

April 22, 2020

APPROVED

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

5
6 Public present via Zoom: Ken Clinton, Meridian Land Services, LLC.

7
8 Chairman Rob Clemens called the online meeting to order at 7:02 pm.

9
10 ADMINISTRATIVE:

11
12 **1. Chair Comments**

13 Rob Clemens announced that today is the 50th anniversary of Earth Day. He also congratulated
14 Bill Stoughton on his nomination to the Planning Board as a representative from the ACC.

15
16 **2. Minutes (4/8)**

17 **John Harvey moved to approve the meeting minutes of April 8, 2020, as amended [to**
18 **remove lines 114-117; and to change all references to “Greater Woods/Road” to “Grater**
19 **Woods/Road.”] Vick Bennison seconded.**

20 **Roll call vote: Rob Clemens – aye; John Harvey – aye; Jared Hardner – abstained;**
21 **Vick Bennison – aye; Frank Montesanto – abstained. 3-0-2; motion carried.**

22
23 *Mike Cohen sat for Lee Gilman.*

24
25 *Rich Hart entered the meeting.*

26
27 **3. Buck Meadow Update**

28 Rob Clemens explained that the ACC and Recreation Department are looking into a proposal
29 with Meridian Land Services for a more intensive evaluation of the parking and access to the
30 Buck Meadow property. The suggestion is that the ACC will pay for 2/3 of this evaluation, and
31 the Rec Department will pay for 1/3 of it.

32
33 In response to a question from Frank Montesanto, Ken Clinton of Meridian Land Services, stated
34 that the recreational uses on the property will be more intensive than those of the ACC. He
35 suggested that, because of this, the evaluation costs might be better split up as 2/3 by the
36 Recreation Department and 1/3 by the ACC.

37
38 In response to a question from Mike Cohen, Ken Clinton explained that the current parking area
39 at the golf course is oval shaped, gravel, and dysfunctional. Meridian Land Services plans to
40 evaluate the absolute minimum improvements that need to be made in order to begin dual use of
41 the access and parking lot areas by the ACC and Rec Department. The company will then look at
42 adding additional functionality with small improvements. Finally, the company will review what
43 the maximum usage of the property will be and what will truly be needed to utilize that.

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44 Rob Clemens stated that the property needs to have a safe and usable access point off Route
45 101A. He believes small improvements to this are necessary regardless of the amount of usage
46 the property will get during the soccer/sport season. He explained that the ACC is also sensitive
47 to the Board of Selectmen concerns regarding a secondary access point off Stearns Road. Both
48 the ACC and Rec Department have an interest in this secondary access point for questions
49 regarding parking capacity, access to the property, and another point of egress.

50
51 Ken Clinton suggested as a consideration that the groups could approach the Buck Meadow
52 condominiums to ask for access to an alternate emergency access point through their property,
53 out to Veterans Road. This is currently the only access point for the condominiums. For an
54 immediate solution, the groups could use that as a secondary egress point, and the condominiums
55 could use the Buck Meadow property as an egress point. He believes that an access point off
56 Stearns Road will eventually be needed.

57
58 Jared Hardner explained that, in terms of splitting the cost, the ACC currently has the funds to
59 front the higher end of the cost sharing split, while the Rec Department does not. Also, the Rec
60 Department will be picking up the long term costs of managing the Buck Meadow property,
61 making its cost burden much larger than the ACCs.

62
63 **Rob Clemens moved for Meridian Land Services to undertake the work, as**
64 **described, with the Recreation Department and ACC, as a way to get access**
65 **concepts on paper and evaluate options. Jared Hardner seconded.**

66
67 **Discussion:**
68 In response to a question from Mike Cohen, Ken Clinton stated that the estimate for this
69 evaluation is not to exceed \$2,400.

70
71 **Rob Clemens amended his previous motion; to accept Meridian Land Service's**
72 **proposal to evaluate the access, parking, and usage for both the Recreation**
73 **Department and ACC at the Buck Meadow property, not to exceed \$2,400, with 1/3**
74 **of the cost coming from Recreation Department funds, and 2/3 of the cost coming**
75 **the Conservation Fund. Jared Hardner seconded.**

76 **Roll call vote: Rob Clemens – aye; John Harvey – aye; Vick Bennison – aye; Jared**
77 **Hardner – aye; Frank Montesanto – aye; and Mike Cohen; aye. Motion carried**
78 **unanimously.**

79
80 In response to a question from Ken Clinton, Rob Clemens stated that the ACC will be in contact
81 with him in early May to begin this evaluation process.

