

TOWN OF AMHERST
Conservation Commission

October 13, 2021

APPROVED

In attendance: Rob Clemens – Chair, John Harvey, Lee Gilman, Rich Hart, Mike Cohen (Alternate), Jared Hardner, Peter Lyon – BOS Ex-Officio, Bill Widmer (Alternate), and Bill Stoughton (Alternate).
Staff present: Kristan Patenaude – Recording Secretary (remote).

Chairman Rob Clemens called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm.

ADMINISTRATIVE:

1. Chair Comments

Rob Clemens explained that the ACC is still trying to recruit for a regular and an alternate member. He asked Commissioners to spread the word and try to find those who may be interested.

Bill Stoughton sat for Frank Montesanto.

2. Minutes, July 28, 2021

Bill Stoughton moved to approve the meeting minutes of July 28, 2021, as written. Lee Gilman seconded.

Voting: Rob Clemens – aye, John Harvey - aye, Lee Gilman - aye, Rich Hart - aye, Jared Hardner – abstain, and Bill Stoughton – aye; 5-0-1 motion carried.

3. Treasurer's Report

Bill Widmer explained that the expenses for the appraiser now need to flow through the Town books. He will continue to check to make sure this is moving forward. Bill Widmer stated that the ACC has had very minor expenses to date. He noted that approximately \$208,000 has been moved into the Land Account, increasing the total funding available to approximately \$500,000.

Jared Hardner noted that there will be an additional \$8,000 charge for the appraiser to be processed soon. This will essentially complete the total \$11,000 previously approved for this item.

Rob Clemens noted that the Town Finance Director has resigned, and the position has been posted.

The Commission discussed the interest related to the Land Account.

Rob Clemens moved to approve the Treasurer's Report, as submitted. Bill Stoughton seconded.

Voting: Rob Clemens – aye, John Harvey - aye, Lee Gilman - aye, Rich Hart - aye, Jared Hardner – aye, and Bill Stoughton – aye; 6-0-0 motion carried.

4. Planning & Permitting

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Bill Stoughton stated that the Planning Board meeting on November 3, 2021, will feature a presentation from the Clearview Development. The Planning Board previously heard a conceptual presentation of the Brook Road development. The owner has apparently abandoned the previously approved development on this property, which would have gifted a large piece of conservation land to the Town. The current conceptual subdivision proposal looks to preserve a greater piece of land on the site but will likely seek for the Town to purchase it. This item will continue to play out.

Jared Hardner stated that the first public forum for the Master Plan update will take place on November 15, 2021, at 6:30pm at the Amherst Middle School. This forum will allow citizens to move around stations for each potential theme of the Master Plan, hear information, and give input. With this input, the Master Plan Steering Committee and the consultant will begin to develop products regarding the feedback received. The forum will be staffed by the consultant and all Commissioners are encouraged to participate and pass the word to others.

TOPICS

5. FY23 Strategic Plan & Budget

Rob Clemens stated that he presented the ACC's FY23 Strategic Plan to the Board of Selectmen last night. There was emphasis placed on sticking to the ACC's Conservation Plan and the role the ACC hopes to play with regard to other Town Departments and ordinances. He noted that a reduced ACC budget, of approximately \$14,600, was presented.

Peter Lyon stated that the Board of Selectmen will hear the first presentation of the FY23 budget at its next meeting.

6. Miscellaneous Items

a. Mowing Schedules

John Harvey explained that the ACC usually mows 6-7 fields around Town each fall. The Commission previously approved approximately \$800-1,000 for this work this year. He believes the actual costs will come in under budget because mowing on a couple of the fields was not needed.

In response to a question from Bill Widmer regarding the Vegetative Control Services (VCS) work, Lee Gilman stated that the work has been completed. VCS spent about one week working on properties around Town. Next year, the ACC can coordinate for VCS to do work at Lindabury Orchard with a boom truck.

John Harvey stated that the Ackley property has a complex, 4-acre perimeter, that is owned by the Town. This area is meadow, but the rest of the property is forested. A separate person owns the timber rights to this section of the property. He plans to speak with this person about allowing the Town's meadow parcel to keep growing and to not cut it back. This is a good opportunity for the ACC to work with a landowner for the benefit of wildlife.

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88 The Board discussed some old, tall white pines on the property boundary between the Ackley
89 and Woolsey property. An abutter would like those trees to be removed. The Commission agreed
90 to allow the landowner to remove these trees if he so chooses.

91
92 John Harvey noted that the two meadows at Joppa Hill have been mowed by someone. The
93 person mowed the whole perimeter of the meadows and through the middle of the Town-owned
94 meadow. The mowing path was approximately 40-50' wide. Unfortunately, this removed 3-4
95 years of brush habitat that John Harvey had been cultivating. He believes that this mowing was
96 done as part of the recent Joppa Hill Trail Run. He has registered a complaint at the Bedford
97 Town Hall. He explained that he would like there to be a written agreement between the Bedford
98 Town Planner, the ACC, the Piscataquoag Land Conservancy, and the Joppa Hill Educational
99 Farm, so that this will not be an issue in the future.

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101 **b. NHACC Annual Meeting**

102 Rob Clemens explained that the NHACC Annual Meeting will take place on November 6, 2021,
103 remotely. He and John Harvey will be making a presentation on meadow management at around
104 10am.

