

TOWN OF AMHERST
Conservation Commission

June 10, 2020

APPROVED-Amended

In attendance via Zoom: Rob Clemens – Chair, Jared Hardner – Vice Chair, Bill Widmer – Treasurer (alternate), John Harvey, Vick Bennison, Peter Lyon – BOS Ex-Officio, and Bill Stoughton (Alternate).

Staff present: Dean Shankle – Town Administrator, Kristan Patenaude – minute taker.

Chairman Rob Clemens called the online meeting to order at 7:00 pm.

Lee Gilman entered.

Frank Montesanto entered.

ADMINISTRATIVE:

1. Chair Comments – none.

2. Minutes (4/22 and 5/13)

Jared Hardner moved to approve the minutes from April 22, 2020, as presented. Vick Bennison seconded.

Roll call vote: Rob Clemens – aye; Jared Hardner– aye; Vick Bennison – aye; Frank Montesanto – aye; Lee Gilman – aye; John Harvey– aye. Motion carried unanimously.

Jared Hardner moved to approve the minutes from May 13, 2020, as amended [Line 170 to read “...not to exceed...”]. Vick Bennison seconded.

Roll call vote: Rob Clemens – aye; Jared Hardner– aye; Vick Bennison – aye; Frank Montesanto – aye; Lee Gilman – aye; John Harvey– aye; and Rich Hart – aye. Motion carried unanimously.

3. Treasurer’s Report

Bill Widmer stated that, of the \$14,112 of the ACC budget, \$11,108 has been expended. Including items already allocated for the rest of the year, the ACC’s budget balance is at \$321.00. He requested those items already allocated be confirmed with funds expended and the requisite bills.

Bill Widmer explained that the land account has \$227,018.09 in it.

Jared Hardner stated that he has submitted a bill from Charlie Koch for surveys and work done on the development of the Forest Management Plan. This is part of the \$10,000 originally earmarked for Charlie’s work for the ACC.

Bill Widmer stated that the Gift Account currently has \$16,792 in it.

Jared Hardner requested that allocations voted on in the past be reviewed and not forgotten. There was a substantial allocation made in the past for the King Post Bridge in Joe English. The work has not yet been done, as the volunteer has not yet started work.

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Rob Clemens explained that the Gift Account should be considered part of the Conservation Fund. The group should review if there are expenditures that seem particularly appropriate to use the Gift Account for.

In response to a question from Rob Clemens, Bill Widmer stated that \$700 has been allocated to Mike Cohen's educational materials, \$1,000 has been allocated to trailhead maps in Joe English, and \$500 has been allocated towards birdboxes.

Jared Hardner moved to allocate \$41.00 for signs to put up to close a trail in Joe English that leads out to Brook Road. Vick Bennison seconded.

Roll call vote: Rob Clemens – aye; Jared Hardner– aye; Vick Bennison – aye; Frank Montesanto – aye; Lee Gilman – aye; John Harvey– aye; and Rich Hart – aye.

Motion carried unanimously.

Jared Hardner explained that Wes Robertson is looking for reimbursement of \$401.12 paid to Classic Signs, regarding work approved in principle by the Commission to make 20 new "Private Property" signs.

Rob Clemens stated that Wes Robertson had concerns regarding the Gowing Woods' residents thus requiring the private property signs. Rob Clemens explained that Wes Robertson could move forward with this at his own risk, being that it had not yet been approved by the Commission.

Bill Widmer stated that the Commission's budget will be exceeded by this allocation. He believes that the group should be more disciplined and that votes need to occur before money is spent.

John Harvey agreed that it seems unfair to those who brought forth allocations that were previously voted on, to possibly lose out based on an allocation that was completed without previously being voted on. He believes that Wes Robertson's expenditure should wait until next year.

Jared Hardner stated that the expenditure shouldn't have been made without authorization, but it is good that something is being done for this project. He doesn't want to see bureaucratic process stand in the way of progress.

Town Administrator Shankle explained that the Finance Department takes information from each department about what was spent in the last year.

Jared Hardner moved to allocate \$401.12 on trail signage out of the 2021 budget, from the Signage line. Frank Montesanto seconded.

Roll call vote: Rob Clemens – aye; Jared Hardner– aye; Vick Bennison – aye; Frank Montesanto – aye; Lee Gilman – aye; John Harvey– aye; and Rich Hart – aye.

Motion carried unanimously.

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Vick Bennison moved to accept the Treasurer's Report as presented. Frank Montesanto seconded.

Roll call vote: Rob Clemens – aye; Jared Hardner– aye; Vick Bennison – aye; Frank Montesanto – aye; Lee Gilman – aye; John Harvey– aye; and Rich Hart – aye.

Motion carried unanimously.

