**Town of Amherst**

**Conservation Commission Meeting**

**Wednesday November 9, 2016**

**Attendance:** J. Harvey, R. Clemens Vice-Chair, L. Gilman, P. Lyon- Selectman Ex-Officio, B. Beckley- Alt, Frank Montesanto-Alt and Community Development Director G. Leedy

The Vice-Chair called the meeting to order at 7:03pm and stated Bruce will vote for Vick Bennison.

**Administrative Reports**

**Chair comments**

None

**Minutes**

Sunday October 23

**J. Harvey moved and L. Gilman seconded to approve the minutes of October 23rd as submitted.**

**All in favor**

**Finance Report- John**

John reported the balances, deposits and withdrawals that have occurred in the accounts since the last report.

**Planning Board Update- Rich**

None- Rich was not present.

Public comment

1. Hubert Buchanan- 20 Storybook Ln

His concern is that some residents would allow walking trails to cross their property, but are worried about liability.

John responded by explaining a Conservation Commission trail agreement. Under the RSA the agreement absolves the property owner of responsibility. The Town’s insurance would cover if necessary. The agreement lists the conditions of the agreement and the location of the trail. Once signed, the BOS is informed, the trail easement is added to the trail maps and the agreement is filed at the town hall. He also stated NH regulations allow walking on any private land as long as there aren’t any ‘no trespassing’ signs posted.

Lauren Buchanan expressed concern about a particular property that is supposed to have an easement for walking, but the proper language was not included in the documentation.

2. Jack Gleason- 12 Pavillion Rd

He gave an update on the progress of the Lindabury lower orchard. 100% of the apple trees are down and most have been removed. There are two islands of trees remaining. One has only an oak tree and the other has a list of trees remaining. The plan is to remove these trees since this area is a magnet for invasives. The contractor is asking for more time to complete the work, but no extra money. He would prefer to delay the work until January when it will fit better in his schedule.

The Commission confirmed there was not a completion date assigned in the contract and no other steps in the process would be affected by this delay so they agreed to allow the extra time.

**Topics**

* LOWG- (Lindabury orchard working group) Member Graham Hankey was present to answer questions.

Lee asked if Mark’s quote is still accurate based on the grading the lower orchard needs. There are other costs that haven’t necessarily been accounted for as well. Graham replied that if the large groups of trees are removed and smoothed out, Mark’s quote stands if there isn’t major grading that he can’t handle. Graham will reengage with Mark to make sure his quote is still accurate.

John said if there’s a need for additional funding, it will probably not be needed until late spring. As a member of ‘Friends of the Orchard’, Graham mentioned since the Conservation Commission is making significant progress on the hayfield, FOTO would be willing to put in some money at the end of the budget year if needed.

The Conservation Commission wondered if the contract is a multi- year contract with the farmer with the farmer taking some portion of the crop or if he will take all the crop as payment for maintaining the land along with the preparation process.

Rob said the working group report was excellent- very detailed.

The commission discussed access to the lower orchard which is needed for Mark to hay it. Graham said the owner of property hasn’t had any problem with letting equipment in there. There could be problems in the future and that risk has been discussed with Mark. The land trust should engage with the owner.

Lee wondered if agricultural access could be secured even if full access cannot so that Mark can get in and out. These details should be buttoned up.

The Conservation Commission discussed approving one of the alternatives for future management that was discussed at the previous meeting.

Rob liked the hybrid option the best and that was the option LOWG recommended to the Conservation Commission.

**J. Harvey moved to accept the hybrid alternative for the orchard going forward. L. Gillman seconded. All in favor**

Lee asked Graham if Mark’s prep cost included poison ivy mitigation. Yes, on 80% of the land. (The orchard and its borders) Lee said they already had someone lined up in the budget to do that so, to be more efficient, we should figure out who should do it and for what cost. We don’t want to be redundant. Mark’s prep work could be scaled back. How much money will Mark take out of his quote if the poison ivy is taken out for him. The Conservation Commission will move forward with that communication with Mark rather than FOTO being in the middle.

Graham said that FOTO agrees with most of what’s in the LOWG report. They want to see if the ACC puts together an orchard management position. Lee said there is a FOTO representative on the ACC. What would they want from an ACC orchard manager?

