Conservation Committee Meeting Minutes

7:00 p.m., Tuesday, December 8, 2020

As a result of the COVID-19 virus, the Conservation Committee conducted the meeting via Zoom remote access as provided by Maine law. Zoom allowed all Conservation Committee members and members of the public to hear all discussion and votes, which were taken by roll call, as required by law.

Present:, Jim Tasse, Chair, Matt Craig, Emily Helliesen Day, Christophe-Heijn De Vries, Corinne Ketcham, Bruce Moore, Mitch Wacksman

Maureen O'Meara, Town Planner

1. Public Comment.

 Meredith Beauregard, Cross Hill, would like permission to put holiday lights on trees located on the Cross Hill village green. She has spoken to the Tree Warden, who has no objection and to the Town Manager, who referred her to the Conservation Committee. Power will be provided by a neighbor and the lights will be up for 1-2 months.

 Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Ms. Ketcham to allow the lights and the motion passed 7-0.

2. Minutes. The minutes of the November 10, 2020 meeting were approved 7-0.

3. Greenbelt Maintenance with Chris Thompson. Jim Tasse welcomed Chris Thompson and expressed thanks for his excellent work managing vegetation growth on the trails. Committee members concurred.

 Chris reported that the season went well. It was a dry spring, which was good for the Scott Dyer and Pollack Brook trails. The trails are getting more use with covid. Folks love the new Pollack Brook trail. June was wet, stimulating some growth which he addressed, followed by a dry summer. He has observed people making their own trails, such as at Winnick Woods. He tried to tell folks not to do it, but they did not listen. There is also a new trail behind 513 Spurwink Ave. The town may want to add more trail markers, such as at the Two Lights Trail.

 The committee talked about adding " limit of town property" signs on Spurwink or a new sign that prohibits new trail construction. Ms. O'Meara noted that the newly installed trail head signs specify no trail changes without committee permission? People are also stripping out signage. It was agreed to add more of the G trail marker signs, with arrows as needed. Mr. Wacksman said that signs are not needed at Turtle Pond (north of Great Pond) and Mr. Moore asked about using blazes. Ms. O'Meara described the Conservation Committee policy to use the "G" signs for trail marking and the effort put into "branding." The committee agreed to stick with the G trail signs and install more as needed in the spring.

 Mr. Thompson asked if the frequency of trail maintenance is ok? He trims trails once a month/twice on the wetter trails (i.e. Two Lights Trail).

 Mr. Tasse asked Mr. Thompson to let us know if he notices boardwalk deterioration. In response to a question, Mr. Thompson said he is willing to do some "chainsaw" work on fallen trees in the winter.

4. CIP. The committee reviewed a draft CIP request for funding to replace the highest priority work at Gull Crest, Stonegate, and Winnick Woods/Cross Hill. The estimates are based on current lumber costs and a labor cost of $100/10' of boardwalk for a total of $370/10'. Ms. O'Meara noted that materials costs for the Town Farm boardwalk are included in this fiscal year. If the committee wanted to upgrade that boardwalk to a Great Pond quality, more funding is needed and perhaps should be added to the CIP request.

 The committee questioned the amount totals and discussed the Town Farm boardwalk. There was concensus that the 3 wooden plank boardwalk is appropriate and more aesthetically compatible on the Town Farm trail. The committee would like to lead the volunteer effort to build this boardwalk, and will revisit scheduling of trail work events in the spring.

 The committee amended the CIP request to include $3,000 per property to fund permitting and revised the total to $80,000. Mr. Wacksman made a motion, seconded by Mr. De Vries to send the CIP to the Town Council, which passed 7-0.

5. Greenbelt Implementation/Management Projects

 •Pickle Pond Restocking. Middle school student Lulu Stoecklein and her dad, Teddy Stoecklein (her adult support person), updated the committee on her project on Pickle Pond, located south of Jordan Farm Rd on town owned open space. She reviewed the components of her project, as follows:

•Trim bushes along existing path;

•Plan aquatic plants to discourage algal growth;

•Educate the neighborhood about the impact of phosphorus in lawn fertilizers which promotes algal growth;

•Apply for a fish stocking license

•Install signage at Pickle Pond

Lulu shared her sign design, which will include a picklepond.com link with information to promote pond health.