82
83 Jared Hardner explained that he walked the property with John Harvey and Rob Clemens. A
84 rough layout of the trail around the perimeter of the property was examined. There could also be
85 a short trail loop out to the pond and back that will give an option for access to those on the
86 lower playing fields, and also a shorter, flatter walk for those interested.

87

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88 In response to a question from Mike Cohen, Jared Hardner stated that the trail is approximately 1
89 mile long in total. The trail will extend past various habitat types and give access to the
90 condominium owners, if they so choose. This will be further discussed with the advisory group.

91
92 Rob Clemens explained that the group has also discussed an access trail over to Parkhurst Place.

93
94 The group discussed some areas on the property that could hold pollinator gardens. Mike Cohen
95 suggested educational signage in these areas to describe what the gardens are and why they are
96 important.

97
98 In response to a question from Bill Stoughton, John Harvey stated that there haven't yet been
99 turtles observed in the ponds on the property yet, but that there are primary shallow wetland
100 habitats for turtles nearby. NH Fish & Game will be going back to the property to make more
101 observations soon.

102
103 Rob Clemens stated that there was an article about the acquisition in the Citizen and Union
104 Leader newspapers. Vick Bennison also shared these articles on Facebook, where there seemed
105 to be a lot of support and positive responses.

106
107 Rob Clemens explained that the advisory group will have an initial meeting tomorrow. This
108 group includes himself, Craig Fraley (Recreation Department Director), 3-4 members of the
109 Buck Meadow condominiums, Danielle Pray (the largest land owners on the Stearns Road side
110 of the property), Paul Spiess (Chair of the Parkhurst condo board), and Selectman Reed Panasiti.
111 The group will discuss the proposed trails, the property usage, and where different interests and
112 concerns lie.

113
114 Rob Clemens explained that the property's parking lot is currently still closed and that the Police
115 Department continues to monitor it. The property will remain closed until guidelines that are
116 consistent with Recreation Department guidelines are available.

117
118 **Jared Hardner moved to allow Frank Montesanto to enter documents into the**
119 **Dropbox. John Harvey seconded.**
120 **Motion carried unanimously.**

121
122 **4. Trails Update**

123 **a. Closures, conditions, and use**

124 Rob Clemens explained that the ACC previously agreed to close the parking lots for Grater
125 Woods, Betty Arnold, Haseltine, and the roadsides around them. The DPW temporarily put out
126 'No Parking' signs and taped off the areas. There was some pushback from the community, but
127 most seemed supportive and stayed in compliance. He explained that he made the decision on
128 Monday to continue these lot closures through the end of the month. The trails are not closed,
129 only access to the parking areas.

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131 John Harvey stated that the ACC should note at the closures that this is due to Governor's orders.
132 The ACC should also note on Facebook that all trails are open.
133

134 Bill Widmer stated that he had sent around an email to the group explaining that normal usage of
135 the parking lots does not seem to be enough vectors to spread COVID-19. He didn't, however,
136 realize that there were things like bike gatherings and tailgating going on in some of the lots. He
137 believes these issues could be policed, instead of closing the lots all together.
138

139 Jared Hardner stated that there is anecdotal evidence showing that there are larger than normal
140 numbers of people out on Amherst's trails right now. This makes sense, as many of the
141 surrounding towns have closed their trails, causing a flood of people to the places that are still
142 open. He explained that this seems to be a temporary situation. There is also the issue of wet
143 trails, and a heavier load of people possibly causing additional damage in these areas. If the trails
144 were dry, the additional people might be okay, but the wet trails can't handle hundreds of
145 additional people on them.
146

147 Jared Hardner stated that permanent 'No Parking' signs are needed along the road at the Grater
148 Woods and Austin Road parking lots. The neighbors have complained about this issue for years.
149 All of the trails in these areas will remain open and accessible.
150

