

TOWN OF AMHERST
Conservation Commission

September 11, 2019

AMENDED APPROVED

In attendance: Rob Clemens - Chair, John Harvey, Vick Bennison, Rich Hart, Bill Widmer – Treasurer (voting for Jared Hardner), Peter Lyon – BOS Representative, Bill Stoughton (alternate), and Mike Cohen (alternate).
Staff present: Kristan Patenaude – minute taker.

Rob Clemens called the meeting to order at 6:59 pm.

ADMINISTRATIVE:

1. Chair Comments

Rob Clemens recognized the anniversary of September 11th with a moment of silence.

Wes Robertson entered the meeting.

2. Minutes (from 8/28)

Review of the minutes was postponed until the next meeting.

3. Treasurer's Report

Bill Widmer presented the Treasurer's Report to the Commission.

In response to a question from Chairman Clemens, Mr. Widmer stated that there is about \$5,600 still sitting as encumbered but yet to be spent. Most of this money is probably for invasive work.

Wes Robertson moved to approve the reimbursement of \$77.50 to Bill Widmer for Old Home Day materials from the Educational Training and Development line.

Vick Bennison seconded.

All in favor.

Wes Robertson moved to accept the Treasurer's Report as presented. John Harvey seconded.

All in favor.

4. 2021 ACC Budget

The Commission discussed the 2021 budget. Bill Widmer explained that the Dues line item was increased due to an increased need for DropBox and Gaia by the group. The Wages line was increased due to extra work being taken on by Kristan Patenaude, including the Town-wide Clean Up Day, brochure, and Old Home Day items. The Water Crossing line was reduced due to there being a good stockpile of lumber for bridges, signage, etc. for the future.

Chairman Clemens explained that the Educational Training Professional Development line was originally lumped together with the Educational Outreach line. The total budget amount for these line items has remained the same, but the money has been split between the two lines.

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Mr. Widmer explained that there is no budget for the Land Management line or the Meadow Maintenance line. Going forward, expenditures from these lines will come out of the Conservation Fund.

Chairman Clemens explained that it is reasonable for some management items to come out of the Conservation Fund. If there are other special initiatives, the Commission can request a warrant article or go to the Board of Selectmen to discuss them further.

In response to a question from Wes Robertson, the Commission discussed that the LUCT funds are unpredictable. Some months the Commission receives money, other months the Commission receives no funds at all.

Wes Robertson stated that he believes anything that is a reoccurring cost to the Commission should be reflected in the annual budget, but other things, like land acquisitions, should come out of the Conservation Fund. He explained that mowing is kind of predictable and so should maybe come out of the general fund, in order to stay transparent to the public.

John Harvey stated that the financial strategy agreed upon by the Commission years ago was that flora, fauna, and habitat items will come out of the Conservation Fund. This was agreed on with the Board of Selectmen last year.

John Harvey noted that he would like to make sure that NHACC conference fees and dues are included in the budget. He also hopes for the Commission to run another workshop or two this year, and those could cost about \$500 each.

Mike Cohen agreed that he would like for the Commission to hold other workshops, due to the success of the grasslands workshop. He also expressed interest in growing and upgrading the Commission's website in order to make all of the ACC materials consistent. He would also like to use Facebook to continue to educate the community.

Chairman Clemens stated that most of the help needed for these items should be in the budget. The Commission will lean on the Community Development Office and Simon Corson, Planner, for support. He has concern with the Commission's ability to spend all of the money that's budgeted.

Bill Stoughton reminded the Commission that the increases to the budget are defensible if they keep the mindset that these items are either administrative or ones that give direct benefits to the town.

Bill Widmer moved to approve the 2021 proposed budget, as presented. John Harvey seconded. All in favor.

5. Planning & Permits

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Rich Hart stated that the Jacobson property application was not heard at the last meeting. The application will be submitted and reheard. The Planning Board will have a work session on the Master Plan on September 18th, and a hearing for the Brook Road application on October 2nd.

Chairman Clemens stated that the Woodlands proposal (Brook Road) requested a continuance before the last Planning Board meeting, in part due to the comments from the ACC. John Walsh, the developer for the project, has asked to have a discussion with the ACC at their next meeting on October 11th.

Town Administrator Shankle stated that future hearings for the Jacobson property will be scheduled at the High School due to increased public interest. All other development hearings will be had at the Town Hall, unless a crowding problem arises.

Peter Lyon stated that the Master Plan work session on the 18th will include preliminary discussion on how to approach the Plan.

TOPICS:

6. Public Education and Outreach

Mike Cohen debriefed the Commission on the Old Home Day festival. John Harvey stated that the new trail brochure went over very well with the public. Mike Cohen thanked Kristan Patenaude for her work organizing and creating the brochure.

Mike Cohen stated that the new trails guide is just the first step. Eventually he would like for there to be a guide that gives a detailed description of walking on the trails. There were about 150 brochures distributed during Old Home Day.