Mr. Moore asked Lulu if she had done research to identify aquatic plants that are not invasives. The committee noted that cattail growth is encouraged by polluted runoff and will lessen oxygen available for the fish.

Lulu plans to distribute a leaflet to the neighborhood that encourages using phosphorus free fertilizers. Mr. Stoecklein noted that cyanotoxins are also dangerous for pets.

Mr. DeVries asked what fish she would stock? Lulu suggested large mouth bass. Pickerel are in the pond now. Mr. Moore asked about other fish, such as the nordic catfish.

Jim Pellerin, Fisheries Biologist with the Maine Department of Inland Fisheries and Wildlife, attended the meeting and provided expert advice He asked Lulu about the objective of stocking the pond.

Lulu wants to encourage a more biodiverse ecosystem.

Mr. Pellerin explained that there are state rules about fish stocking. She would not be able to purchase anything but trout and they will not survive long in this pond. You could stock fish for "put and take." Stocking should happen in late fall or spring and the pond should be assessed first.

State rules prohibit purchasing warm water fish for stocking and you cannot transport live fish. With the permit, you would have a very limited transport permit that limits the number of fish transported. This pond is a class S13. Blue gill fish are not native, so they would not be allowed. Large mouth bass may not survive.

Lulu estimated the pond depth at 8'. Mr. Pellerin explained that because the pond is shallow, and with oxygen depletion, fish will be subject to winter kill and large mouth bass are susceptible to that. Fish that can survive winter kill include pickerel, and bullhead.

Mr. Tasse asked for advice on aquatic plants.

Mr. Pellerin agreed that cattails are not a good choice as they are aggressive and can accelerate pond succession. You may want to consider emergent or submerged plants, and floating pond weed. Fish stocking is not out, but maybe you need to consider other species. We need water quality sampling and our department may be able to add this to the sampling list for next season. Because this is a town-owned pond, we can do it for free.

Ms. Ketcham wanted to summarize next steps. Mr. Pellerin will work to get the pond sampled next summer (August). That will probably include a basic water quality evaluation, depth survey, netting to find other species.

Mr. Tasse summarized that the project needs a little more research, including the types of fish that will work and field work support from Mr. Pellerin. Mr. DeVries noted that talking to neighbors could have a huge positive impact.

Mr. Moore asked if we will allow Lulu to install the sign. Mr. Tasse supported it with a "coming soon" message. Ms. Day would like the website referenced on the sign set up. Ms. O'Meara reviewed a possible timeline of projects and there was general agreement.

Mr. Tasse thanked Lulu for her interest and asked her to keep the committee informed. We can review outreach letters and perhaps add the town seal.

•Forest Ave trail. Ms. O'Meara introduced the discussion. She was contacted by resident Grant Burgess about a potential trailon his property that would connect to the Forest Ave/Ocean View Rd open space. This area was the subject of a committee project in 2016 when it was selected from the Greenbelt for implementation. Ms. O'Meara sent letters to property owners from Woodland Rd to Oakhurst Rd inquiring about a potential trail. A few property owners responded, not supportive. Further work was suspended as other projects were a higher priority.

Mr. Tasse reported how he met onsite with Mr. Burgess and believes there is potential for a trail connecting to the end of Ocean View Rd. Following committee discussion, next steps are for Ms. O'Meara to contact Mr. Burgess about options and also to contact the property owner on Woodland Rd.

•Dog Park. Mr. Wacksman asked to discuss this option due to issues with dog conflicts, most recently at Gull Crest.

Mr. Moore said that Fort Williams Park is where dogs are off-leash. It is huge now with 10-15 dogs off leash in the middle of the day. Isn't this our dog park?

Ms. Ketcham said that Fort Williams is not fenced in. A dog park can be a great source of problems, town liability and maintenance, where they often turn into dirt pits. We would have to consider a location and Fort Williams is already open. Willard Beach is open.

