

TOWN OF AMHERST
Conservation Commission

August 10, 2022

APPROVED

In attendance: Rob Clemens – Chair (remote), Jared Hardner, John Harvey (remote), Rich Hart, Peter Lyon – Board of Selectmen Ex-Officio, Lee Gilman, Steve Lutz (alternate), and Christian Littlefield (alternate).

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

Also present: Bill Stoughton, Selectman

Vice Chair Jared Hardner called the meeting to order at 7:01 pm.

ADMINISTRATIVE:

1. Chair Comments

None at this time.

Christian Littlefield sat for Frank Montesanto. Steve Lutz sat for Bill Widmer.

2. Minutes: July 13, 2022

Christian Littlefield moved to approve the meeting minutes of July 13, 2022, as amended [Line 30: Change \$1.7M to \$1.007M]. Rich Hart seconded.

Roll Call vote: Rich Hart – aye; Lee Gilman – abstain; Jared Hardner – aye; Christian Littlefield – aye; Steve Lutz – aye; Rob Clemens – abstain; John Harvey – abstain; 4-0-3; motion carried.

3. Planning & Permitting

Steve Lutz reviewed the most recent Planning Board items. He stated that the August 8th Planning Board meeting included a discussion on the proposed Clearview development. The Commission should know that the applicant will be coming before it on August 24th regarding its CUP application, including information on the wetland crossing, buffer disturbances and stormwater design. The applicant has drafted a conservation easement with the Amherst Land Trust. The next Planning Board meeting on the Clearview proposal will be held on September 21st. At the first meeting in September, the Board will hear proposed changes to zoning ordinances.

Rob Clemens noted that he recently saw a request for comment from the Commission regarding the Vonderosa (Hazen property) and development of the Curran property due August 24th. He noted that Bill Stoughton, Planning Board/Board of Selectmen, recently proposed some building code amendments for additional requirements for water quality and quantity ahead of issuing a building permit.

Bill Stoughton stated that the water quality changes would require testing of individual well water before a building permit can be issued. This will test for the basic level of contaminants DES recommends, along with manganese and PFAS, per the Town. The capacity test for individual wells will use the State recommendations for the optimum capacity, 960 gallons over

August 10, 2022

APPROVED

4 hours; the State's minimum requirement is 600 gallons over 2 hours. The procedure in the suggested building code change was recommended by a Planning Board consultant for the Clearview development. These proposed changes do not address shared wells. These code changes have to go before the State Building Code Committee before they can be placed on the ballot to be adopted locally. The Commission will review comments on this at its August 24th meeting.

In response to a question from Jared Hardner, Bill Stoughton explained that, in the context of Clearview there was a great deal of discussion regarding community wells. This issue was raised a little late in the game for that application, as it could be an additional approximately \$1M cost and a 2–3-year process to get approved at the State level. It was not fair to require that of this applicant at the last minute. The cleanest way to make this a requirement for new developments would be through the Town ordinances. These would have to match State law.

4. Treasurer's Report

The Commission reviewed the Treasurer's Report but held off on discussion until Bill Widmer could be present.

TOPICS

5. Meadow and Hayfield Management

John Harvey noted that Christian Littlefield has agreed to help him with this project. Meadows are managed for wildlife habitat and hayfields are managed for hay. No nutrients are added to the meadows and the minimum they would be mowed is once a year in the fall after the birds leave. John Harvey noted that he usually waits until once every three years to mow these meadows, but other considerations on when meadows are mowed may be view from the road, and/or soil type of the area. There are three farmers who take hay as a crop and provide the nutrients to these Town fields.

John Harvey shared a spreadsheet as to which fields should be mowed this year. He is suggesting that the Commission pay Mike Riccitelli to mow the meadows in Town.

Rich Hart noted that some of Lindabury Orchard needs to be mowed for the upcoming Ciderfest event. John Harvey stated that the grass under the Lindabury Orchard trees is not significant wildlife habitat and, thus, is not included on his list of meadows to manage for wildlife habitat.

John Harvey moved to expend \$2,800 for meadow mowing this year from the Conservation Fund. Lee Gilman seconded.

Discussion:

John Harvey explained that the Conservation Fund was previously agreed to be used for items that benefit wildlife, which is why he is suggesting this item be expended from the Conservation Fund.

August 10, 2022

APPROVED

Rich Hart asked about allocating funds to mow Lindabury Orchard. Jared Hardner stated that this should be brought up with Frank Montesanto. Christian Littlefield stated that he has spoken with DPW, and they are content to continue to mow the upper orchard, but not the lower due to poison ivy and the terrain. Rich Hart stated that the area will need to be mowed within the next month. Rob Clemens asked that Christian Littlefield sit with Frank Montesanto to discuss this item and find a solution.

Roll Call vote: Rich Hart – aye; Lee Gilman – aye; Jared Hardner – aye; Christian Littlefield – aye; Steve Lutz – aye; Rob Clemens – aye; John Harvey – aye; 7-0-0; motion carried.

6. Invasives Management Update

Lee Gilman stated that a special 30' boom sprayer was used this year to address poison ivy in Lindabury Orchard. There are some invasive species at Buchanan Park, which is generally managed by the Recreation Department, and he is suggesting removing a layer of Norway maples on the site, through his volunteer services. Rob Clemens noted that abutters may be concerned regarding work completed on the site, and a public information campaign will be necessary. Lee Gilman noted that replanting a shrub layer may create more of a park-feel for the area. Lee Gilman stated that he would reach out to the Rec Department regarding approval for the work. He suggested also notifying the immediate abutters and general public, through a sign placed on the property.