4. Planning and Permitting

Bill Stoughton, representative from the ACC to the Planning Board, explained that the Planning Board is going to start working through some of its backlog of applications. The Arboleda Realty project currently has two applications in with the Planning Board; the wetland CUP application, which previously came before the ACC, and the site plan. The Planning Board approved the wetland CUP with all of the recommended conditions included. The ACC still needs to work out the wording of the easement language for this CUP with the state and the applicant. He explained that Bill Drescher, town counsel, should be consulted regarding the estimated cost for this review, to pass along the information to the applicant.

Bill Stoughton explained that the Arboleda site plan hearing will be held on July 1, 2020. A site walk of the area will occur on June 13, 2020, at 9am. The Carlson Manor site plan review will be heard on June 23, 2020. There was some concern with this application regarding keeping nearby water supplies cool. The first step in hearing the second Jacobson application will occur on July 7, 2020, with the Planning Board reviewing the threshold question of whether this new application is materially different from the first application. The Planning Board will also hold work sessions on June 17th and July 15th to discuss impact fees and the Master Plan. He doesn't believe there are any new applications that have been submitted to the Planning Board at this time.

Rob Clemens introduced the new Town Planner, Natasha Kypfer, to the Commission.

Natasha Kypfer explained that she started with the town about three months ago. She moved to the area from Montana, where she has previously worked in higher education and for the Gallatin County planning office.

In response to a question from Jared Hardner, Rob Clemens explained that Natasha Kypfer will be helpful to the Commission in their work regarding planning, and NRPC will be utilized for GIS work.

Rob Clemens noted that he has received emails from Fish and Game regarding Witches' Brook and Peacock Brook and the possibility of proposed developments causing warmer water sources in those areas. He will send these along to Bill Stoughton for Planning Board review.

Bill Stoughton noted that the Community Development Office has begun posting all of the application materials on the town website prior to each hearing.

TOPICS:

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5. Buck Meadow Update

Rob Clemens explained that the group had previously authorized Meridian Land Services to pursue looking at the access/egress requirements for Buck Meadow and the parking capacity on site. After an initial review, there seem to be three options:

- 1) Keep everything as-is for right now; clean-up the existing parking lot and provide boundaries; and create a small combination of recreational fields as the areas currently exist without taking down any trees.
- 2) Clear out the existing parking lot of trees and improve the area; include a small access way off Stearns Road with 3-4 parking spots for access to ACC trails; remove some of the trees on the fairway; and expand the field capacity.
- 3) Maximize the field capacity and recreational space; expand the parking lot to hold 150-200 car spaces; create an emergency access road from Stearns Road along the perimeter that can connect into the access roadway along the field.

Rob Clemens explained that the state needs to know more about the current driveway permit that the golf course held off Route 101A. This information has been difficult to find. The information is needed to better look at access, turning points, etc. The nature of this permit will dictate how the Highway Department addresses current and future access to the site.

Rob Clemens stated that he and Craig Fraley, Recreation Department Director, did a first mowing of the proposed trail around the perimeter of the property. The grass around is coming in nicely to make this a defined trail. There has been one field walk completed with the advisory group.

Lee Gilman stated that full leaf expansion should happen around the end of June. He will look to pass along the edges for invasives at that time.

Rob Clemens explained that the Recreation Department would like to hold a portion of their summer camps at the Buck Meadow location this year.

Town Administrator Shankle agreed that Buck Meadow will be used for some of the summer camp this year. Craig Fraley has created a five page Operating Manual for this activity. There was hope to use the first and second floors of the clubhouse during summer camp, but the DPW will first need to create an egress from the second floor.

In response to a question from Jared Hardner, Town Administrator Shankle explained that none of the town fields are currently open, but this may change in relation to the Governor's orders.

5.1 Path Forward

John Harvey explained that this area is a valuable addition to the town in terms of different wildlife habitats. He recommended: letting the shrubbery grow around the edges of the woods, letting the shrubbery fill in the areas between the three existing turtle ponds, moving sand from the sand traps to piles for turtle nesting, creating pollinator gardens in sunny areas, mowing the large grassy center area every two years for ground nesting birds, and placing a one mile trail

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around the perimeter with habitat interpretive signage along it. He believes this will all take approximately three years to complete.

John Harvey explained that the Board of Selectmen should be kept aware of all of this, and that the trails need to be named and blazed. Advice can be sought from UNH and Fish and Game on a number of items. The ACC should continue to look into bird boxes, pollinator gardens, and an ADA compliant trail for the property. There will need to be signage at the front and rear entrances of the property and a kiosk.

Jared Hardner discussed the possibility of hiring the Amherst Country Club to help the ACC to create a short ADA compliant path to start. John Harvey agreed that the DPW probably cannot help with this project right now due to budget issues. If possible, it can be completed this year, if not it can wait until next year.

Rob Clemens stated that the group could endorse the list of planned tasks as written and then complete them as time and budget allow.

Bill Stoughton suggested possibly creating a mini arboretum on the property. Rob Clemens noted that the state nursery does have plant materials available for replanting and that the Girl Scouts have been asking for projects to help with.

