

Town of Swanzey, New Hampshire  
**Conservation Commission Meeting**  
Meeting Minutes – January 4, 2016

**CALL TO ORDER**

The regular meeting of the Swanzey Conservation Commission was called to order by Chair Wally Smith at 3:00 p.m. at the Muster Field where the members walked the land with Forester Steve Roberge. The meeting continued at Swanzey Town Hall at 4:00 p.m. Committee Members Present: Chair Smith, Vice Chair Stepenuck, Bob Goodrich, Mike Morrison, Jane Johnson and Beverly Bernard.

**ABSENT**

None

**OTHERS PRESENT**

Those present at the Town Hall portion of the meeting: Open Space Committee Chair Victoria Ames, Jan McClure, Director of Land Protection with The Nature Conservancy, Theresa DiLuzio, Jeanne Thieme and Karen Sielke from the Open Space Committee, resident Ken Goebel and Director of Planning and Community Development Sara Carbonneau.

**MINUTES**

- Minutes of December 7, 2015 were considered. **Motion** by Morrison to approve the Minutes of December 7, 2015. There was a second from Johnson. All were in favor. ***Motion passed.***

**NEW BUSINESS**

**Muster Property - Field walk results with Steve Roberge;**

- **Maintaining a healthy natural environment** – Roberge said that bush-hogging the land would probably be a good idea, but if we didn't do it now, the shrubbery would be thicker and more difficult to cut later on. Now would be a good time to bush-hog before a new heavy snowfall, but could wait until the autumn to do it. The concern was how long before more snow would make bush-hogging impractical. Roberge said it shouldn't be done more often than every five years. Roberge did not recommend removing any pines at this time. He also said the land looked pretty good for now. As to Buckthorn, for best results it should be leafed before removal. Stepenuck said he asked Roberge to provide a short report with his recommendations. The members were in agreement to wait to make any decision until the report was received.
- **Public access safety concerns** - There was a discussion about the idea of putting a cable across the dirt road to prevent cars on the road where the bank of the river is eroding. Public access will be maintained as there is a small parking area before where the cable would be placed and the public can walk past the cable. Stepenuck said that NH Fish & Game reported that they do not have a problem with the idea and are fine with whatever Roberge recommends. Morrison recommended that the Commission ask Public Works to go ahead and place the cable across the trail and Smith said he would follow up.

**Conservation Project Request Presentation by Jan McClure - The Nature Conservancy**

McClure spoke about a project that they are working on adjacent to the Ashuelot River. She passed out a map of the Ballou Tract which is 27 acres abutting Town Conservation Land. She said the owner is

excited about protecting the land and it involves restoration of some 11 acres of floodplain forest. McClure spoke about natural river processes that occur. She passed out photos of flooding of the land that occurs periodically. McClure also showed a map of the floodplain forest with a Swamp White Oak, which is unique in southwestern New Hampshire. She noted a turtle nesting site for the property. Planting is planned for some 2000 trees, mostly silver maple. Some elm will be planted as well. She said the Monadnock Conservancy will likely take the conservation easement. She spoke about proposals that her organization have made for funding.

Morrison asked about contacting the State of New Hampshire Nursery for a package of plants native to wetlands. McClure then noted that one area will be planted with wetland shrubs. Morrison mentioned that the high school Fish & Game Club members would be happy to help out with planting. He mentioned that the teens were excited about doing some planting in the past on another parcel. McClure said that the scale of the project requires contracting out, but some planting might be done by volunteers.

McClure said the project is costing about \$300,000. She said that of the \$300,000, approximately \$234,000 has been committed from various sources. The gap is approximately \$65,000. She noted that the Open Space Committee has been asked for \$17,900 from the Town of Swanzey Capital Reserve Land Acquisition Account and she asked for \$20,000 from the Conservation Commission, for a total of \$37,000 from the Town of Swanzey.

Morrison mentioned the fact that there is an aquifer in the area which is valuable. He asked about funds for protecting the aquifer that might be applied to this kind of work.

Carbonneau noted that the Conservation Commission has funds to dispense as it sees fit. Ames said that the Open Space Committee has endorsed this project. Recommendations from the Planning Board and the Conservation Commission are requested. Johnson asked to determine the balance in the fund. Bookkeeper Theresa Louder was asked to double check the funds in the account and she determined that \$77,500.78 was in the account as of this date.

There was a brief discussion about informing the Conservation Commission earlier in the planning stage about potential projects such as this. Theresa DiLuzio said she spoke to Jan McClure about the properties but there wasn't any money available at the time. Ames noted that McClure has been trying to meet with the Conservation Commission since last November. McClure said that this is the appropriate time because she now knows that the project has been primarily funded.

