

TOWN OF AMHERST
Conservation Commission

May 10, 2023

APPROVED

In attendance: Jared Hardner – Chair, Rob Clemens, Rich Hart - alternate, John Harvey - alternate, Frank Montesanto, Peter Lyon – Board of Selectman Ex-Officio, Steve Lutz, Lee Gilman, Mark Bender.

Staff present: Kristan Patenaude – Recording Secretary (remote).

Also present: Bill Stoughton, Will Ludt

Chair Jared Hardner called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

ADMINISTRATIVE:

1. Chair Comments

Jared Hardner opened the meeting at 7:00pm with a moment of silence and remembrance for Bill Widmer.

Jared Hardner explained that, as the newly elected Chair, he would be trying out a new seating format, philosophy, and culture for the Commission, moving from being organized as a deliberative body and more to an organization that will implement projects. He would like to cultivate a different sense of teamwork, with an emphasis on execution.

The Commission thanked the outgoing Chair, Rob Clemens, for all of his work. The Commission presented him with a gift for his time.

Lee Gilman entered the meeting.

2. Minutes approval

Rob Clemens moved to approve the meeting minutes of April 12, 2023. Seconded by Frank Montesanto.

Vote: 6-0-0; motion approved.

Steve Lutz moved to approve the meeting minutes of April 24, 2023. Seconded by Rob Clemens.

Vote: 6-0-0; motion approved.

3. Financial Update

Mark Bender recognized the previous Treasurer, Bill Widmer, who did a fantastic job working with the Finance Director to resolve issues that had been outstanding for many years. Mark Bender explained that the annual expenses, year to date, are at \$6,662.14 leaving the Commission with a remaining balance of \$9,165.86. The fiscal year ends at the end of June, and he requested any pending invoices be sent in shortly. As of April 30th, the balance in the Land Account is \$1,068,927.69. There is one pending invoice from Drummond Woodsum regarding a pending land acquisition for \$5,142.80.

May 10, 2023

APPROVED

**Frank Montesanto moved to approve that invoice for \$5,142.80 for legal fees related to the acquisition of the Curran properties. Seconded by Rob Clemens.
Vote: 6-0-0; motion approved.**

Mark Bender stated that the gift account balance, as of April 30th, was \$47,457.77. He read a number of gift donations made in memory of Bill Widmer, for a total so far of \$600.

Mark Bender noted that he recently received an invoice for signs for \$117.04. Jared Hardner explained that these signs were time sensitive items. One was a sign explaining to the public that construction is underway on Frank Montesanto's project. The second signs are to alert people that, starting May 1st, the dog and leash rules change at Buck Meadow.

**Rob Clemens moved to approve an expenditure of \$117.04 for signage. Seconded by Frank Montesanto.
Vote: 6-0-0; motion approved.**

Jared Hardner noted that he planned to ask Rich Hart if he would like to take the leadership on organizing the 4th of July events for the Commission. Rich Hart agreed. Jared Hardner explained that he would like to consider more handouts with regard to trail maps. The Commission agreed to consider what type of handouts would work best and discuss this at a future meeting.

SPECIAL TOPICS

4. Town-wide cleanup day update (Steve)

Steve Lutz stated that Clean-Up Day was successful. He thanked Kristan Patenaude and Marion Kastner, who helped organize the co-sponsors this year. There were three collection sites around Town this year, at the Green, Baboosic Lake, and the South Fire Station. These sites collected a little over 100 bags and many blue bags were brought directly to the Transfer Station. There will be discussion regarding how to get more involvement and participation for the event next year.

Rob Clemens noted that the Souhegan River Local Advisory Committee could not gather volunteers for the event but plans to regroup and organize a River cleanup day in the next month or so.

Kristan Patenaude thanked Steve Lutz for all of his help on Clean-Up Day. She also thanked Bill Widmer for setting up an event that was already well in hand. She stated that she would like to continue helping out with the event in the future.

5. Explanation of thematic organization & plans (Jared)

Jared Hardner stated that he would like to focus Commissioner leadership in certain thematic areas. He would like the Commission to hear presentations from thematic leaders moving

May 10, 2023

APPROVED

forward. He reviewed the proposed thematic areas and leaders for each. The Chair and external communications roles will be filled by himself. Mark Bender will lead the finance area. Jared Hardner stated that property acquisitions will be led by Rob Clemens, accompanied by himself. Under the overall heading of Land Management, Christian Littlefield will lead the grasslands area, Jared Hardner stated that he will lead the forest area, and John Harvey will lead the habitats area. Rob Clemens will be leading the area for the Planning Board and for water resources, Frank Montesanto will lead the area for infrastructure, and trails will be led by Steve Lutz. Jared Hardner noted that he has volunteered Lee Gilman to lead the property monitoring area, which includes knowledge on invasives and LCHIP property monitoring. Jared Hardner noted that Steve Lutz and Rich Hart will lead the public events area.