Someone who could allocate resources and maintain communication between ACC and FOTO to facilitate getting things done.

Rob said it sounds like the LOWG is coming to an end, but the Conservation Commission should keep the report on our agendas for further review and action.

John stated someone will have to write a contract for Mark.

* Budget

John will be making a presentation to the BOS on the ACC budget next week. He previewed it for the Conservation Commission for input/ corrections. Each department head needs to present budget planning and John has tried to put the presentation in that sort of a format.

A discussion ensued about invasives regarding future plans and ideas that both Lee and Gordon have.

The Conservation Commission gave opinions and ideas regarding the presentation.

Discussion ensued and Gordon said he will find out how much money to expect from the Land use change tax which is payable just after April 1st. The amount due is dependent on how the property is valued.

* Great Meadow

Rob and John described an Eagle Scout project that extends the existing boardwalk closer to the water. Permit approval was received last week. It’s a 40’ extension to what we had before. It is very sturdy and has interesting architectural characteristics. It is approached by a trail.

Rob said it’s peaceful and great but his concern is that it’s hard to know it’s there. There is only one sign facing one way on a trail. It’s hidden if you don’t know it’s there.

The board agreed some town events could be hosted there which would help with visibility. Or it could be a ‘trail of the month’ location and/or a group walk with an educational element could be held there. Rob and John will connect on writing some press about it.

Frank arrived at this time. (8:50)

**Management Areas**

Meadows/ Forests/ Invasives- Lee

* Lee reported in Joe English a bridge is going to be taken out and a culvert put in. That is being prepped and will begin soon.
* Notice needs to go out to the Town, abutters and PMEC about logging that’s about to start on the Hemlock trail.
* There’s an App developer who wants the ACC to utilize a particular app. This app will create a data dictionary / inventory and put it into a report after the data is entered through the app. We need to decide what we would want to track on our trails. Lee said the trail stewards would be key users of the app.

Infrastructure- Frank

* The Nathaniel Drive stairs are shut down and can be taken out. It will get done in a week or two.
* Cutting the steel pieces at the boat landing is the only other project going on
* The bridges will be the big project in the spring

Trails

* No report as Vick was not here
* Trails committee meeting report by Frank and Will Ludt: The committee voted Wes Chair of the committee, discussed the mission statement, which organizations they should have regular contact with, having an odd number of members, standards for established trails such as signage and kiosks, meeting with partners/ constituents/ stewards. They discussed starting a ‘trail of the month’ to make citizen’s more aware and gain exposure.
* John addressed a message from a resident stating people are using leaf blowers to get rid of leaves on formal and informal trails. The Betty Arnold Forest trails in particular were mentioned.

Lee has purchased 25 pounds of seed that should last through spring.

**L. Gillman moved to approve $162.50 from the town budget for seed. B. Beckley seconded. All in favor**

Management Planning

John said he and Jared are figuring out what mapping tool to use for trails. The data will go to three places: Google Maps, open street map project (GIS) and NRPC MapGeo. He explained the different uses for each. The town website now has all the trails. There will be a link to Google Maps with each trail on the site. When you are on the trial, you can click the pin and it will take you to the trail information on the town website.

Round Table

Rob: A Town of Amherst land committee is being assembled to examine all town-owned land along with their easements. Two ACC members are needed. Daryl and Wes had stated previously that they are interested. John said he is also interested. Rob will discuss this with Wes since he may be overcommitted and willing to let John take the spot.

Bruce:

* He reported working on several trails. He needs to connect with the Merrimack commission to complete a trail.
* He recommended a way to bypass cemetery fields with a trail.
* He needs to know who is doing what at Converse regarding a warming hut. Daryl is contact with the Recreation department about it. Rob will follow up with Daryl.
* There was a nice article in the paper about storybook trail.

John: Remaining 2016 Sunday meetings are on Thanksgiving and Christmas. **John moved that as long as the Management Area committees are doing good work, we should drop the Sunday meetings until next year. Rob seconded. All in favor**

Lee: Who oversees and implements Town Hall plantings? He would like to work with future groups before the install to avoid issues.

**R. Clemens moved to adjourn at 9:46pm. J. Harvey seconded. All in favor**

Respectfully submitted,

Jessica Marchant