

Swanzy Conservation Commission

April 14, 2009 meeting minutes

Minutes are not final until reviewed and approved by the Conservation Commission.

Review and approval of minutes generally takes place at the next regularly scheduled meeting of the Conservation Commission.

ATTENDANCE Michael Day, Chair, Gary Colburn, Paul Daniello, Stephen Stepenuck. Alternates Jane Johnson (seated for Crowder), Bob Goodrich (seated for Morrison). Excused absences: Deb Crowder, Mike Morrison.

Town Administrator Beth Fox also was present (7:00 – 8:45), as were Theresa DiLuzio (7:00 – 7:20), Dan Zeh (7:00 – 7:45), and Peter Walker, Vanesse Hangen Brustlen, Inc. (7:00 – 8:45).

Chairman Day called the meeting to order at 7:01 p.m., and welcomed new member Colburn.

GUESTS Dan Zeh and Theresa DiLuzio, Stewards of Mt. Caesar Advisory Committee (7:05 – 7:15)

DiLuzio said that the Committee was created by the Board of Selectmen in response to her concerns regarding types of use and deterioration of Mt. Caesar trails. Along with DiLuzio, members include Dan Zeh, Bruce Bohannon, Mike Lilly, and Jeff Goller. The group will solicit public comment, and make recommendations to the Selectmen regarding uses and restrictions for the public trails. (Selectmen will conduct hearings to receive public comment before considering the enactment of any rules or regulations.) The group seeks to keep SCC members informed, and hopes to involve SCC members in decision-making and trail work. VHB engineer P. Walker recommended the DRED Trails Bureau manual as a good source of information on repairing and maintaining trails.

DiLuzio described the important values the Mt Caesar parcel provides for the community: a large natural area in a central location, with historic features, important wildlife habitat, and close proximity to the schools. She said that MRHS science teacher John Samparesi hopes to direct students to Mt. Caesar (a short walk away) for GIS mapping activities in a new town-school collaboration that could yield an existing conditions map of the entire Mt. Caesar area. In the short term, DiLuzio said that the group has applied for a NH Public Service grant to finance signage and construction of a gate to limit access to trails by motorized wheeled vehicles – the greatest cause of trail erosion. The group will present its first report to the Board of Selectmen on April 15.

GUEST Dan Zeh, Eastern wood turtle research sponsorship request (7:15 – 7:45)

Zeh appeared before the SCC to request funding for research equipment; specifically, 5 transmitters and a receiver.

Zeh presented maps, photographs, and a description of a project designed to track habitat use and range of Eastern wood turtles, a species of concern. The two research sites are farmland owned by Mike Johnson that has been in agricultural use without significant alteration since 1913 (Swanzy) and for several hundred years (Richmond). Zeh said that some individual turtles in the study area already are identified by year of discovery (one bears the date 1972, carved in the shell with an artist's scribe). Zeh said that grant funding may extend the analysis to DNA testing, to determine the extent of interbreeding between the two study populations, separated by 11 linear miles of stream. An Antioch/NE Graduate School student, Mari Clemmer, will work on the project as her thesis. NH Fish & Game has expressed enthusiasm for the research.

Zeh said that successful grant applications have funded purchase of one set of equipment, and said that he hopes to have a second set for the second research site so that two workers can collect data simultaneously. He said that his request for funding from the Richmond Conservation Commission had been unsuccessful. Zeh said that an additional \$1,300 would finance purchase of the remaining necessary equipment; a donation of \$600 would keep the project going by paying for five additional transmitters.

Daniello said that the research is a good project. SCC members discussed posting reports on the Town website. Zeh said that donors will be acknowledged in the published paper. Zeh discussed his commitment to making conservation personal by getting students of biology into the field to experience research first-hand.

At the personal level, he said, citizens make decisions that directly affect local populations of animals and plants.

Motion by Daniello to donate \$600 from the Conservation Fund for the purchase of five transmitters. Second by Johnson. All in favor.

GUEST Peter Walker, Vanesse Hangen Brustlen – Homestead Dam, Thompson (7:45--8:40)

Walker appeared before the SCC to update members on project progress and address questions. He said that dam removal and bridge repairs likely will take place during low flow, late summer of 2009. The project wetlands permit application will be submitted to DES shortly (anticipated date: April 17, 2009), and the SCC is authorized to comment on the application.

Walker outlined the history of the project, which began in 1997 with first discussions of dam removal, and has grown to involve a long list of project partners who have scrutinized project goals and design. Walker referenced a September 2005 feasibility study as a source of information regarding permit application references (available online: www.nh.gov/DES; search for “Homestead Woolen Mills”). Walker explained the major goals of the project:

1. *Achieving dam safety* The dam was deemed structurally deficient in 1999, and was considered to no longer be serving a function and to be a financial liability to its owner, who wants to remove it.
2. *Improving river habitat, fish passage* It is anticipated that removing the dam will restore conditions suitable for American shad and Atlantic salmon in the Ashuelot River, the lowest major tributary and a major watershed of the Connecticut River system.
3. *Ensuring integrity of the Thompson covered bridge* It has been determined that on-going scour problems would be exacerbated by natural removal of the deteriorated dam, thereby linking the two projects, even though the dam is privately owned and the bridge is Town-owned.