Jared Hardner stated that he hopes 95% of the things the Commission talks about and does falls into one of those categories. A Commissioner's first stop when something arises related to one of these areas is to discuss it offline with the lead. This will hopefully help to make the decision processes more efficient. He noted that the Commission will also have a succinct written plan associated with each of the thematic areas. These plans will include a general purpose statement explaining what the objectives are in that thematic area and then a list of institutional knowledge along with potential objectives. This could include annual items along with a list of potential projects for the upcoming years. Leaders can then keep track of the status of work projects for that item along with a projected budget for the fiscal year. The leader in these areas should involve as many people as want to be involved in the associated activities.

Rob Clemens noted that he has applied for an alternate position on the Planning Board and will be interviewed next week, along with other applicants. He stated that, especially in terms of water resources, he believes it would be good for the Commission to have an elevated voice on the Planning Board.

THEMATIC AREAS

6. Grassland & Agricultural Management (Christian)

This item was not addressed at this time.

7. Infrastructure (Frank)

Frank Montesanto reviewed the general purpose plan for infrastructure. The purpose is to promote access to open space where infrastructure is needed, for example bridges, kiosks, etc. A map will be created to pinpoint all of the local infrastructure to allow for an inventory in the action plan. He stated that he will work with the trail stewards to identify new infrastructure needs and build new projects as prioritized. The large project for this year is the Pulpit Brook walkway, which is slated for May through August. In June through August, the group will work with Christian Littlefield on the installation of fencing at upper Bragdon. In May, a new kiosk will be placed at the entrance of the B&M Trail at Walnut Hill Road. This will be used to make it obvious that no vehicles are to enter the area. Some repairs have been completed on the little story brook bridge at PMEC, but a new bridge there with handrails would be helpful. This could

May 10, 2023

APPROVED

also be a good location for a new trail. During this summer, it would be nice to build a kiosk at Lindabury Orchard. He would also like to examine both canoe ports to see what damage was done during recent high-water events. He would also like to consider reinstalling the staircase and bridge at the B-H Trail.

Regarding the Pulpit Brook project, Frank Montesanto stated that he has installed a bench, which appears to have already been used. Installation has begun on the walkway.

John Harvey noted that people taking photos of infrastructure should have the navigation turned on so that the coordinates will be embedded in the photograph. These pictures can then be dropped into Google Maps to be used by the Commission.

Jared Hardner noted that the next meeting will hear the Land Management thematic area plans.

8. Trails (Steve)

Steve Lutz shared his general purpose statement on trails. He explained that this group will coordinate with the trail stewards group and infrastructure group. He stated that he will act as liaison on the Bicycle & Pedestrian Advisory Committee. He noted that he added a copy of the Trail Steward Guidelines into the Dropbox. A list of infrastructure projects for the trails will be maintained in coordination with Frank Montesanto. The trail stewards will be asked to work with the public outreach group. Trails will be patrolled monthly, and the list of trail infrastructure improvements will be created in November. In February annual Clean-Up Day will be planned. In May and July there will be public outreach in the community. In September there will be a trail steward get together. In October the group will discuss repairs, signage, etc. The group will also work with John Harvey on a GIS program. Steve Lutz stated that he would like to be able to communicate to the trail stewards and the community how to communicate back to the ACC on things such as downed trees or other issues. He will also be working with the Commission on what it wants to see in terms of trails at the Curran properties.

Rob Clemens suggested an assessment of an estimate for signage and/or water crossing needs on the Curran property, in order to authorize funds before the end of this fiscal year. Steve Lutz agreed to create a list for this item. Peter Lyon suggested waiting until after the final vote is taken by the Board of Selectmen on the Curran acquisition.

Mark Bender asked if any trails in Town are open to motorized vehicles, either electric or gas. Rob Clemens explained that the ordinance specifies trails that are called out for snowmobiles. Jared Hardner noted that the Commission also continues monitoring the use of e-bikes on trails.

Will Ludt, Heritage Commission, noted that he attended the Baboosic Lake Association meeting, much of which dealt with the milfoil problem at the Lake. There is real concern among the property owners regarding this issue. Peter Lyon stated that there is a new Town committee that includes a couple of people from that Association and staff members trying to work on strategies.

May 10, 2023

APPROVED

Non-Public Session per RSA 91-A:3, II, (d)

- Consideration of the acquisition, sale, or lease of real or personal property which if discussed in public, would likely benefit a party or parties whose interests are adverse to those of the general community.

Mark Bender moved to enter into Non-Public Session per RSA 91-A:3, II, (d) at 8:07pm, for the consideration of the acquisition, sale, or lease of real or personal property which if discussed in public, would likely benefit a party or parties whose interests are adverse to those of the general community. Seconded by Frank Montesanto.

Roll Call Vote: Hardner – aye, Clemens -aye, Montesanto - aye, Lutz - aye, Gilman - aye, and Bender – aye; 6-0-0; motion approved.

No motions were made, and no actions were taken.

Frank Montesanto moved to exit Non-Public Session. Seconded by Rob Clemens

Roll Call Vote: Hardner – aye, Clemens -aye, Montesanto - aye, Lutz - aye, Gilman - aye, and Bender – aye; 6-0-0; motion approved.

**Mark Bender moved to adjourn at 8:29pm. Seconded by Frank Montesanto.
Vote: 6-0-0; motion approved.**

The meeting adjourned at 8:29pm.

*Respectfully submitted,
Kristan Patenaude*

Minutes approved: May 24, 2023