

Ferrisburgh Conservation Commission Meeting

May 14, 2024

Minutes Approved

Members present in person: Craig Heindel, Barry Estabrook, Jen Cirillo, Don Dewees, Joe Nelson, Amy Dohner.

Members Absent: Matt Gorton.

No one attended via Zoom.

Craig opened the meeting at 7:05 p.m.

Draft minutes of 2024-04-09 were read and approved as amended. Craig said he would prepare the minutes for 2024-03-12.

Treasurer's Report: Craig reported that there was over \$1,000 on hand. In addition, Fiscal Year 2025's budget for the CC of \$550 is expected to be available as of July 1. Amy said that there were adequate funds on hand to accommodate planned expenses in the immediate future.

Town Forest Management Plan Updates:

Craig reported that Andrea Shortsleeve (VT F&W Biologist) and Tim Duclos (Audubon Vermont) have submitted their reports, after a worthwhile visit on April 24. Their reports confirm that the Forest is unique and valuable.

Andrea and Tim said that most vehicle activity should not be allowed in the forest, but the Commission saw no reason to discontinue access to the snowmobile trail because it was used very little and during the winter when introducing invasive plants was not an issue.

Based on these two reports and other information, we concluded that it's appropriate for the Commission to maintain its policy of managing the town forest for wildlife habitat, and research.

The Commission will continue to control invasive plants. Don said he felt that invasive control was the Commission's biggest responsibility. In her report, Andrea noted that the forest itself was virtually free from invasive plants, but that there were many on the edges and beside the access trail that could act as seed sources.

Workday: Jen volunteered to circulate a sign-up sheet for workdays to focus on invasive removal.

At Craig and Joe's suggestion, the Commission decided to initially focus its invasive monitoring and control in the southwest quadrant. Other workdays would focus on trail improvements and signage.

Barry will reach out to the Trails Committee to see if they would like to participate in the trail workday.

Joe will contact the Nature Conservancy to see if they would help provide training on invasive species control, on a workday. Jen will contact Vermont Invasives or, a member of the groups could educate us on identifying and removing invasives.

The Commission discussed working with student groups. Joe wondered whether we could ask the UVM Field Naturalist Graduate Program to draft the overall forest management plan. Don asked whether or not we should first do a forest inventory. Craig suggested that the Field Naturalist Program could be asked whether they would prefer to do the inventory, or the full plan.

Craig noted that there was no urgency to finish the management plan, so we had time to compile an inventory.

Craig said that he and Don had spoken to Tom Aldrich who complained of car activity affecting his driveway.

The Commission agreed that there needed to be better signage on Robinson Road and at the Schultz-Aldrich driveway indicating where visitors to the Forest should park and where they should not park. Craig will check with John Bull, Road Foreman about whether they could arrange for the signs. If that's not possible Commission funds can be used.

Don said we also needed directional signs along the trail to the Town Forest. Craig suggested that the directional signs be more than simple arrows; they should also say something like "To Town Forest".

Planning Commission applications:

Two (2) Lot Subdivision; Applicants JSCL LLC- Sue DeVos, Manager; on Tupper's Crossing. Craig said he would attend a meeting on May 15 when a sketch plan would be presented. We agreed that getting a state wastewater permit, and not impacting the wetlands at the north end of the parcels, seems to be the most obvious potential conservation issues.

Zoning Board applications:

Craig received notice that McElwain Contracting is applying to expand their parking lot on Route 7. There are questions about whether the new driveway will encroach on the wetlands at the back of the lot. No further information was available.

Mid-Champlain Valley Regional Conservation Partnership Leopold Benches: Jen said the benches will be assembled in the fall. All of them will be placed on eastern edge of the Rokeby property in the bird habitat restoration area. Jen hopes that students at the Patricia Hannaford Career Center will cut the wood for the benches to size. Volunteers from the Conservation Commission and elsewhere will meet at Rokeby for a workshop to assemble them. The Commission will formulate a plan for the workshop. Don, Joe, Amy, and Jen agreed to handle the preparations for the event, and present it to the Partnership.

Conservation Commission website: Amy said she will take over overseeing the site and will reach out to Laurie Curler for training.

Bridget Butler Slow Birding event, June 2: We agreed that Jen will advertise the outing on Front Porch Forum and to the Commission's email list using Bridget's description. Participants will gather at 8:45 a.m. at the town office to car pool to the birding site.

Shade Tree Preservation Plan:

Joe said that the \$6,200 grant the Shade Tree Committee had received would not cover the number of trees he had hoped to plant. The Commission suggested that he purchase the number of trees he could with the grant and apply for a subsequent grant for additional trees.

Don and Jen said they would meet with Joe at the Town Beach to help decide where trees might be planted there.

Future Presentations and Programs: The ideas brought up at the April meeting all had merit. At Craig's suggestion we agreed to focus on agriculture and its impact on water quality. Craig suggested that an event could be a visit to a farm that demonstrates best practices. Jen will approach Champlain Valley Farmers Coalition for their input. Don suggested the Commission talk to River Watch, which does an annual farm tour. Craig suggested that the event should take place this summer or fall.

Town Plan update: Craig said that Jean and Bonnie were waiting for us to produce some content for the new plan. He will attend the next Planning meeting to see where things stand.

Mid-Champlain Valley Regional Conservation Partnership Draft Map: Jenn said that the Partnership has asked for input from area Conservation Commissions on

the content and format of the map. The Commission agreed that there was not enough information and context to offer an opinion at this time. We were puzzled by the intent and purpose of the online map, since it appeared to be similar to the VT ANR Natural Resources Atlas. Jen did not know why it was developed.

Don reported that Laura Fair has expressed interest in joining the Conservation Commission. We noted that she should follow the usual policy of attending a meeting, and then informing either Laura or Pam at the Town office if she was interested in being appointed by the Selectboard.

Bat Monitoring in July: Amy said that she had not heard from Alyssa Bennett at the Department of Fish and Wildlife. Amy would like to have someone take over coordinating the sessions because she will be away. Amy will reach out to Alyssa to find out about the status of the effort this summer.

Meeting Adjourned: 8:50

Next Meeting: 7:00 p. m. June 11, 2024, hybrid mode.