There was a discussion about Nature Conservancy chapters around the country. McClure spoke about some of the projects the Conservancy has been involved in. She said the NH Chapter worked on the CT Lakes headwater protection project. She said there are 29 preserves in the State of NH, including Great Bay in the eastern part of the State, and Pine Barrens in the Ossipee area.

Goodrich asked where committed dollars go if the entire funding is not used. McClure said that all the expenses need to be invoiced before funding occurs and the money would be returned if not used. Smith suggested a contribution of "up to \$20,000". Stepenuck asked if the Conservation Commission would be allowed to see the terms of the easement before it was finalized. There was discussion about

being informed by the Monadnock Conservancy about the terms of easements prior to their finalization. McClure noted said that none of the funding sources require public access.

**Motion** was made by Morrison to support the Nature Conservancy project for the Ashuelot River Floodplain Protection and Restoration: Ballou Tract, with up to \$20,000. The motion was seconded by Bernard. The Chair called for a vote and all were in favor. **Motion passed.**

Before leaving the meeting, McClure noted that the owner is a private person and has asked that her privacy be respected.

#### **Conservation Commission versus the OSC responsibility**

Smith spoke about the work needed to be done for aquifer protection. Johnson noted that the Conservation Commission is advisory to the Planning Board and addresses regulatory issues. Stepenuck said that he thought that Open Space Committee exists to preserve the rural character of the town. He referred to the fact that the economy has slowed down which has reduced the need for the Conservation Commission to deal with housing developments. He referred to additional areas of interest beyond water issues.

The Open Space Committee members DiLuzio, Sielke, and Thieme left the meeting at 5:25 p.m.

#### **Dell'Erba Resignation**

Smith read the resignation of Ric Dell'Erba to the members of the Commission.

#### **Annual Report - status**

Stepenuck provided copies at the meeting for consideration by the members.

**Motion** by Morrison to accept the draft annual report written by Steve Stepenuck for the 2015 Annual Report, there was a second by Goodrich. All were in favor. **Motion passed.**

#### **Cresson Mountain Wayne Young Timber Harvest**

There was a discussion about Wayne Young's recommendations for the area. Smith suggested dumping might occur on a new parking area and therefore he was having second thoughts about doing anything further on the property. Stepenuck said that he was not in favor of whole tree removal of trees. Ames suggested looking at sites where whole tree removal has occurred before moving ahead with that kind of cutting. Morrison recommended Bruce Berry take a look at the property as well and to consider his recommendations as well as Young's. He said he was concerned about water erosion. Goebel gave his opinion about the project. The Commission members agreed to have Morrison talk to Berry about taking a look at the property.

#### **Stoddard Conservation Commission Request Opposing Bobcat Season**

Morrison said he would not support the request of the Stoddard Conservation Commission to oppose the opening of a trapping and hunting season on bobcats in New Hampshire. He referred to a bobcat study that occurred in the past that helped interested parties understand how the animals behave and survive in the wild. He said the study provided numbers to work with concerning the acreage needed to support males and females. He said knowing the demographics of the bobcat population is important in order to compare information with other New England states. He said bobcats starve to death when

there is a winter of deep snow. Being shot or trapped is less painful. He said he would support a season on bobcats. He suggested writing a letter to the Commissioners in support of a bobcat season.

Morrison made the **motion** to support a bobcat season and to write a letter to Robert Phillipson, Fish & Game Commissioner from Cheshire County. There was a second by Goodrich. All were in favor. **Motion passed.**

### **OLD BUSINESS**

Open Space Rotation

- January no attendance; February - Bernard; March - Johnson; April - Stepenuck
- Anti-Dumping Ordinance – Status – Smith said he spoke to a resident who had objections to the ordinance in the past and explained that the Commission has tried to address his concerns.

### **REPORTS**

- ARLAC – none
- Open Space - none
- Selectmen Meetings - none
- Municipal Committee Meetings – Smith passed out the report to the Selectmen from the Municipal Committee for the membership review.
- Access to Honey Hill Trails – Ames asked to speak as a private citizen and owner of property on Honey Hill. She noted that a reference to access to Honey Hill Trails she saw in an email was incorrect. Ames said that, contrary to the representation in an e-mail message distributed to the Conservation Commission, no owner of the Honey Hill property is authorized to permit public access to the Honey Hill trails from Honey Hill Road. Ames said that, as an affirmative right of the Grantee, the Town of Swanzey--and not the property owner at the time--established in the Conservation Easement Deed that "there is no public access to the Property [the conserved land on Honey Hill] from Honey Hill Road." (Cheshire County Registry of Deeds, Book 1315 Page 0340)

Next Meeting Date: February 1, 2015

### **ADJOURNMENT**

There was a **motion** to adjourn by Morrison with a second from Goodrich. All were in favor. Adjournment occurred at 6:11 p.m.

Respectfully Submitted,



Beverly Bernard, Recording Secretary