Walker said that, due to its poor condition, the dam no longer impounds much water. He predicted the major result of dam removal would be restoration of a riparian habitat, with riffle pools under low flow conditions, replacing the lake-like habitat that impoundment creates. He said that these changes may be most perceivable in the meandering section of the Ashuelot River adjacent to Route 10 in Swanzey.

Walker presented plan sheets illustrating the process of dam removal, and described how the restoration design incorporates three crossveins to stabilize the river, and two barbs to direct flow in the vicinity of the foundation of the covered bridge. He described the process that would be used to divert flow during demolition and construction, saying that vegetation and the dam structure would be removed, the streambed would be altered, and the work area “won’t be pretty.” Although the water level will change, the streambed elevation will remain the same at project completion. Walker said that water quality improves after dam removals.

Walker said that pre-qualified contractors would be invited to bid on the project package, which likely will be released at the beginning of June. He invited SCC members to call with any questions regarding the wetlands permit application, and offered to return to discuss the application at the May meeting.

SCC members discussed Committee involvement in reviewing the wetlands permit. Daniello said that he supports restoration of the river to natural flow, and said that the engineers know more about hydrology than he does.

Motion by Day to not submit a placeholder letter to formally intervene; rather, to stay in contact with project engineers and comment or intervene, if the Commission feels that it is important to do so, after receiving the application. Second by Daniello. All in favor.

MINUTES

After discussion, SCC members agreed to postpone consideration of the March 10, 2009 minutes until Crowder and Morrison are present.

Motion by Day to postpone consideration of the March 10, 2009 minutes. Second by Johnson. All in favor.

ELECTION OF OFFICERS

After discussion, SCC members agreed to postpone election of a vice-chair until Crowder and Morrison are present.

Motion by Daniello to re-affirm election of Michael Day to the position of chair. Second by Johnson. All in favor.

Motion by Johnson to nominate the vice chair at the May meeting. Second by Stepenuck. All in favor.

SCC WORKPLAN, MEETING APPROACH, REPORTS

Visioning retreat Day invited members to attend a special meeting to focus on ideas for the year's workplan, and how to accomplish those ideas. The session will take place on Monday, April 27, will begin at 6:00, and will be held at the Day residence on Old Richmond Road (across from the Community Center). SCC members will bring a contribution to the potluck.

Use of meeting time Day expressed his goal to make best use of members' time by focusing SCC meetings on discussion of issues and voting. To the greatest extent possible, Day will encourage members to rely on e-mail for distributing reports and information. He said that he aims for meetings to last a maximum of two hours.

Discussion of reports of related committees

SWRPC (Morrison) Report submitted by e-mail to SCC members.

ARLAC (Stepenuck) Stepenuck reported that the group meets next on April 21. He said that B. Scully has informed him that budget cuts may result in elimination of the River Management and Protection Program.

OSC (Crowder) In Crowder's absence, Barlow reminded SCC members of their invitation to the annual easement celebration party to be held on April 21 from 4:00 to 6:00 at the Keene State College Camp at Wilson Pond.

Growing Our Own (Day) Day reported a large and diverse attendance at the collaboration's first meeting, and said that meeting notes would be forthcoming by e-mail.

Treasury Day reported expenses. The report will be filed with minutes of meeting.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

Bardwell Farm retail development Tax Map 38 Parcels 1 and 1-2

Day reported receipt of correspondence from DES acknowledging receipt of materials.

SCC members discussed attending the Planning Board public hearing of the site plan application on April 16, 2009 to speak regarding potential undue adverse impacts on water quality.

Goodrich said that areas on the parcel that have been delineated as wetlands appear undersized relative to wet areas visible during snowmelt. Johnson said that she had been told that the field typically had produced three cuttings of hay. Johnson said that she would attend the Planning Board meeting. Johnson advocated for installation of a landscaped berm between the proposed parking area and Route 10. She objected to proposals to cut back trees in the Ash Hill Road right-of-way, saying that traffic speed and use of the road would increase.

Stepenuck said that it would be nice to have the size of the wetland checked, stating that in his opinion the developer may be "ducking mitigation." He said that the SCC would have to pay for an independent consultant to delineate the wetland. He said that the Planning Board could require a second opinion. He said he also has concerns regarding development of the central portion of the parcel, because the developer has never represented that the central portion will remain undeveloped.

