

TOWN OF AMHERST  
Conservation Commission

March 25, 2020

**APPROVED**

In attendance via Zoom: Rob Clemens – Chair, Jared Hardner – Vice Chair, Bill Widmer – Treasurer (alternate), John Harvey, Vick Bennison, Lee Gilman, Frank Montesanto, Rich Hart, Peter Lyon – BOS Ex-Officio, Bill Stoughton (Alternate), and Mike Cohen (alternate).  
Staff present: Dean Shankle – Town Administrator; Craig Fraley – Recreation Director; and Kristan Patenaude – minute taker.

Public present via Zoom: Ken Clinton, LLS, Meridian Land Services, LLC.

Chairman Rob Clemens called the online meeting to order at 7:04 pm.

**ADMINISTRATIVE:**

**1. Chair Comments**

Rob Clemens thanked the group for working together to meet in this manner.

**2. Farmhouse Marketplace CUP Application**

Bill Stoughton explained that this CUP application is due to some items regarding the wetlands and wetland buffers on the property. He has prepared a possible draft response letter from the ACC to the Planning Board. This response includes three sections: 1) the requirements of the wetlands ordinance and the exceptions that this CUP would seek to fall under, 2) the ACC's review of the application, 3) three recommended conditions [1. That the applicant provide means to direct runoff from parking lots and facilities away from the wetland located to the rear of the property (as the applicant has proposed), 2. That the applicant, the town, and the state reach mutual agreement on the terms of the proposed conservation easement, 3. That the applicant allows public access to the proposed conservation easement area, at a minimum from the adjacent town-owned Bragdon Farm conservation land.]

Ken Clinton, Meridian Land Services, stated that the letter is thorough and that the three conditions can be agreed on, with the exception of #3, without first speaking to the owner. He cannot be sure that the owner will be okay with allowing additional access. At a minimum, access will be allowed to the public through the Bragdon property, because it is directly adjacent and on the same property line.

In response to a question from Mike Cohen, Bill Stoughton explained that any trails on the property would probably be from the Bragdon property, thus creating a natural access point.

Chairman Clemens agreed that, if the owner wants to add additional access points, it will be up to them.

*Wes Robertson entered the meeting.*

In response to a question from Frank Montesanto, Ken Clinton stated that the additional parking created on this lot should eliminate the need for LaBelle employees to utilize the Bragdon parking lot as an overflow parking space.

March 25, 2020

**APPROVED**

**Jared Hardner moved for the Amherst Conservation Commission to send the comments expressed in the proposed letter to the Planning Board, and for the Chairman to sign the letter on behalf of the Commission. Frank Montesanto seconded.**

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

### **3. Buck Meadow Update**

Jared Hardner explained that the second public hearing on the Buck Meadow property occurred as part of the Board of Selectmen meeting on Monday night. The Board of Selectmen will vote on this acquisition next Monday. All indications are that the Board is supportive. All items on the due diligence list are complete. The final touches are being put on the operating agreement and the deed.

Jared Hardner explained that Selectmen Tom Grella brought up some concerns regarding access to the property via Route 101A. There is a possibility to make an access point from Stearns Road, but this is not the current plan because the existing access point has available parking and the ability to expand, if needed.

John Harvey proposed that any signage to turn into the property be quite prominent.

Chairman Clemens stated that he and Craig Fraley met previously with Ken Clinton to discuss parking lots and access areas. There are some constraints regarding the current access point and an egress spot. Stearns Road lends itself to becoming an access point, if needed. One of the selling points of this property was the easy access point off Route 101A, with an existing parking lot located close to the clubhouse. The completed engineering study shows that the existing access point can be utilized, with the option to use Stearns Road as a backup access point in the future. He stated that the signage on Route 101A will need to be addressed.

Peter Lyon suggested that the ACC send this item to the Highway Safety Committee for their opinion.

Ken Clinton stated that there are some concerns regarding having a single access point off Route 101A. There is a concern for vehicle stacking and a volume of traffic exiting onto Route 101A. Stearns Road came up as a secondary option for the future. The current access point is good enough and, as the need is further studied, a secondary access point could become a viable option.

John Harvey noted that an access point from Stearns Road onto the property would cut right through the wildlife preserve.

TOWN OF AMHERST  
Conservation Commission

March 25, 2020

**APPROVED**

Chairman Clemens stated that the property ran as a golf course for a number of years with steady access to it. The increased traffic impact will be studied into the future.

Jared Hardner stated that a small parking area, for 2-3 cars, could be placed off Stearns Road, but anything larger than that would go against what has been presented to the public for this project.

**Jared Hardner moved for the Amherst Conservation Commission to give its formal approval of and to release the funds necessary for the Conservation Commission's part of the Buck Meadow property acquisition, \$375,000 and closing costs (not to exceed \$15,000), from the Conservation Fund. John Harvey seconded.**

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

Chairman Clemens explained that the closing costs were initially going to be split 65/35 between the ACC and the Recreation Department. It has since been decided that the ACC will cover the total cost, thought to be around \$5,000.

**Jared Hardner moved to approve the Operating Agreement, understanding that there may be changes in the final version, including: Amherst Conservation Commission paying for all of the closing costs, and other possible additional refinements from Attorney Tom Quinn made before finalization. Vick Bennison seconded.**

**Discussion:**

John Harvey stated that the Garden Club has agreed to help the ACC find volunteers interested in helping with plantings, pollinator gardens, or similar items on the property.

