

October 11, 2023

**APPROVED**

In attendance: Jared Hardner – Chair, Rob Clemens, John Harvey - alternate, Peter Lyon – Board of Selectman Ex-Officio, Lee Gilman, Christian Littlefield, Frank Montesanto, Rich Hart – alternate, Mark Bender.  
Staff present: Kristan Patenaude – Recording Secretary (remote)

**Administrative:**

**1. Chair Comments**

Jared Hardner opened the meeting at 7:00pm.

*John Harvey sat for Steve Lutz.*

**2. Minutes Approval**

**Rob Clemens moved to approve the meeting minutes of August 23, 2023, as amended [Line 60: add the word “yes”; Line 97-99: change to: “Jared Hardner asked if it was the understanding that the wetland buffer is intended not to be disturbed, or can it be disturbed, say replaced with lawns or something else. Mr. Robinson responded that the limits may not be defined precisely but he does not know of any wetland buffer where clearcutting of buffers and replacement with lawns is standard practice. Mr. Hardner asked if that was generally the understanding of Fieldstone. Mr. Robinson answered, “yes.”] Seconded by Christian Littlefield.**

**Vote: 7-0-0; motion approved.**

Jared Hardner noted that he sent the change he proposed to these minutes on Lines 97-99 to the Zoning Board of Adjustment as part of their documentation.

**Rob Clemens moved to approve the meeting minutes of September 13, 2023, as amended [Line 19: change to “had expenses from its budget of \$12,190 leaving a balance of \$11,258”; Line 141: change to “Hardner”.] Seconded by Christian Littlefield.**

**Vote: 7-0-0; motion approved.**

**3. Treasurer’s Report**

Mark Bender stated that the Commission’s actual expenses through the month of September were \$1,744.92 compared to a budget of \$12,190 leaving a balance of \$10,445 for the remainder of fiscal year 2024. The Land Account started the month with a balance of \$1,109,974. There were withdrawals of \$35,962.80 including legal bills and related expenses for the Curran acquisition and a \$25,000 deposit on the Clearview land acquisition. Along with those withdrawals, there was interest of \$2,248 leaving a balance at the end of September of \$1,076,259. There are pending LUCT payments of \$96,155, a projected Curran land acquisition

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expense of \$600,000 and the remaining Clearview land acquisition expense of \$445,000. This will all leave a projected balance in the Land Account of \$127,414. The Gift Account's beginning balance was \$50,078. This earned \$4.12 in interest, leaving a balance of \$50,082. Pending forestry work from this account was previously approved at \$4,250.

**Rob Clemens moved to approve a bill from Drummond Woodsum for \$239.20 for legal fees from the Curran closing costs from the Land Account. Seconded by Frank Montesanto.**

**Vote: 7-0-0; motion approved.**

**Christian Littlefield moved to approve an expenditure of \$750 for 2024 membership dues for the NH Association of Conservation Commissions from the Dues & Subscriptions line item. Seconded by Frank Montesanto.**

**Vote: 7-0-0; motion approved.**

Jared Hardner explained that the Commission has received an invitation to the NHACC annual meeting and conference on November 4<sup>th</sup>. Rob Clemens noted that he was invited to co-present a Lunch & Learn on October 24<sup>th</sup> remotely with a lawyer from the New Hampshire Municipal Association regarding bond authority for acquiring open space.

#### **Special Topics & Presentations**

##### **4. Easement monitoring**

Jared Hardner explained that, a few years ago, the Commission organized and put together a database of all its easements and a general plan for monitoring them. The Commission should take stock of what needs to be done with monitoring these easements, in order to stay consistent.

Rob Clemens noted that Bill Stoughton got this program off to a great start and it has since not been well attended to. The Commission acquired a couple of these properties using LCHIP funding, which requires annual monitoring that the Commission has fallen behind on. The property list needs to be brought up to date, and other properties have recently been acquired and should be added. A monitoring template should be utilized. The Commission could consider engaging the trail stewards for help with this project.

John Harvey stated that he and Mark Bender recently walked two LCHIP properties and filled out the monitoring reports. Rob Clemens stated that the Scott properties and one on Joe English are subject to these annual monitoring requirements.