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106 **c. Infrastructure and Signage needs**

107 The Commission discussed how best to carry on with signage and Trail Steward items after Vick
108 Bennison's passing. Rich Hart agreed to reach out to the Trail Stewards and continue to work
109 with them.

110
111 The Commission discussed the process for Eagle Scout projects in the future. After some recent
112 issues with a project, the group discussed laying out rules and expectations, along with the
113 possibility of requesting interim reports. It was determined that Bill Widmer, Bill Stoughton, and
114 Rob Clemens will sit down and work on proposed rules and regulations for these projects. Bill
115 Widmer also volunteered to speak with the Scout Masters involved, if necessary.

116
117 **d. Climate Change and the ACC Conservation Plan**

118 Mike Cohen stated that the Commission previously discussed adding climate change as an eighth
119 goal to the Conservation Plan. It was also noted that climate change could be integrated into all
120 strategies in the Conservation Plan in different ways. He would like to continue to build a more
121 resilient community in Amherst through adaptation and mitigation regarding climate change.

122
123 Bill Widmer suggested that this information should be presented to the Master Plan Steering
124 Committee to determine if it could be incorporated into the update of the Master Plan.

125
126 Rich Hart suggested that the Commission could more regularly speak about climate change to
127 the public.

128
129 Rob Clemens asked if other conservation commissions in the State are doing work on climate
130 change similar to this. Mike Cohen stated that towns around the state are beginning to address
131 this problem in different ways. Rob Clemens stated that community resiliency is important, and

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he believes the Master Plan update process may be a great opportunity to present this information.

Bill Stoughton stated that, instead of broad principles, he believes the group should focus on what can be done that is new or different for the Town. It can pick four to five items that can actually be executed and have the biggest impact.

Bill Widmer suggested boiling down this presentation into specific actions that can be done. One of these could be advocacy.

Jared Hardner stated that the term ‘climate change’ was originally left out of the Conservation Plan as a way to not alienate anyone, while still allowing those who were interested in it to continue to advocate for it. However, times have changed and there may be a need to include this information more formally for the Town. He suggested that this information be brought to the Master Plan Steering Committee or Planning Board to determine which items can be addressed by the ACC and which items may need separate committees to be formed to handle them.

Mike Cohen stated that he wants to build the idea of resilience into the ACC’s work and into the community. Much of what the ACC can do is recommend items for others to take up for action.

Rob Clemens stated that he believes the next step is to determine any text modifications that the ACC thinks are necessary to the Conservation Plan regarding climate change. Then to pick out a subset of actions that are being done or should be done within the ACC’s responsibilities.

John Harvey noted that there are some incontrovertible items happening in the world. Pollinator populations are plummeting, the weather is changing, and species are moving northward. There are items that the ACC can address such as forest management and others to help with these issues.

Lee Gilman stated that it will be important to determine where exactly climate change should be included in the Conservation Plan in order to be most impactful.

Rob Clemens stated that he would like everyone to relook at Mike Cohen’s information on climate change, determine where it could best be included in the Conservation Plan, and determine which action items could be rolled into the strategic elements within the Plan.

7. Other Business

Rob Clemens stated that he received a request to place a tree stand in Buck Meadow for archery hunting. This property has not yet been posted. He noted that this is a very publicly used area and it is unclear if hunting can be permitted within the Buck Meadow footprint. The ACC does share its properties with hunters, generally.

Lee Gilman stated that closing off any property to hunting completely could be problematic, in terms of herd populations. Jared Hardner agreed that there is an abundance of deer in Town that

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seems to be having a deleterious effect on the forests. However, the area of Buck Meadow that is used for recreation is not a safe place for hunting. If someone can find a safe place within the isolated forested area on the property, it should be allowed.

Rob Clemens stated that he believes the ACC should default to all of the State's hunting safety guidelines. There is a tree stand policy in place that stands be registered and taken down at the end of the season.

Bill Stoughton stated that the State prohibits the use of rifles to hunt deer in Amherst, and other towns. He noted that the procedures for Buck Meadow state that the ACC and Recreation Department will agree together on recreational uses for the property.

Town Administrator Shankle stated that signs may need to be posted in areas that hunting will not be allowed on the property. It may be a concern to allow hunting in an area that the Town is promoting for children and other recreational uses. Hunting was never discussed during the public hearings for this property.

Peter Lyon stated that, in terms of the conservation area for this property, uses are up to the ACC.

Rob Clemens stated that a granite bench in Buck Meadow is agreeable to Vick Bennison's family as a memorial to him. Bill Widmer stated that he would work to get the cost of the bench. Rob Clemens stated that he will look at appropriate locations on the site.

Rob Clemens stated that the NH Cooperative Extension contacted him regarding placing all the Town trails on Trail Finder. This is a public access app for people to use trails across the State. This would be put on the site at no expense to the Town.

Jared Hardner stated that these trails are already on Open Street Map and other standard mapping apps. This is a UNH project that wants to use a separate app and they should be welcome to add the trails.

Rob Clemens noted that Doug Tallamy, nationally recognized author, is speaking at Souhegan High School on October 23, 2021, at 7pm, as part of the Garden Club's 50th anniversary.

The ACC will next meet on October 27, 2021.

Jared Hardner moved to adjourn at 9:25pm. The meeting was adjourned.

*Respectfully submitted,
Kristan Patenaude*

Minutes approved: October 27, 2021