In response to a question from Jared Hardner, Lee Gilman noted that there may be an influx of annual weeds into the area. It might be possible to add wood chips to some areas to prevent this.

In response to a question from Frank Montesanto, Rob Clemens noted that, in the Operating Agreement, the Recreation Department agreed to undertake infrastructure pieces on their part of the property.

The group discussed what kind of a kiosk they want on site. Frank Montesanto stated that the estimate for the type of kiosk decided on by the group is \$3,375.

Frank Montesanto moved to allocate an amount not to exceed \$3,500 out of the Gift Account for the Buck Meadow kiosk. Jared Hardner seconded.
Roll call vote: Rob Clemens – aye; Jared Hardner– aye; Vick Bennison – aye; Frank Montesanto – aye; Lee Gilman – aye; John Harvey– aye; and Rich Hart – aye.
Motion carried unanimously.

Rob Clemens moved to approve John Harvey’s general outline of projects for Buck Meadow and allow him to move forward with pursuing them. Jared Hardner seconded.

Roll call vote: Rob Clemens – aye; Jared Hardner– aye; Vick Bennison – aye; Frank Montesanto – aye; Lee Gilman – aye; John Harvey– aye; and Rich Hart – aye.
Motion carried unanimously.

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6. Lindabury Orchard Update

a. Closures, conditions, and use

Frank Montesanto explained that FOTO (Friends of the Orchard) has hired a landscaping company to do mowing of the orchard, due to DPW budget restrictions. FOTO will pay for this work to be done.

Frank Montesanto explained that the property owner that owns the parcel next to the Lindabury Trail prefers for his land not to be used anymore for this purpose.

Frank Montesanto noted that he has plans and easement language to add into Dropbox.

Frank Montesanto showed the group an image depicting a possible walk around that would make access to the Lindabury Trail possible. He recommended purchasing four signs that note the trail as being under reconstruction/rehabilitation until the reroute is completed.

Lee Gilman noted that he should have an estimate in for brush mowing soon. Rob Clemens stated that he's discussed using the Ventrac mower from the Recreation Department as well.

Frank Montesanto moved to expend up to \$56.62 on four signs for information regarding rehabilitation/redirection for the Lindabury and Orchard Trails out of the 2020 budget, Water Crossing Repair and Maintenance line. Vick Bennison seconded.

Roll call vote: Rob Clemens – aye; Jared Hardner– aye; Vick Bennison – aye; Frank Montesanto – aye; Lee Gilman – aye; John Harvey– aye; and Rich Hart – aye. Motion carried unanimously.

The group discussed work done by Vegetation Control Services.

Rob Clemens explained that the group had discussed giving lumber cut from trees on Christian Hill Road to welfare recipients. This has proven to be a difficult project.

Rich Hart explained that there is an opportunity through the Wood Ministry in Milford, which provides wood to those who can't pay for it in order to heat their homes. He has approximately 25 cords of wood on his property that needs to be split before it can be donated. He also has about 2-3 tons of wood chips. There is also the possibility that some of the split wood could be made into planks for the ACC to use in their projects.

Vick Bennison noted that he is out of blazes and needs to order more. He would also like to order blaze guides to install in the kiosks.

Vick Bennison moved to expend an amount not to exceed \$250.00 for blazes and blaze guide signs from the 2020 Water Crossing Repair and Maintenance line. Jared Hardner seconded.

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**Roll call vote: Rob Clemens – aye; Jared Hardner– aye; Vick Bennison – aye; Frank Montesanto – aye; Lee Gilman – aye; John Harvey– aye; and Rich Hart – aye.
Motion carried unanimously.**

7. Other Business

Rob Clemens stated that a public hearing for the Gleason easement can be held in the second half of July jointly with the Board of Selectmen. This will be to accept the conservation easement on the Gleason lot.

Bill Widmer suggested that Clean-Up Day, which was cancelled in May, be held later in the summer. Peter Lyon noted that Bill Widmer should contact DPW Director, Eric Hahn on this item.

In response to a question from John Harvey, Rob Clemens stated that a cost estimate for signage on the new Atherton/Purtell trail be obtained before officially declaring the trail open.

Jared Hardner explained that he recently received permission from Bill and Candace Rapf to put a section of a trail in Joe English onto their private property. This fixes the issue of the previous trail in the area that ran out to Brook Road. This trail is far superior and the Rapf's have chosen to name it the Treehouse Trail, after their son's old play spot.

Rob Clemens stated that the ACC will next meet on July 8, 2020. They will possibly hear from Fieldstone regarding the Brook Road property, and also the Hazen property.

Rich Hart noted that he has hiked four local trails and written up descriptions of his hikes. He's received great feedback.

**Jared Hardner moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:37pm. Lee Gilman seconded.
Motion carried unanimously.**

*Respectfully submitted,
Kristan Patenaude*

Minutes approved as amended: July 8, 2020