Public Comment:

Ginger Browne Johnson, Cape Vet Center - She has 3 acres on Ocean House Rd and wants to host dogs recreating on her property. It has challenges and she has approached CELT. She wants to work together to address legalities, public v. private. There are not many true voice control dogs.

Mr. Tasse confirmed she is willing to host it. Ms. Johnson is willing, subject to "creative thinking" about maintenance, control, dog ages.

Mr. Tasse speculated about mechanisms that would include some town management role and asked Ms. O'Meara about the implications. She noted costs and management responsibilities would increase.

Mr. Tasse asked Ms. Johnson why she hasn't done this? She listed finances and if the town would accept it. Paddock type fencing would be needed and the legalities of a private owner hosting a public facility would need to be worked out.

Ms. Day asked if Cape needs a fenced in dog park?

Mr. Craig would want the town to make an intentional plan with a community process.

Ms. Ketchan observed the property is on Route 77, next to Lions Field so off-leash is not compatible. Fencing is expensive.

Mr. Tasse suggested the dog community do some soul searching and the committee can then revisit this at a later date.

Sheila Wellehan, 24 Rocky Hill Rd- She joined the meeting because of the dog park discussion. Some think a dog park is an amenity while others fear losing open space access elsewhere. She supports funding for an animal control officer. Perhaps a dog park committee could raise the funding for the dog park.

•Gull Crest. Mr. Wacksman inquired about grooming the nordic trail in Gull Crest. The town has a snowmobile that needs repairs, then we need a volunteer to use the sled to groom the trails. Ms. O'Meara will follow-up with Public Works on repairs and then try to locate Mr. Wing.

Philip Mathieu, CELT - CELT owns land next to Gull Crest and we could extend the trail to that property, coordinate volunteers and cost for winter grooming.

Mr. Wacksman asked if the new trail goes over the stone wall.

Mr. Mathieu said they could avoid the wall by using the trail closest to Spurwink and maybe widen a few trails. CELT wants to preserve the opportunity for agricultural uses on some fields eventually. The land must be kept open to the public.

Ms. O'Meara contacted the athletic director and the schools do not have nordic teams at this time, but there was committee interest in grooming for general public use.

Mr. Wacksman is willing to try the snowmobile and noted it was sad not to have the grooming last winter. The groomer is at Public Works and we need volunteers to take turns using the snowmobile or it won't happen.

Mr. Tasse questioned the policy when fat bikes use the trail?

Mr. Wacksman said the grooming has been happening for 20 years. We need to fix the snowmobile and then address any fat bike issues.

Mr. Craig is intrigued that CELT wants to expand. There will be map work. There are also 3-4 trees down on the trail loop.

Ms. O'Meara will contact Mr. Wing to see if he is willing to resume grooming and also ask Chris Thompson to clear trees down.

•Spurwink bridge and boardwalk. Brian Alexander will do the work in the spring.

•Dyer Pond. Ms. O'Meara met onsite with Mrs. Klopp, whose property abuts the Dyer Pond Trail located at the end of Dyer Pond Rd. In order to mitigate chronic encroachments on private property by dogs, orange snow fencing will be installed in the locations where dogs enter her property.

•Fat bike grooming. Mr. Wacksman asked if we are going to grant permission for fat bike grooming as we did last year in Winnick Woods? He likes the grooming and supports multi-use trails. The committee discussed granting permission system wide, such as Gull Crest and Cross Hill. Ms. O'Meara said that Canterbury should not be included unless we get permission from the condo association.

Mr. Wacksman made a motion to approve winter grooming on greenbelt trails, except for Canterbury. Mr. Moore seconded and the motion passed 7-0. Mr. Tasse will let NEMBA know.

6. Planning Board review.

 The committee reviewed the materials submitted to the Planning Board for the Magnolia Terrace Private Rd and Resource Protection Permit.

Mr. Craig made a motion to approve the Resource Protection Permit, seconded by Mr. Moore. The motion passed 6-1 (Ketcham).

Ms. O'Meara summarized the fence amendments and Town Farm amendments on the Planning Board agenda.

7. Next meeting. The committee will work on the water body naming project at the next meeting. The meeting adjourned at 9:16 p.m.