Stepenuck asked whether the Planning Board had received the letter submitted by the SCC to DES. Day said that Town Planner Carbonneau had assured him that she provides Planning Board members with all correspondence received by the Town pertaining to any application.

Motion by Stepenuck that the Town Planner provide the Planning Board with the SCC letter to DES. Second by Daniello. All in favor.

The group discussed Stepenuck's recommendation that Johnson read the SCC letter to DES at the Planning Board meeting. The group discussed authorizing Johnson to speak on behalf of SCC concerns.

Motion by Stepenuck to establish Johnson as the SCC's official delegate to the Planning Board public hearing regarding the Bardwell Farm retail development, for the purpose of making reference to the fact that the Planning Board has received a copy of the letter from the SCC stating concerns that were sent to DES. Second by Day. All in favor.

Roadside cleanup, April 25, 9:00 – 12:00 SCC members discussed organizational details.

Stepenuck reported the DPW Director Dunham has procured approximately 300-400 bags, and will bring them to Town Hall.

Stepenuck said that, in the past, the SCC has made available a map and highlighters so that volunteers can indicate which sections of roadway they will clean. Stepenuck described other tasks and needed items:

- transcribe large map data to a small map for the DPW to use when picking up trash bags
- count out piles of bags
- get Scout leaders to determine how many bags their groups require
- have volunteers execute the liability waiver forms
- have volunteers complete the exit report
- publicize the event

Stepenuck described the safety talk he as presented at prior clean-up days, and said that he is willing to present the talk again.

Daniello said that he has notified the Keene *Sentinel*, *Monadnock Shopper News*, and NHPR; Cheshire TV no longer runs public announcements. He said that Crowder has put up posters. Johnson recommended contacting Dan Mitchell at WKBK to promote the event on Open Mike.

Day said that fast food restaurants have been unresponsive to his solicitations for donations; he will purchase 50 pairs of gloves.

The group discussed whether bottled water should be available, and/or whether coffee and soft drinks should be provided. Day will discuss bottled water with Town Administrator Fox.

SCC members will arrive at Town Hall at 8:45 to set up.

Johnson recommended that the SCC encourage town groups to adopt sections of highway.

Mill K plantings Discussion deferred until Morrison is present.

NEW BUSINESS

Sevene, Tax Map 57 Parcel 118, Planning Board site plan review application for an excavation and construction service business. Commission members reviewed documents pertaining to historical use of the parcel. Daniello said that so long as the applicant meets DES rules and obtains proper permits, he has no issues of concern. The group determined not to comment at the May 7 public hearing.

SCC annual canoe trip May 16, 9:00 a.m., from Mill K to Cresson covered bridge or Thompson covered bridge. Day will attend, and possibly Daniello. Day and Daniello will advertise the trip; Day will serve as contact for information.

Planning Board zoning workgroup, April 28, 4:00 p.m. Goodrich volunteered to participate.

Mail, upcoming conferences and training

OSC easement celebration, April 21, 4:00 – 6:00, Keene State College Camp

Day advised SCC members of receipt of various items of mail, including notifications of workshops and training opportunities.

OTHER BUSINESS AS MIGHT ARISE

Northfield bicycle trip Daniello alerted SCC members to the upcoming event; contact Daniello for details.

Bluebird boxes Daniello said that he will inspect and clean during the weekend of April 18--19.

Award for Morrison Stepenuck reported that Mike Morrison has been selected for recognition by Fish & Game, with an award ceremony to be held on April 15 at 1:00 p.m.

Belding Field work day April 18, from 10:00 to 2:00; fence repair and brush cleaning.

Moore Nanotechnology LLC drainage Goodrich reported his concerns regarding the function of the drainage system, saying that water appears to be pooling rather than draining as had been represented by the developers. Goodrich said that he could review the drainage plans. Johnson advised SCC members to give leeway, due to the time of year. Stepenuck said that the pool will become a mosquito breeding pool, and said the SCC should keep an eye on it. He said that, in his opinion, inspections are a major loophole -- after developers attain permits and approvals, nobody double-checks: the State fails to inspect, and the Town has no funding for inspection.

“Reading the Forested Landscape” hike Stepenuck reported that he had attended the Open Space Committee-sponsored hike conducted on April 6 by Tom Wessels on land owned by Cynthia Richards in west Swanzy. Stepenuck said that the group had observed a 300-year-old black birch tree, and a hickory-hornbeam savannah, and learned many aspects of forest ecology. OSC Chair Barlow will supply field notes to SCC members by e-mail.

Source of funding for SCC Colburn asked how the SCC raises money. Stepenuck said that voters approve appropriations to the Conservation Land Acquisition capital reserve fund; he said that the SCC has no authority to spend this fund. Stepenuck said that another source of funding is the land use change tax.

ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn by Day. Second by Goodrich. All in favor. The meeting adjourned at 10:30.

Respectfully submitted,

Victoria Reck Barlow
Recording Secretary