151 Jared Harder noted that he is discouraged by the lack of personal discretion being exhibited by
152 some of those visiting these lots and ignoring the signage. He explained that the Horse Hill trails
153 are closed due to wetness, but the parking lot there is actually owned by the town of Merrimack.
154 The town has not closed the lot and people continue to use the trails, even though they are
155 closed.
156

157 In response to a question from Rob Clemens, Peter Lyon stated that the Police Department can
158 only enforce things backed by a law/ordinance/rule, not simply at their discretion. There is no
159 ordinance regarding parking at these areas. The signs will help to discourage people but there is
160 no further enforcement to take at this time. If the ACC closes these lots, the Police may be better
161 able to enforce parking issues under ACC authority.
162

163 Mike Cohen stated that these lots seem to have much less usage on weekdays. He also noted that
164 there didn't seem to be any clarity on the closure signs that all of the trails were still accessible.
165

166 *Lee Gilman entered.*
167

168 Jared Hardner explained that he would like to let local residents know that the trails are still
169 open, but to discourage out of state visitors from using town trails.
170

171 Rob Clemens stated that the next step will be to get at least Grater Road permanently signed with
172 'No Parking' signs along the road. Peter Lyon agreed that, at least for this area, there seems to be
173 the need for an ordinance. This will need to happen through a public hearing process with the
174 Board of Selectmen.

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175 Jared Hardner noted that the Haseltine lot does not seem to be an issue, as much as Betty Arnold
176 and Grater Road.

177

178 Frank Montesanto agreed that the ACC has a responsibility to keep the parking lots closed for
179 right now and to let residents know that the trails are still open.

180

181 Jared Hardner noted that there has been an outpouring of support from the cycling community
182 online. The locals seem to want to protect this resource.

183

184 The group discussed the different ways to get the word out about these closures, why they are
185 happening, and to let residents know that the trails are still open.

186

187 Rob Clemens stated that he will repost his informational post on Facebook and clarify that the
188 trails are still open to Amherst residents. He will also include information about carry in/out all
189 materials, including used gloves that some people have been using in response to the COVID-19
190 pandemic while touching items out in public but not necessarily disposing of properly.

191

192 **Rob Clemens moved to continue the closure of the Grater Woods and Austin Road**
193 **parking lots, until such time as the state and local guidelines regarding COVID-19**
194 **gatherings changes. Vick Bennison seconded.**

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

198

199 Frank Montesanto noted that the sign from the upper Haseltine parking was unfortunately
200 removed by someone.

201

202 **b. Pulpit Brook bridges**

203 Frank Montesanto explained that, if the group decides to proceed with an elevated walkway in
204 this area, it should wait until the water recedes.

205

206 In response to a question from Rob Clemens, Frank Montesanto explained that the issue in this
207 area is due to beavers.

208

209 Rob Clemens stated that there is also an issue with the beaver deceiver near Little Baboosic
210 Lake. He sent a message to the person in Vermont who originally put in the beaver deceiver to
211 see if there are any repairs or enhancements that can be made. It may also be worth it eventually
212 to speak with Fish & Game regarding employing a trapper to deal with the beavers.

213

214 **c. Rocky & Bullwinkle**

215 Jared Hardner explained that there are now four new bridges on the Highland Trail and one new
216 one on the Harding Trail. The Bullwinkle Trail was completed; it is about 0.5 miles long. Next,
217 the Rocky Trail was completed; it is about 0.7 miles long. Both of these new trails provide a loop
218 back to P MEC, so that users do not have to exit onto Brook Road. He also explained that the

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219 Bobtail Trail has two new reroutes and two new 16' bridges. In Haseltine, the Frodo's Ring Trail
220 has a new reroute, and the Legolas Trail has a new 24' bridge. In the Bicentennial area, the
221 Humpty Dumpty Trail has a new 32' bridge, with lumber donated by NEMBA (New England
222 Mountain Bike Association). There was also draining work and reroutes done in this area. He
223 continued that the private property owner near Caesar's Brook has agreed to a trail agreement
224 that will allow for a dry exit from the trail onto the nearby class 6 road. This will also allow for
225 entry onto six other ACC properties.

226

227 Jared Hardner suggested that the ACC consider: the fate of the Highland Trail exit onto Brook
228 Road, the design of You Are Here maps for Joe English, the updating of the maps in
229 Bicentennial South, building the exit from Caesar's Brook and seeking approval for the new
230 Wilkins easement, and updating the UNH online trail app "TrailFinder."

