

TOWN OF AMHERST
Conservation Commission

November 9, 2022

APPROVED

In attendance: Rob Clemens – Chair, Jared Hardner – Vice Chair, Rich Hart, John Harvey (remote), Peter Lyon – Board of Selectmen Ex-Officio, Lee Gilman [7:03pm], and Bill Widmer
Staff present: Kristan Patenaude – Recording Secretary (remote).

Chair Rob Clemens called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

ADMINISTRATIVE:

1. Chair Comments

Rob Clemens stated that he received a check in the mail in memory of Bruce Beckley for \$5,000 which will be placed in the Gift Account, after formal acceptance is given by the Board of Selectmen.

2. Minutes: September 28, 2022

Bill Widmer moved to approve the meeting minutes of September 28, 2022, as presented. Seconded by Rich Hart.

Vote: 4-0-1; motion approved [J. Hardner abstaining].

Lee Gilman entered the meeting at 7:03pm.

3. Treasurer's Report

Bill Widmer stated that the budget sits at \$12,063. He explained that approximately \$6,000 worth of withdrawals will be taken from the Land Account for a couple of appraisals and mowing work. Some new LUCT funds have been included since the last report. The Gift Account has grown nicely over the past year and the Commission may want to consider a project to use some of this funding toward.

Rich Hart moved to approve the Treasurer's Report, as presented. Seconded by Lee Gilman.

Vote: 6-0-0; motion approved unanimously.

4. Planning & Permitting

Chair Clemens stated that the conceptual hearing for the 24 Brook Road property was postponed to the December 21, 2022, Planning Board meeting. This revised proposal involves a clustered elderly housing development. It is unclear what this will propose for open space. The Master Plan public hearing was postponed to January 4, 2023, at 7pm. Jared Hardner noted that public comment will be important at this meeting.

Chair Clemens noted that he heard from Ken Clinton, Meridian Land Services, regarding a site walk on the Curran property. This will likely occur in late November/early December.

TOPICS

5. Souhegan River Water Testing Program – Eric Doberstein, SRWA

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Chair Clemens explained that Eric Doberstein has taken over the testing program along the Souhegan River and has joined the Souhegan River Local Advisory Committee (SoRLAC). He has asked Eric Doberstein to review his work. The Commission could then discuss working with the Souhegan River Watershed Association for enhanced DNA testing of e-coli bacteria in the Souhegan and, specifically Beaver Brook. This could help to determine the source of this e-coli. The Souhegan River Corridor Management Plan is proposed to be updated, along with the more detailed testing. The Management Plan has been accepted by the State, and DES may be willing to fund the testing project. Amherst has the opportunity to benefit quite a bit from this project.

In response to a question from Will Ludt, 3 School Street, Chair Clemens stated that PFOAs have been tested for a bit along the Souhegan, but this testing deals mostly with bacteria and dissolved oxygen as indicators of surface water quality health.

The Board tabled discussion on this item to later in the meeting.

The Board took up a discussion regarding a potential Eagle Scout project by Jacob Sainsbury.

Jared Hardner explained that Jacob Sainsbury is working towards his Eagle Scout. One project the Commission has interest in is demolition of an old bridge that is no longer in use at Joe English. He and Christian Littlefield met with Jacob Sainsbury, his father, and the Scout leader in the field to review a proper process for safe removal of the bridge. To keep in compliance with the Commission's Eagle Scout Policy, Jacob Sainsbury will make a presentation to the Commission and there will be continued follow-up during the process.

Jacob Sainsbury explained that the old bridge is on an unused trail. The intention is to carry out this project safely. A trailer will be used to dump this wood at the Transfer Station for free. Any wood the Commission wishes to keep will be saved aside. A temporary bridge across the river will be used to deconstruct the bridge. Adults will use power tools, but Scouts will use hand tools to do the rest of the work. Staging and railings will be set up for safety and safety equipment will be used.

Bill Widmer noted that the pressure-treated wood from the bridge will need to be placed in a separate area at the Transfer Station. Jared Hardner stated that Christian Littlefield is working on this item with Jacob Sainsbury. Jacob Sainsbury noted that concrete sitting in a drum in the river will be removed from the site, in order to leave the site better than it was found.

In response to a question from Rob Clemens, Jacob Sainsbury stated that a truck with a trailer will be left in the parking lot, but an F-150 will be driven fairly close to the site.

In response to a question from Bill Widmer regarding cost of the project, Jacob Sainsbury stated that the main costs will be from tool rentals and food for the working party. Jacob Sainsbury estimated the project will cost \$400 and he plans to pay for this out of pocket or with donations from family.

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In response to a question from Jared Hardner, Jacob Sainsbury stated that he plans to carry out this work on the 19th and 20th of this month. Anyone interested in helping is welcome.

In response to a question from Rob Clemens, Jacob Sainsbury stated that he will take video and pictures along the way to document the process. Jared Hardner suggested using a picture-a-second video to take a unique video of the process.

The Board retook the discussion with Eric Doberstein at this time.

Eric Doberstein stated that the Souhegan Watershed, beginning in Massachusetts, and ending at the Souhegan River, has been studied. The river is currently fairly clean in terms of sewage entering it, but other natural sources, such as runoff, animals, etc., still exist. E-coli bacteria is found in all animals and, if ingested by people, can cause numerous ailments. Amherst is tied to the Souhegan in that it runs through Town and many tributaries to it begin in Town. 22 of the rivers of NH are designated by the State as Designated Rivers, meaning they should have volunteer advisory committees reviewing the local watersheds. The effort that he is a part of will continue to monitor the water quality and attempt to improve it.

