

**Town of Amherst
Conservation Commission Meeting
Wednesday, June 14th, 2017
7:00pm**

Attendance: R. Clemens-Chair, J. Harvey, V. Benson, B. Widmer, R. Hart, J. Hardner, F. Montesanto, P. Lyon Selectman Representative

Staff: Planner S. Corson

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

Rob begins with Chair comments. He thanked the Commission for their hard work. He highlighted Frank as a good example of doing putting in significant hours of work for the benefit of the Commission. Rob acknowledged Simon for doing a nice job with minutes.

Rob asked Bill Widmer to sit for Lee Gilman in his absence. Bill obliges.

Rob discusses the May 24th minutes by mentioning they were edited to include Lee Gilman's changes. There was some quick discussion. John moves to accept the May 24 minutes as edited. Vic seconds. All in favor. Motion passes.

John begins his treasurer report. He notes that since the Commission does not have to pay a recorder when Simon is taking minutes. The ACC has about 900 dollars to spend. Peter asked John if the Commission has any open invoices. Bill queried if the money might go towards invasive plant management. Peter noted that if the money cannot be spent before the end of the month, the ACC needs to contact Town Administrator Jim O'Mara to encumber the funds.

John discussed the Town budget, reminding the Commission that the new fiscal year starts on July 1st.

Rob asked John about if the ACC ever paid the landscaping company, Blazing Grass. There was some discussion about whether or not the company were paid.

Rich is asked to provide an update about any recent Planning Board cases. Rich said he did not attend the last Planning Board meeting, but knows that nothing of Conservation interest happened.

Rob asked Jared Hardner to sit for Wes Robertson at 7:12 pm. Jared obliges.

Rob asked Jared to update the Commission on the Conservation Management Plan. Jared shared his thoughts on formulating overarching framing principles that will dictate the goals of the Conservation Management Plan. Jared also stressed the importance of moving ahead with updating the town forest management plan, and developing management plans for invasive species and grasslands management.

There was some conversation about the overarching principles of this plan. Rob asked if the Commission needs a new 30,000 ft. view or if the prior plans have outlined the Commission goals sufficiently. Several Commissions shared their opinions on the matter.

Jared commented that managing recreation and managing wildlife come with different approaches. For example, managing forests for wildlife will likely include doing aggressive cutting. Jared stated that if the Commission were to undertake 5 acre cuts, for example, people recreating may become alarmed and upset; thus this approach must come with equally-aggressive outreach and education about how the Commission's management approach. Alternatively, a management focus on recreation would involve far less active forest management.

Rob asked if this could be an opportunity for a small group to get together and report back to the Commission. Jared responded yes. Jared discussed Bragdon Farm as an opportunity for the next forest management operation, and a good case study for learning more about wildlife management techniques as they relate to forest management. John emphasized that Amherst's Forest Management Plan will be guided for the New Hampshire Wildlife Action Plan. Rich added that the Commission can educate private property owners about forest management as well.

Rob asked that a small group proceed in meeting on this topic before the July 12 ACC meeting. It was decided that the draft Conservation Plan will be presented at the July ACC meeting, and the outputs of the small group meeting on Forest Management be presented in the August ACC meeting.

Simon stressed the importance of understanding the Forest Management efforts taking place at the New Boston Air Force Station. Jared and Simon are pursuing the Air Station's Management Plan. There was general agreement that the Commission should understand what is being done in the Air Station to create wildlife habitat before undertaking projects in Amherst.

Rob asked Frank Montesanto to sit in for Daryl D'Angelo at 7:44pm. Frank obliges. John started discussing the Grasslands Habitat Plan. John noted that he does not anticipate the plan being controversial. He continued stating that the plan will begin with a high-level strategy and propose active management practices for Amherst grassland habits. He provided the Commission with a definition of a grassland and explain the different varieties. By tailoring management practices to baseline species as well as targeting desired species, Amherst can best support their grassland habitats. John stressed the importance of establishing performance indicators so we can understand the effectiveness of the management practices. Large grasslands over 25 acres support different species than small grasslands under 25 acres, although there is some overlap. Amherst should strive for a landscape of mixed mosaic, in other words, different types of grasslands support the largest variety of species. The Commission should provide the type of grasslands present, relevant maps and photos, species possible, baseline species, target species, and performance indicators for each property the ACC manages. John added there are certification programs for private property owners to improve the grasslands on their properties. He said he feels confident that the Commission can collaborate with people who can assist in the recording process. He noted that the recording process will make up the bulk of the work.

Rob asked John if there are large grasslands in Amherst. John responded that there are two or three. Rich asked if hayfields will be considered as grasslands in the Management Plan. John said no, but that hayfields should be discussed.

