the Natural Resources section; the PC seemed receptive. We agreed on some potential assignments to CC members, to draft some wording for various sections: Vernal pools, as well as updating the wetlands information: Matt; Water supplies: Craig. This would include piped water via the several consecutive public water systems that receive their water from the Vergennes-Panton Water District; and also including water wells; Forests and Forestry: Joe; Wildlife: Matt; Geology: Don and Craig. Climate: perhaps by the Climate & Energy Committee? And with input from State Climatologist Dupigny-Giroux? And possibly also incorporating information from the recently-released Fifth Climate Assessment. Other topics to be assigned or figured out later. We also agreed that it will be important to include any topics in the updated town plan that would eventually be mentioned, encouraged/discouraged and/or regulated by future zoning regulations.

Meeting Adjourned: 8:26 p. m.

Next Meeting: 7:00 p. m. May 14, 2024, hybrid mode.