Eric Doberstein stated that approximately 30 volunteers manage 30 sites along the Souhegan. Water quality samples are taken at each site for analysis. Every other Tuesday in the summer, water quality is sampled. The Amherst Country Club and Boston Post Road sites are both hotspots for e-coli. It is unclear what the source of this is. He noted that one student intern found that some of these sample spikes seem to be due to temperature. If the EPA agrees to fund this testing, there can be more determinations made.

Rich Hart noted that, if the spikes are correlated to higher temperatures, this could be due to warmer weather, when more people and animals are using the water source.

Rob Clemens noted that the Commission began a water resources initiative last winter that touched on this, along with a number of other items. This will continue to be developed as part of a more robust piece of the Conservation Plan. A Master Plan activity also recognizes the Souhegan Watershed and integrates it with planning activities.

Water quality is the number one most important issue to Amherst residents, per a recent survey. There is a whole chapter on water quality in the updated draft Master Plan, which includes coordination between the Commission and entities supporting the watershed.

John Harvey noted that NH Fish & Game has a map of each creek and brook in Amherst, every one of which is impaired to some degree, under some criteria. He suggested staffing or sensor technology available to sample these sub-watersheds. Eric Doberstein stated that this should be tied into the overall program. There is a push at the State level to build a corridor along the River. Jared Hardner stated that there could be a mandate to acquire more conservation land in Town. Additional land acquisitions by the Town could lead to management actions to help with this e-coli issue.

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Eric Doberstein noted that the State is working on a comprehensive plan for PFOAs, and the volunteers for SoRLAC are trying not to duplicate efforts.

6. Boutelle Forest Management – Jared Hardner

Jared Hardner stated that the Forester, Charlie Koch, is interested in pursuing a cut at the Boutelle Forest. Charlie Koch's view is that the Forest Management Plan suggests five years to see how things go with oak regeneration using a shelterwood cut. However, he does not believe that there is enough oak at Boutelle for this to matter. The principal reason for cuts is to diversify the age structure of the forest, and additional oak is an added benefit. Thus, a cut is currently being considered for the Boutelle property. This may occur this winter, or possibly not until the following winter. Jared Hardner stated that he would like to make sure invasives are treated properly around the edges before a cut takes place. The community does not always love forest harvesting, so spreading them out in time may be a good idea.

In response to a question from Rich Hart, Jared Hardner stated that he does not believe there are any diseased ash, hemlock, or beech trees in the Boutelle property that need to be removed. Lee Gilman noted that there are a lot of invasives in the field entering the forest. Jared Hardner noted that a stand of invasives in the entryway was identified in the Invasive Species Plan. It may be good to wait to cut this stand until next winter, after the invasives have been treated.

Bill Widmer stated that it may be interesting to see what happens with the cut at the Wheeler property before making this cut.

In response to a question from Rob Clemens, Jared Hardner stated that the Boutelle property is on a cut rotation. The last cut was done in 2008.

The Commission agreed to allow Charlie Koch to arrange for a forester to cut at the Boutelle property in winter 2024. This will also give the Commission the opportunity to do some public outreach before the cut.

John Harvey noted that he has been having the Boutelle area mowed. The Commission noted that the area should not be mowed in the same year as it will be treated for invasives.

7. Other Business

Bill Widmer stated that he has been speaking with Frank Montesanto regarding pruning and maintenance at Lindabury Orchard. This is being considered for health of the trees and potential viability of fruit. He noted that two years ago workers from Currier Orchards visited Lindabury and worked for 12 hours with two people to prune the orchard. He proposed seeking to do something similar this year. To do that this year would cost approximately \$1,320, plus \$650 for chipping any items pruned. This pruning would be for both the upper and lower orchards.

Bill Widmer moved to authorize \$2,300 from the Conservation Fund for pruning and a pruning workshop at Lindabury Orchard. Seconded by Jared Hardner.
Vote: 6-0-0; motion approved unanimously.

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Jared Hardner exited the meeting at 8:40pm.

Rich Hart suggested finishing the shed located in Lindabury Orchard. Years ago, funds were received from the Town to do some structural work. There was not enough time or materials to complete the back door, windows, and floor. The Commission did not make any decisions on this item at this time.

Will Ludt stated that the Heritage Commission has been working to determine the best outcome for the cooperage at the Corn Crib. The Heritage Commission recently voted to approve demolition of the building, with help from the Conservation Commission and Town. All items that can be kept will be moved into the Corn Crib for storage. He spoke with Steve Desmarais, former owner of the property who donated the cooperage and Corn Crib to the Town, and he is in support of demolition. The proposal is to keep the foundation of the building, in remembrance. Will Ludt stated that he will speak with any abutters regarding the demolition. This will likely not occur until the spring.

Will Ludt stated that the Heritage Commission uses its December meeting as a holiday gathering. This will occur on December 8, 2022, and there will be a public meeting associated, in order to roll out the Heritage Commission's new website. There will also be a new GIS mapping website and app. He invited any Conservation Commission members interested in attending.

Will Ludt paid homage to Carolyn Quinn, who passed away last weekend. She was on the Historic District Commission for 18 years and was selected as Citizen of the Year in 2011.

Rich Hart noted that the Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee has been working to gather easements along the Baboosic Greenway. The Committee is looking for information regarding how to access the Greenway from Baboosic Lake Road. Rob Clemens noted that the Commission holds an easement in this area, right next to the Route 101 on-ramp. There was a bridge there which was removed for safety reasons years ago. More specifics are needed as to where the path will go if access is restored and improved. The Commission agreed to wait for more information from the Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee.

8. Adjourn

Lee Gilman moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:00pm.

The meeting adjourned at 9:00pm.

*Respectfully submitted,
Kristan Patenaude*

Minutes approved: December 14, 2022