During the July or August meeting, John wants the Commission to vote to accept the Grasslands Habitat Plan.

Rob asks Frank to give the Commission an update on Lindabury Orchard. Frank showed the Commission that he has the Blazing Grass invoice for 80 dollars and that it has been approved and authorized.

Frank provided an update on Lindabury Orchard including vegetation control, invasive plant management, and the task of figuring who is going to regularly mow the field. Frank reviewed the quote from a man who offered to mow the field using two pieces of equipment. Rich said that the ACC was paid Riccitelli to mow the field in the past. John added the Commission has a 65 dollar an hour standing agreement with Riccitelli. Riccitelli has a contract because he is also part-time Town employee. The contract validates that there will be no conflict of interest.

Frank remembered that the ACC de-obligated money a couple meetings ago. John clarified that action was taken because Department of Public Works agreed to do some close mowing for free.

Rob asked Frank to have Riccitelli provide a quote for mowing on the Lindabury Orchard property.

John moves authorize up to 2,500 dollars for two grass mowings and one poison ivy treatment from the FY18 Town Budget not to be expended until the 1st of July at Lindabury Orchard. Rich seconded. There was some discussion on the motion regarding how the process should take place to get the mowings done as soon as possible. Motion passes unanimously.

Rich said he spoke with Bruce Berry from the Department of Public Works to get the drums out to the Orchard and to the dump. Bruce provided a letter to Rich to allow this task to happen.

There was some discussion about whether Mark would be able to get a crop in sometime this year. Peter added that Mark intended to get a crop in before the end of the year.

Rob postponed the Lee's Invasive Management Proposals presentation as he was not able to attend the meeting.

There was discussion about the Arnold Parcel (8-9). Rob noted that in July, the ACC should proceed by having a public hearing about this acquisition. Arnold would like an easement from Amherst Land Trust.

Rob asks Vic to present on trail maps.

Vic showed the Commission several laminated maps. Jared asked about the outdoor functionality of the lamination. There was some discussion about weatherproofing the maps.

Frank commented that the sign seems to suggest people should not use trashcans. Vic said he could change the graphic as long as it uses a reasonable amount of ink. Vic did an inventory of all maps on ACC property.

Vic shared map that reads “please don’t litter” and the Betty Arnold trail map. These maps cost 7 dollars to laminate. Vic also shared the Joe English Trail map that costs 28 dollars to laminate. Rob complimented Vic on his map creating and lamination efforts.

Frank said he bought some lumber for the Pulpit Bridge. Frank said a conversation with a resident about making tax deductible donation to the Commission. John said he will talk with the Town Finance staff to get the necessary IRS codes to accept a tax-deductible donation.

Jared moves to an expend 430 dollars of lumber for general infrastructure from the FY17 Town Budget. Rob seconded. Rob asked for discussion. There was none. Motion passes unanimously.

The Commission discussed moving large steel beams to build bridges. The advantages and drawbacks of steel and wood material were deliberated. How to get the infrastructure to the site was also discussed. Frank said he emailed Department of Public Works and said his email was forwarded. Peter said Frank might want to talk with Eric Hahn. Frank said he that is email was forward to Eric.

Rob asked if we should authorized some money for Vic to create and laminate more maps; maybe a couple hundred dollars.

Rob moves not to exceed 200 dollars for trash signs and trail map signs at Vic’s discretion from the FY17 Town Budget. Frank seconded. Motion passes unanimously.

Rob leading Trail of the Month at Pond Parish.

Rich and Rob discussed the 4th of July celebration. Rich has created a few posters to illustrate the basic definitions and basic goals of the ACC. Rich said he would like to include some information about forest management, grassland management, and information about the trail steward program. Rich said he will make posters, but is asking Commission members to send him content. Jared asked to keep forest management posters after the 4th of July to put them in kiosks in areas where the ACC has had logging done.

John and a Nashua Regional Planning Commission (NRPC) staff member will map Old Mail Road on June 20th. John noted there is a geometric NRPC mapping error in the northern part of Amherst, if you look on Boston Post Road into Cazares Brook, the conservation boundaries do not work out.

Vic saw some America woodcocks!

Rob said he got a note from Will Ludt to send at maximum two ACC representatives to the Brick School to discuss a town-wide metal detection policy. Bill and Rob plan to attend the event.

Jared stated that the yellow trail in Haseltine will be re-routed this summer. Jared obtained permission from DPW to close the lower Haseltine parking area and to resolve the drainage issue there. This may include some planting to restore the area.

Rob asked for motion to adjourn. John moves. Vic seconded.

Respectfully submitted,
Simon Corson