Will Ludt, Chair of the Heritage Commission, stated that he believes the hike hosted by him and Jared Hardner went well. The two hikers who attended were interested in the topics presented.

Chairman Clemens suggested the Commission might look into starting up the monthly/bimonthly hikes again. At Old Home Day, people reported at the animal sightings project to seeing four moose, eight coyotes, eight fisher cats, twelve bobcats, and twenty-six bear. There were pushpins representing these animals spread out all over town, including in the Village.

Bill Widmer stated that the tree identification activity went over well. Approximately fifty cards were taken and filled out by participants. The award for the activity was a wildflower seed recycled paper leaf, and candy. Kids were interested, but many adults participated too.

Will Ludt suggested that the ACC might look into doing a workshop for a compass course, orienteering, or cell phone mapping.

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Mike Cohen stated that he has received feedback on the educational posters from the Commissioners. He will take this feedback and use it to build new posters. He hopes the ACC can use these posters or put them up around town on a monthly/bimonthly basis.

The Commission discussed the work plan worksheet. Commissioners should jot down any activities they complete that fall under any of the three large Education & Outreach categories.

Bill Widmer stated that there is an environmental class at Souhegan High School that is looking for presenters from the community to talk to the students on different environmental topics. This would be a great way to introduce younger, future citizens to the ACC's work.

7. Other Business

Will Ludt stated that there was supposed to be a trail day on September 14th at 10am to layout a trail spur from the Josiah Parker trail to the corn crib. This will be postponed until October.

Rob Clemens stated that he was contacted by someone wanting to donate a 62 gallon trash bin for use at the Boston Post Road canoe port. The only issue would be that someone would have to collect and dispose of the trash. The Commission agreed to add signage regarding carry in/out at the canoe port in hopes of deterring littering there.

John Harvey stated that Matt Tarr, UNH Extension, and Ethan Belair, previous Country Forester, suggested that the meadows in town be mowed less often, every other year or every 3-4 years. They should also be mowed in stripes to create habitat division. He thanked Keith at the Recreation Department for mowing the trail perimeters all summer long.

The Commission reviewed the mowing schedule. John Harvey explained that Upper Bragdon will be mowed. Part of Joppa Farm was mowed and another patch will be mowed next year. The Great Woods meadow, by definition, is the only grassland in town, so he decided not to mow it at this time, but spot treat it for invasives. Mr. Harvey stated that the mowing budget was overrun by about \$1,078.

Chairman Clemens stated that the Grater property acquisition is complete.

John Harvey suggested creating permits for CSA's on town land, cutting wood on town land, or deer stands on town land. Chairman Clemens stated that many of these items would be flagged under the ACC's monitoring program. It appears, at this time, that the Board of Selectmen is going to be reviewing encroachments on a case-by-case basis. Thus, permitting seems to run counter to this decision.

Town Administrator Shankle agreed that permitting would lead to an enforcement issue, as someone would need to watch all of the permits and the activities associated with them. He requested that the Town be notified as to where the deer stand on town land is, as it will be removed.

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Rob Clemens stated that he was approached by Daryl D'Angelo regarding how to get more volunteer support for the trail steward, or other ACC projects. The Commission discussed their interest in a more aggressive volunteer recruitment process. Mike Cohen stated that the person to manage the volunteers would need to have interest within the context of the ACC's priorities. Chairman Clemens stated that Ms. D'Angelo is personally passionate about this topic and would be able to energize people to volunteer. He thinks the idea is a good one, as long as the Commissioners will be guiding and directing the process.

**Rob Clemens moved to accept a monitoring report and an update to the property spreadsheet from Bill Stoughton into the DropBox. Bill Widmer seconded.
All in favor.**

**Rob Clemens moved to accept a document regarding non-forest habitat steward duties from John Harvey into the DropBox. Vick Bennison seconded.
All in favor.**

8. Round Table

Wes Robertson stated that the Gowing Woods Board agreed to a proposed reroute on a steep section of the Bicentennial Trail. Also, the Eagle Scout project on the south end of the Highland Trail is effectively finished.

John Harvey stated that the Bike/Pedestrian Commission will be presenting their proposed plan to the public on the 19th. Chris Buchanan, their Chair, will present their ideas to the ACC shortly, as it relates to any trails in town. The NHACC conference will be held November 2nd in Pembroke. He encouraged Commissioners to attend.

Chairman Clemens stated that the Staples property has hit the market at \$470,000. The ACC's appraisal of the property came in at \$99,900.

Rich Hart stated that the Lindabury Orchard Cider Festival will be held on September 28th and they are looking for volunteers to help.

**Vick Bennison moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:13 pm. Bill Widmer seconded.
All in favor.**

Respectfully submitted,
Kristan Patenaude

Minutes approved as amended: November 13, 2019