John Harvey stated that the GAIA app is very useful for monitoring. The Commission discussed if additional subscriptions for this app should be considered.

In response to a question from Christian Littlefield, Rob Clemens stated that Bill Stoughton created a tutorial for this monitoring and reporting that is available through Drop Box.

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Rob Clemens stated that he would work to set a date for an infield training for this monitoring and reporting for those interested. The Commission discussed doing this training on the LCHIP property in Joe English.

## **5. Grater-Pond Parish trail planning**

Jared Hardner explained that this discussion is to develop a vision for how to integrate the Curran acquisition into this now larger complex of 1,200 acres of Grater Woods and Pond Parish. There are already established trail systems on both sides of this area, including a couple of old logging roads and some rogue trails. The Commission can also consider enhancements to the road access and new kiosks. Different interest groups for this area include walkers, mountain bikers, snowshoers, cross country skiers, wildlife habitat watchers, etc. The Commission could consider asking on social media if anyone has suggestions for this area.

Rich Hart noted that the neighboring property has existing cross country ski trails on it. These could be extended onto the new property. Jared Hardner noted that there is a very large wet area that runs the length of the property. A trail agreement may be needed with private abutters to get around the wettest portion. Rob Clemens noted that Bruce Beckley previously tried to put this idea together and ran into the same issue. One of the neighboring abutters did not want a trail easement at that time. This could be revisited.

Frank Montesanto stated that he likes the idea of getting input from all the various groups but is worried that it may open up a can of worms.

Rob Clemens noted that the Commission should consider if the existing trails that people have been using for years can be used and/or upgraded or should be abandoned.

Christian Littlefield asked if there is a map of what is existing in this area. Rob Clemens stated that he knows where the trails are but does not know if there is an existing map. Frank Montesanto noted that a lot of them are based on the path of least resistance.

Christian Littlefield asked if there are any restrictions or access issues with the one new parcel. Jared Hardner stated that he does not believe any trail building or altering will be done until the final agreement is in hand, which will be July 1, 2024. The area can likely be walked and planned until then. John Harvey noted that the Commission has a trail standard document in the Drop Box that everyone agreed to follow when building new trails. Jared Hardner agreed that the Commission wants good, high-quality trails of a low enough density that allows the group to pay attention to its other conservation objectives of the area.

Jared Hardner suggested that Commissioners go out to the site and walk a grid to get a feel of topography and different features. The Commission can then start to develop better ideas about what it wants to do with the property. Rob Clemens stated that the Commission should consider connectivity, such as connecting the Pond Parish parking area to Grater Woods, and potential connectivity to the Boy Scout trail and the Schweiker property. At one point Meridian Land

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Services was considering a trail that would circumvent much of the property along the wetlands to the south.

The Commission agreed to walk the property at different times and consider usage. Rob Clemens asked if the Commission is considering putting an additional trailhead parking area off Grater Road on the Curran property. There was agreement that this could be considered.

## **6. Other Business**

Mark Bender explained that he attended a meeting that was hosted by the Department of Public Works and Hoyle Tanner regarding the replacement bridge at Thornton Ferry 1. The group invited all abutting property owners, including the Conservation Commission for the Ross Bird Sanctuary. Hoyle Tanner has requested all of the property owners sign a temporary easement for the period of a year to install the bridge.

**Mark Bender moved to authorize the Chair to sign the temporary access easement. Seconded by Christian Littlefield.**

### **Discussion:**

**There was an explanation that this will be used for workspace for the project and to extend the guardrails in the area.**

**Rob Clemens stated that the work done on the bridge near Caesar's Brook is excellent.**

**Vote: 7-0-0; motion approved.**

Frank Montesanto noted that there is a hanging tree on the Plumb Trail. Lee Gilman noted that this tree is approximately 5' in diameter at the base and is fairly dangerous to address. This is hanging right over the trail. The Commission discussed rerouting the trail until a long-term solution can be determined.

Mark Bender explained that the draft contracts for haying and farming are complete. He asked if the Commission would like to review these, or if the Town Administrator should review them first. The Commission agreed that these should be reviewed first by the Town Administrator.