231

232 **d. Mobility assistance**

233 Bill Stoughton explained that there is at least one trail on the Buck Meadow property that could
234 be made accessible, including to personal mobility devices. He reviewed the requirements for
235 these types of trails, including: being a minimum of 36" wide, being on a firm and stable surface,
236 and having a maximum slope of 1:20, or steeper is okay with periodic resting areas along the
237 way.

238

239 Jared Hardner stated that the Buck Meadow trail has an advantage to be this sort of trail because
240 it contains no bridges or structures. There is also no limit as to how wide the trail can be. The
241 issue may be the requirement of a firm and stable surface, as parts of this area are wet and
242 spongy.

243

244 John Harvey stated that there are four greens and tee boxes to remove in order to get the
245 necessary slope.

246

247 Bill Stoughton explained that the trail could be listed as closed/not accessible if it is wet and
248 spongy. He reviewed the Town of Mason's policy on personal mobility device use.

249

250 Town Administrator Shankle noted that there is a state office, NH Governor's Commission on
251 Disability, which gives advice on these types of matters.

252

253 Rob Clemens stated that Buck Meadow appears to be an ideal place for this type of trail. He
254 suggested that the group reach out for guidance in order to move forward. He also suggested that
255 the short loop trail out to the pond could possibly be made compliant.

256

257 John Harvey noted that the Purtell trails are nominally open at this time. There is still some work
258 to be done, and thus the trails are not being announced as open to the public yet. He explained
259 that the trail needs a name. The Trail Standards mention not breaching stone walls, so as to try to
260 leave the wall as originally found.

261

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262 Bill Stoughton noted that these trails are also on an easement and thus if any stone walls are
263 going to be destroyed or modified, the ACC would first need permission of the land owner.

264

265 **5. Other Business**

266 Rob Clemens explained that the Planning Board will likely try to focus on new possible
267 ordinances, now that the IIHO has been removed. The ACC should begin to think about what
268 changes it might like to see in regard to any of these possible changes. He, Rich Hart, and Bill
269 Stoughton will discuss this topic further.

270

271 Rob Clemens explained that Eric Bazil has submitted another request to the Board of Selectmen,
272 regarding the encroachment on his property on Simeon Wilson Road.

273

274 Rob Clemens stated that he received a letter from DES regarding a notice of deficiency for a
275 property owner on Route 101. The property owner apparently moved too much material and
276 possibly filled in part of a wetland without the proper permits. The land owner must now get the
277 proper engineering and permitting in place.

278

279 Rob Clemens explained that the NH Big Tree program identified the largest pitch pine in
280 Hillsborough County as one in Meadowview Cemetery. He will provide the certificate to the
281 DPW, as they manage the property.

282

283 John Harvey explained that a Facebook survey created by Kristan Patenaude for those interested
284 in more information from the ACC has gathered the names of people in town who are also
285 interested in possible volunteer opportunities. He asked the group to review a letter that could be
286 sent to these people in the hopes of gathering volunteers to help with some of the ACC's work.

287

288 Rich Hart stated that there should be a decision made regarding the town's annual 4th of July
289 celebrations soon. He suggested the ACC think about having their own float in the parade, if it
290 happens, this year.

291

292 Mike Cohen thanked Kristan Patenaude for her work educating the public around Earth Day
293 through Facebook.

294

295 Lee Gilman stated that there is an Intent to Cut filed for a property on Aglipay Drive.

296

297 Rob Clemens explained that he and Rich Hart are members of the Souhegan River Advisory
298 Committee. Last week there was an Intent to Cut granted for a strip of trees abutting the
299 Souhegan River. The Town of Milford approved the request, but the owner essentially ended up
300 clearcutting along with edge of the river. This violated some of the best management practices
301 and thus the group will be filing with the state. He recommended the ACC continue to look
302 closely at all Intent To Cut requests they receive.

303

304 **Jared Hardner moved to adjourn the meeting at 9:30pm. Vick Bennison seconded.**
305 **Motion carried unanimously.**

TOWN OF AMHERST
Conservation Commission

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306

307

308

309

310

311 Respectfully submitted,

312 Kristan Patenaude

313

314 Minutes approved: June 10, 2020