

Franconia Conservation Commission (FCC) - Draft

Meeting: June 6, 2023, 3 pm, at Town Hall

Members present: Chris Nicodemus (Chair), Jill Brewer, Mary Grote, Mark Ober, Ginny Jeffryes, Dan Zajic (alternate)

Jill: Intent to Cut permits.

Says Mary asked at recent Select Board meeting that the Town consider hiring a town forester again to look at logging permits, and the SB was supportive of putting into the budget next year. Mary says that in past decades we had one. Ginny says that Bethlehem Conservation Commission routinely looks at their town's. She will check with a couple foresters she knows if interested, and suggests others reach out to foresters they know. Mark says that NH Forest and Lands has one forester per county who is supposed to inspect each Intent to Cut permit, and look at complaints.

Ginny: Minutes from 5/9: Ginny says she is remiss. Didn't finish last meeting's yet. Chris says we need to get these posted. Ginny will finish. Need to approve at next meeting.

Ginny: Posting of meeting dates:

Recently met a new town resident who has started learning about conservation and who mentioned wanting to volunteer for local town or organization about conservation-related issues. Inexperienced but enthusiastic. She asked about our meetings. Ginny told her meetings are posted on town website, but yesterday she noticed this meeting isn't listed there. She was told by someone else in town that our meetings are supposed to be announced in 2 places. Not sure if that's correct, but if so, she thinks we should post in the Post Office where other town meetings are, plus the website. Chris will check.

Chris: Update on Town Forest project:

He and Dan went to the last month's Water Commission meeting to request support for possible funding grants for conservation easement project costs for Town Forest and map 17-3 parcels. They have no plans for the parcels for specific water resources but are enthusiastic about supporting us. The ACT Lands Committee reviewed our application, and the ACT Board will discuss it at their meeting tonight. It looks fundable related to water resources. We can work on it re project funding grants for next year.

Chris: Update on DES's deficiency letter to Sabados:

Red not here to update us. Red got a copied on a DES communication about the deficiency, and Lang sent a complaint letter to DES about how long it's taking DES to act – the erosion and new water drainage onto his land has been happening for 2 years now. DES did inspect 18 months after initial complaint. Ginny notes DES isn't adequately funded by legislature. She thinks that we as FCC need to be cautious – especially with the landowner lawsuit - that we don't mistakenly convey the impression that we have any RSA-based power to impact the mitigation. Jill says that the Franconia SB and the Sugar Hill SB sent a joint letter to DES saying both select boards needed to be kept informed, since affects both towns.

Mary: Water use from streams:

She wonders if there are rules about taking water out of streams – she says water is being siphoned from Ham Branch by landowner to water the field with the new tree plantation near Franconia Inn. [Dawn Redwood plantation]. No one present knows. Ginny suggests that Mary call DES Surface Water division to ask because that is a wetlands impact, and report back.

Chris: Conservation Commission handbook:

Chris has been reviewing and scanning chapters 2, 6, 7 related to NRIs and conservation plans. We don't have budget to buy copies. Our budget is \$500, and \$250 is used for NHACC membership. Mary offers to donate for these. Chris says we should be familiar with the contents of chapter 6 and 7, so we can discuss whether to go further with our NRI. Ginny says she explained at a meeting last winter that Level 1, 2, and 3 NRIs are well-defined in the ecological-biological world, and in NH small towns do a Level 1, and a few large towns and cities that can afford the expensive experts can opt do the more detailed level 2 or 3 NRI. It's expensive post-grad level work, per a NH ecological consultant who does these. Chris says we can decide after review of manual if we want to do a level 2 or 3. Chris doesn't know if there's an old NRI. Ginny says there is one from 15 years ago that is part of the last Master Plan, and that former SB member Bernie Costa showed it to her back then, but we don't have a copy. Chris says he thinks we should address this formally, and see if we need additional info or new maps. He asks Mary if Planning Board is working on a new Master plan. She thinks it's done. Ginny says the PB compiled the results of the town members' survey over a year ago. Jill says that the Planning Board has funding in the current budget for North Country Council to assist with the overdue updated Master Plan work. Chris thinks we should be involved, that we need to look out for the conservation aspects. And if we need budget money we can tell SB that. And he wants us each to read the manual and come to next meeting with our thoughts written down. Discussion about state PB requirements for the Master Plan. Chris will look into how much the NHACC manual costs and get back to Mary. Dan suggests the library have one. Ginny says it is also online at NHACC website – all their online resources are free and public.

