Franconia Conservation Commission (FCC) \*\* DRAFT MINUTES \*\*

Meeting: February 16, 2022, 4 pm, Town Hall

Members present: Chris Nicodemus (Chair), Ginny Jeffryes, Mark Ober, Jill Brewer, Mary Grote, Red McCarthy (who left at 4:45), Art Daily

Guests: Rosalind Page of Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust (ACT), Melinda Richmond, Sharon Penney, Peter Grote

Draft minutes of 12-16-21 meeting reviewed. Jill moves to accept the minutes as written. Red seconds. Unanimously approved.

Discussion of tax map parcel 17-3, currently for sale:

[Background from last meeting: parcel on Profile Rd (Rte 18), 4.2 acre parcel abutting Town Forest across Lafayette (Beaver) Brook, and close to Lawrence Family Forest, which directly abuts the Town Forest; just south of Stony Brook Motel. see 12-16-21 minutes.]

Sharon Penney: She’s here as a concerned across-road abutter who sees its conservation value. Parcel went up for sale almost 3 months ago. A great wetlands place, looks unbuildable to her but is being advertised on Zillow as home site w/ septic plan. Rapid real estate sales and development has been happening in our area recently. She watches this parcel being a big part of an active wildlife crossing corridor– she sees bear, moose, heron, beaver, among others there. Town Forest is across the brook from it– being used as a selling/building point on the Zillow website. Would need to fill it for someone to build there and that would disrupt the important habitat. She would like to see it conserved.

Ginny: She researched the parcel tax card, deeds, Town Forest access, acquisition process, and reviewed our Lawrence Family Forest acquisition records. She agrees parcel is important for wildlife, and important to protect for water quality and floodplain protection, as well as being a potential access to Town Forest and Lawrence Family Forest, maybe eventually via a foot bridge. It has 670 feet of Brook frontage per tax map. Deeds show the right-of-way from Rte 18 to the Town Forest brook boundary is through parcel 18-29, just south of the for-sale parcel, though she has been unable to locate on-line info about specifics of the ROW. The Town Forest and ROW dates to the 1930s, from what she recalls from 2015 discussions. Re current parcel: elevated old roadbed-like area off Rte 18 to the brook appears to be pink-flagged within the for-sale parcel. Oddly, the for-sale parcel’s map 17-3 deed that Ginny on Grafton Co deed website still lists the property as 6.7 acres (last update on deed pages is 2019), but it appears it was subdivided at some point into the 2.5 acres now owned by Stony Brook Motel owners, and the 4.2 acres owned and for sale by Fini Realty Trust. Recent couple years of on-line planning board minutes don’t include a hearing on subdividing the 6.7 acre lot, so this needs to be clarified. The family has Franconia history: map 17-3 deed in the early 1980s were also in the Fini name – appears to be have been the parents of current Fini owner, and their names appear in other 40 year old deeds, so perhaps they would be willing to selling it to us for a less inflated price than the $89K it’s listed for. Assessment on tax card is approx $54,000. The tax card agrees it is 4.2 acres, unlike the deed.

Ginny outlines the process for us to purchase: We use our current use Conservation Land Use Fund to buy, if the owner is willing to sell it to us for at or below its appraisal value – we cannot spend more than appraised value from the Fund. The process requires us to pay for an appraisal from the Conservation Land Use Fund, and to have a properly posted public hearing about the acquisition. It’s a slower process for the seller than a private buyer, so the seller needs to be willing to wait. It could take at least a few months, based on what we went through with acquiring the Lawrence Family Forest with ACT’s help to conserve. Town-wide vote is not required due to the State’s Conservation Land Use Fund rules. Ginny is concerned that the parcel might be sold for development before this could all happen.

Sharon has brought into this process a willing conservation donor, Melinda. She confirms that she is willing to provide some matching funds to help us buy it.

Rosalind: If ACT get involved, there needs to be clear public benefit. That appears to exist: it involves wetlands, and water, connectivity of conserved land, and the parcel is under threat of development. There needs to be an appraisal, regardless of ACT’s involvement. Ginny says she found the name of the appraiser the former ACT executive director had arranged for the Lawrence Family Forest purchase in 2015-2016. Ginny thinks the appraisal fee was $750 back then. Rosalind requests Ginny send her the name, to see if still on their list. Rosalind thinks appraisal fees are considerably higher now.

Further general discussion of benefits and costs: tax revenue vs conservation value; mechanisms of purchase, and potential use of the land for access to the adjacent Town Forest. Red has looked in the past at possible Town Forest and Lawrence Family Forest access points, and thinks this would be an important acquisition. The next step is to contact the owner to see if she’s willing to go with the slower process required for us to buy it. We could buy the parcel, and subsequently work on the long term conservation strategy.

Motion: Ginny moves that the FCC should pursue purchasing the property at map 17-3 using Conservation Land Use Funds of equal or less than the appraised value. Chris will reach out to the owner about our interest and initiate discussions. Jill seconds. Unanimously approved. Jill will check with town attorney about tax deductibility if owner willing to sell for less than appraised value. Ginny will send name of adjacent Lawrence Family Forest appraiser to Rosalind, who will also look into appraisers that have helped with other projects.

Membership: Brief discussion that Art is still listed on town website as being an alternate member per email from town clerk, Carol, and he’s due for reappointment. We thought we moved him from alternate to member 2 years ago when Kim resigned. However, it isn’t in the minutes. He’s up for reappointment. He says he is willing to continue to volunteer, so Jill will put on SB agenda for reappointment as voting member.

Minutes by Ginny Jeffryes