Lee Gilman stated that there is poison ivy surrounding the sign at the Great Meadow. There is also a great deal of bittersweet, which will soon begin to impede mowing efforts on the site.

Jared Hardner stated that he does not believe the area surrounding the sign is well-used by the public and the existing signage does not indicate there is a conservation area there. He suggested cleaning up the entrance, placing the fence, and making it a more inviting spot for the public.

The Commission discussed additional parking at the Great Meadow. John Harvey stated that he believes the entrance should be treated and kept like a park, just as Lindabury is, either by DPW or the Recreation Department. Rob Clemens stated that an abutter, Rick Crocker, has been the caretaker for the property for some time, and his input should be considered. Peter Lyon suggested that the Commission speak with the DPW and the Highway Safety Committee regarding parking for the Great Meadow.

Lee Gilman explained that purple loosestrife was found and treated at Lindabury Orchard. Jared Hardner noted that there is a lot of this invasive at Buck Meadow which needs to be managed. It has also spread to an abutting property and the owners would like to treat it.

John Harvey exited the meeting.

7. Master Plan Update

August 10, 2022

APPROVED

Jared Hardner stated that he supplied a few comments to the Planning Board on the Master Plan update. Bill Stoughton stated that a revised draft was released yesterday and will be discussed at length by the Planning Board next week. Jared Hardner stated that the Town's conservation interests are very well represented in the Plan. He hopes this will reflect what was expressed by the general public.

Rich Hart stated that he mentioned to the Planning Board that he believes information on climate change, increasing temperatures, droughts, and floods, is missing from the Plan. He also stated that the Town may want to consider information on car charging stations in the Plan. Jared Hardner stated that there are action items to address these items in the Plan.

Will Ludt stated that he sat in on a Transportation Technical Assistance Subcommittee of NRPC meeting and there was discussion regarding the next 5 and 7 years of funding which will be available for charging stations. The surrounding NRPC towns will likely receive some action items about this in the future.

8. Other Business

Rich Hart stated that a Ciderfest is planned for September 25, 2022, at Lindabury Orchard. A planning meeting will be held on Friday afternoon. The Board of Selectmen will need to be notified so the appropriate Town Departments can be coordinated. The lower Orchard needs to be mowed under the trees. He asked any Commissioners who are available to help with planning the event to do so.

Christian Littlefield noted that there has been discussion regarding placing split rail fencing along the Bragdon Farm field. This will likely cost approximately \$19,000, based on various items.

Jared Hardner stated that, during some Master Plan meetings there was discussion regarding where to cultivate development in the Town, and the consultant stated that the 101A area could be a potential. There was an outpouring of negative feedback from the Master Plan Steering Committee because many want to see the area kept as a bucolic gateway into Town. Bill Stoughton stated that the same section of Town has been designated by the Town and State as an Economic Revitalization Zone, with incentives given for developing in the area. He believes there needs to be more discussion on this topic before the Master Plan is finalized. Jared Hardner stated that there is an action item in the Plan to reevaluate those zones, as it was unclear how and why they were chosen in the first place. Rob Clemens stated that he does not believe any of these comments determine how the Commission should handle the Bragdon Farm field, as this is conservation land and will not be developed. Jared Hardner agreed that the area should be maintained to look like a nice entrance into Town. The Commission agreed to allow Christian Littlefield to explore more about fencing in this area.

Rob Clemens stated that the Commission reviewed a request through the Recreation Department from an individual regarding a memorial bench to be placed in the Joe English trails/Peabody Mill Environmental Center area. There is precedence for memorials to be placed for past

TOWN OF AMHERST
Conservation Commission

August 10, 2022

APPROVED

Commissioners and/or families with special connections to conservation properties. This would not come at a cost to the Commission, but only require the Commission's coordination. Jared Hardner asked that this bench be kept in similar style and design to existing benches in the area. He also suggested that the Commission consider repositioning some of the existing benches around the pond at Joe English. Rich Hart stated that he would prefer benches that differ in style so that there is variety. The Commission agreed it was amenable to placing the memorial bench and would help with coordination of the benches in that area.

Rob Clemens stated that he has been speaking with the DPW regarding a surveying contract for issues regarding encroachments or boundary disputes in Town. The DPW has a similar need and will help creating an RFQ for this item.

Jared Hardner stated that a site walk will occur on Friday at 8am of the Wheeler lot where some forestry work was completed over the summer. The group will likely also visit one other property where future work of a similar nature is proposed.

Jared Hardner stated that the eastern end of the Noble property on Mack Hill Road, through which the Bicentennial Trail and Hemlock Trail run, recently changed hands and the property has been posted. The Bicentennial Trail is now broken, and the Hemlock Trail cannot be used in that section. He plans to contact the owner to find out the rationale. Rerouting of trails may need to be considered.

**9. Non-Public Session - (pursuant to NH RSA 91-A:3 II (1))
- Review of potential property acquisitions.**

Jared Hardner noted that the Non-Public Session will not be occurring this evening.

Steve Lutz moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:27pm.

The meeting was adjourned.

*Respectfully submitted,
Kristan Patenaude*

Minutes approved: August 24, 2022