Chris – McKenzie Woods Middle Earth trail easement markings: When tick season abates, we'll add the additional markers.

Ginny – Proposes we hire an environmental wildlife and wetlands consultant to advise us re new NEMBA-proposed trail in Lawrence Family Forest (LFF), and for recommendations about conserving the Town Forest:

Ginny mentioned to Dan and Chris this possibility 2 months ago, and so she checked out the general expense involved. She's concerned about the ecosystem impacts of the NEMBA proposal to add a new bike trail to Lawrence Family Forest. She is aware that the NEMBA grant requires a NEEPA review, but thinks that rather than relying on the NEMBA-paid consultant, the FCC should hire our own wildlife and wetlands consultant who is focused solely on the environmental impacts, without regard to economic development or recreation, which aren't the CC mission. And, she thinks we need to look carefully at the e-bike issue, since e-bikes are motorized and our LFF easement prohibits motorized recreation. She wants to hire someone with expertise in wetlands and wildlife to look at that proposed trail, but also to look at the Town Forest and make recommendations about easement restrictions, given how wet it is. She phoned an acquaintance, Elise Lawson, who does this kind of work via her company, Watersheds to Wildlife, and who is currently doing the Dalton CC's NRI. She is adept at looking at ecosystem balance regarding trails, and the Dalton CC, plus the Coos County Forester, give her work rave reviews. Ginny explained to Elise this was very preliminary inquiry about costs. Elise says she charges local towns \$75 per hour and thought it would be under \$1000, and maybe less, depending on the level of detail we wanted in her report. Elise disclosed that she's on the Board of Directors of Kingdom Trails (VT). We might need to put it to bid, but Ginny says this is very inexpensive for this kind of work. Funding for this fits within the guidelines of what our Conservation Fund can be used for.

Discussion: Dan thought that NEMBA grant review required an independent consultant, so he thinks we should wait for that assessment, and if we don't think it's good enough, we can hire our own. Ginny's concern is that by fall, the vernal pools will be dry, and this time of year is best for wetlands assessments. Dan thinks that maybe we could delay till next spring. Ginny's concern that in terms of

the Town Forest assessment about easement restrictions, waiting till next year delays decisions on that, too. Chris's opinion is that the Northern Forest Center is paying for an environmental assessment of the property regarding the new trail and that's just begun, and we need to see their assessment and trail plan. He says the NEMBA flagging in LFF is preliminary, not the final trail. Ginny thinks there's an obligation to do due diligence since this is "in perpetuity" (given the grant NEMBA has), and since Northern Forest Center pushes for biking trails, so she thinks there's an agenda requiring independent oversight. Dan and Chris think the timing is too early. Ginny points out that 3 FCC members are mountain bikers and one rents e-bikes. Jill and Dan don't think we should allow e-bikes in the Lawrence Forest. Jill points out that we lack beginner mountain bike trails here suitable for kids and older people. And, she clarifies that she enjoys walking the trails – and doesn't mountain bike them. Dan thinks the best way to hedge against any special interests is to have a group decision and possibly an independent expert survey, but still thinks this can wait for the NEMBA-paid survey. Ginny reiterates that there's more value in having a survey consultant that's beholden to us, not to NEMBA or Northern Forest. Jill thinks that part of our mission is to make conservation principles more accessible to people. And she agrees that we should wait for the NFC's consultant report. Chris thinks we should get an update on when that report will be done.

Ginny says if we don't hire someone now for the proposed new Lawrence trail issue, she still thinks we should hire a wetlands and wildlife expert such as Elise Lawson to look at the Town Forest for purposes of expert view of the conservation easement restrictions we will request. ACT's environmental assessor expert, Jesse Mohr, will assess it for baseline conditions documentation, but ACT doesn't give recommendations. It's an older forest. She asks when is it on our agenda to discuss that? Chris says it's not yet, but it should be, and it's part of the easement decision process. Ginny proposes we hire someone to walk the property and assess and advise us. Discussion to consider this further.

Next meeting: TBA in July

Minutes by Ginny Jeffryes