In response to a question from Mike Cohen, Chairman Clemens stated that the ACC has a responsibility to uphold the underlying groundwater quality. Any plowing, or snow removal on the site will have to follow town guidelines. The access road is dirt, so it will not have a salt treatment applied to it in the winter.

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

**Jared Hardner moved to authorize Rob Clemens to sign the Operating Agreement on behalf of the Conservation Commission. Vick Bennison seconded.**

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

March 25, 2020

APPROVED

**Jared Hardner moved to authorize Rob Clemens to sign the deed on behalf of the Conservation Commission. John Harvey seconded.  
Jared Hardner retracted his previous motion.**

**Jared Hardner moved to authorize Rob Clemens to act as the agent of the Conservation Commission and take all actions appropriate, convenient, or necessary for closing the purchase of Tax Lot/Map 2-98-33, 30 NH Route 101A, situated in the town of Amherst. Vick Bennison seconded.**

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

Rob Clemens stated that he and Craig Fraley will walk through the property with the realtor on Monday at 2pm. If the Board of Selectmen vote is favorable, the deal should close at the end of day on March 31<sup>st</sup>.

#### **4. Other Business**

**Vick Bennison moved to be authorized to spend an amount, not to exceed \$250.00, for the purchase of 10 trail signs and 4 “You Are Here” maps from the Water Crossing Repair and Maintenance line item. Jared Hardner seconded.**

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

Mike Cohen explained that the ACC’s current Trail Guide doesn’t include one large encompassing trail system map. NRPC has helped to produce one for the ACC that could be printed out separately and included as an insert into the Trail Guide. He also explained that he is working on standardizing the ACC’s educational signs with Kristan Patenaude. There is the possibility of having another ACC banner printed that includes the group’s tag line. The total for all of this printing comes to approximately \$1,450.00.

Chairman Clemens stated that Clean Up Day will not be able to happen on April 18, 2020. He’s not sure that the Buck Meadow Earth Day Celebration will be able to happen on April 25, 2020, either. These items will need to be postponed to some degree. He suggested that Mike Cohen get some detailed pricing information and examples for the next ACC meeting.

**Frank Montesanto moved to expend up to \$2,200 out of the Water Crossing Repair and Maintenance line item for bridge materials. John Harvey seconded.**

#### **Discussion:**

Bill Widmer explained that the ACC currently has about a \$1,500 overage in the Salary line item. There is enough money left in other line items to cover this.

March 25, 2020

**APPROVED**

In response to a question from Chairman Clemens, Frank Montesanto explained that the bridge locations are: 2 in Lindabury Orchard, 2 in Pond Parish, 3 in Joppa Hill, 2 on the Bobtail Trail, 1 on BH, 2 in the Purtell area, and 1 in Caesar's Brook.

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

Frank Montesanto discussed the new kiosk for Buck Meadow. He suggested the group look into an upgrade from their regular kiosk for this area. This larger kiosk would have a bulletin board section and an area for maps, etc.

In response to a question from Vick Bennison, Chairman Clemens explained that, in the Operating Agreement, the ACC is responsible for all signage, etc., on the Buck Meadow property. The two groups will work together jointly for any items at the entrance.

John Harvey stated that spot treatment of invasives is needed in a few places throughout town. An example is common buckthorn on the Cemetery Fields/Forestview Cemetery property. A solution is to cut and control the invasives by covering the plants with a black plastic for Year 1. In Year 2, the plastic can be reused for newly identified plants. If this is applied in the spring, the invasives should be dead by mid-July. This has a 100% kill rate and needs no chemicals or uprooting of plants. The cost is about \$1.25 per cover and approximately 20-25 covers are needed. There is an anonymous donor for this project. He would like to go before the Forestview Cemetery Trustees to get their permission.

Lee Gilman stated that, depending on the species, the invasives might be able to lift the cover off and it should be weighted.

Chairman Clemens agreed for John Harvey to go before the Forestview Cemetery Trustees to seek their permission.

Chairman Clemens stated that Will Ludt, Chairman of the Heritage Commission, is looking to do a trail day on the corn crib trail on Saturday. He and a couple of members of the Heritage Commission will be meeting at 10am and doing the trail work while being socially distant.

## **5. Roundtable**

Vick Bennison suggested that Mike Cohen look into printing some of the educational items on the same PVC material currently being used for the trail signs.

The group agreed to discuss mowing and cutting at the next ACC meeting.

Wes Robertson stated that the February Gowen Woods HOA meeting discussed requesting signage, similar to that used on the Bicentennial Trail, stating that the trail there crosses private property and to discourage users from exiting the trail in that area. These could be placed in 4-6

TOWN OF AMHERST  
Conservation Commission

March 25, 2020

**APPROVED**

219 spots along the trail and cost about \$20.00 each. Chairman Clemens requested that actual pricing  
220 for this be brought to the next meeting.

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222 Town Administrator Shankle thanked the ACC for all of their work on the Buck Meadow  
223 acquisition. Jared Hardner thanked Town Administrator Shankle for his help in facilitating the  
224 project.

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226 **Jared Hardner moved to adjourn the meeting at 8:48pm. John Harvey seconded.**

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228 **By roll call: Jared Hardner – aye; Frank Montesanto – aye; Vick Bennison – aye;**  
229 **John Harvey – aye; Rich Hart – aye; Lee Gilman – aye; Rob Clemens – aye. Motion**  
230 **carried unanimously.**

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240 Respectfully submitted,

241 Kristan Patenaude

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243 Minutes approved: April 8, 2020