Rob Clemens noted that, in 2021, the Town passed a warrant article for open space acquisition for \$6M over a period of five years. These monies were used principally to acquire the Curran and Clearview properties. Once those deals are completed next summer, there will be no money left in that funding authority. Several Commissioners, members of the Planning Board and members of the Board of Selectmen would like to consider another warrant article for open space acquisition. The draft increases the amount to \$10M, with limitations to spend up to \$5M per year with the same review requirements as the previous warrant article. Town Counsel reviewed this draft and suggested a warrant article for \$10M with no restrictions. The draft warrant article

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language was revised and will be presented to the Board of Selectmen for inclusion in the warrant articles to be considered for next March at Town Meeting. This is being proposed as there seemed to be acknowledgment from the public that this is a good plan for acquisitions.

Peter Lyon explained that, once this is brought to the Board of Selectmen, language will be considered for the final warrant articles, with input and advice from the Commission.

Rob Clemens agreed to send out the draft warrant article language for review by Commissioners prior to the next meeting.

Peter Lyon updated the Commission on the Curran and Clearview acquisitions. Within the next ten days, there should be a closing date scheduled for the Clearview acquisition. Rob Clemens noted that the 18-unit senior condo portion of the East Village has been sold to another owner.

Lee Gilman noted that the worker from Vegetative Control Services (VCS) has had some health issues and some of the items around Town may be floated until next season. New treatments will likely not be opened this fall. He stated that New Hampshire has an invasive species strategic plan template which he will be using as a base document for some of the planning he was asked to do for invasive species management. He also found an outside consultant that is willing to be consulted for any customizations or questions. Jared Hardner explained that he met with Eric Slosek, DPW Director, regarding what the Department plans to do this coming year for invasives management, and he indicated that the Department plans to include a consultant in their budget to help develop a strategic plan for rights of way and other land that they manage. Lee Gilman stated that he would pass along the name of the consultant for DPW to consider.

John Harvey noted that this Saturday at 9:00 AM, a nature steward will be hosting an autumn olive sprouts pull at Buck Meadow. Also, on October 19<sup>th</sup>, John Harvey stated that he will be hosting a meeting of federal forestry managers regarding an eastern hemlock workshop. This is a professional conference and not open to the public.

Rich Hart stated that, in 2020, the Town rebuilt a piece of Christian Hill Road and, in the process, needed to cut trees along that stretch of the road. The Conservation Commission decided that it wanted to give the wood to people in Amherst who needed the firewood and could not pay for it. The Commission worked with the Wood Ministry to distribute the wood to various people. As of this week, the last load of that wood will be picked up by the Wood Ministry.

Joe Connelly, Hollis Conservation Commission, explained that conservation commissions are compelled to act when something such as a large tree is about to fall onto a trail, so he was happy to hear that the Commission will be dealing with this. He invited all Commissioners to attend Hollis Conservation Commission meetings at any time. Rob Clemens noted that this is a great opportunity to learn something new.

Rob Clemens stated that he hiked Caesar's Brook recently and it is in nice shape.

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Christian Littlefield asked if Lindabury should be mowed this year, as the Cider Fest will not be occurring. Frank Montesanto stated that he believes this should not be mowed this year, as poison ivy treatment will not be occurring. The trail itself is mowed and there are deer runs through the existing grass. Lee Gilman agreed that there will be better ecology and support for wildlife if the area is not mowed.

The Commission discussed an invoice for mowing at a number of properties in Town, such as Caesar's Brook, Sky Meadow, and Grater Woods. Christian Littlefield noted that this should have been approved independently back in June/July as part of this season's annual meadow mowing, charged to the Land Account.

Jared Hardner stated that last night he presented the Commission's strategic plan to the Board of Selectmen. This was received favorably. The budget presented a budget with a 4% increase over last year.

Christian Littlefield stated that he will update the Commission on the mowing budget at the next meeting.

**Rob Clemens moved to adjourn at 8:17pm. Seconded by Frank Montesanto.  
Vote: 7-0-0; motion approved.**

**The meeting adjourned at 8:17pm.**

*Respectfully submitted,  
Kristan Patenaude*