

Franconia Conservation Commission (FCC)

Meeting: Aug 1, 2023, 3 pm at Town Hall.

Members present: Chris Nicodemus (Chair), Ginny Jeffryes, Mark Ober, Mary Grote by phone (until 3:50), Dan Zajic (arrived 3:15), Art Daily (arrived 3:15).

Guests: Elise Lawson (Watershed to Wildlife); Pat Garvin (Planning Board - PB); Jennifer Cao; Stephen Schwartz (PB alternate); Diantha Bovey

Chris moves to approve 5-9-23 and 6-6-23 minutes, Mark seconds. All voted in favor.

Chris: Purpose of today's meeting is to meet with Elise Lawson of Watershed to Wildlife, who was one of the authors of our 2007 comprehensive NRI (Natural Resource Inventory). PB wants us update the NRI synopsis for purpose of master plan completion in second half of this year.

Chris: Brief summary of progress on recent CC issues: conservation of Town Forest and adjacent lot 17-3 approved to proceed by ACT. NEMBA proposed a new bike trail in Lawrence Family Forest with funding by Northern Forests, and the NEPA process hasn't started yet.

Chris: Chris Collman requested of Select Board (SB) that Fox Hill Park trees over his garage be removed. He will contact SPNHF first as the easement holder. He is contacting Bob Benson for quote. The SB is the decision-marker.

Chris: Red not here to elaborate: Mr. Sabados has been ordered by NH DES to mitigate the downhill erosion from his land clearing.

Chris: Reminder that in the fall we will add some additional Easement markers on the McKenzie Woods easement.

Chris: Planning Board wants FCC to update the conservation part of the currently in-progress new Master Plan. Portions of the 2007 NRI which Elise co-authored were condensed and put into the 2008 Master Plan. Planning Board has hired North Country Council to help with it. Their goal is finish it by the end of December, with public hearing to be held in Jan or Feb 2024. Pat adds that the September Master Plan committee focus will be housing. So she says we have more time than Chris originally thought we had to update what we can of the old NRI synopsis. Chris made available a pdf of the 2007 NRI, and Ginny printed a copy which we pass around for review (about 50 pages). Chris will talk with town office about putting it on the website. Ginny points out that the NRI and the maps were put in the Master Plan verbatim, edited for brevity.

Elise says she wouldn't be able to work on our NRI before the new Master Plan is due, because she is finishing other towns' NRI projects. But, she thinks we can leverage some of the existing work and our future plans for the Master Plan. FCC can do some reassessment of our conservation priorities prior to a new NRI. Ginny thinks FCC can update certain parts of the 2007 NRI synopsis – for example, adding the additional invasive species, and updating the conservation land section with new properties. But some parts we can't; but we can mention our project of updating the NRI. We can't do the maps, but maybe use some of the recent Plymouth State project maps.

In answer to group questions, Elise says when she does a new NRI, mostly she doesn't work from her previous one, because so much has changed.

Elise passes around recent NRIs she has done for nearby towns (Whitefield; Lancaster; also an NRI for a central NH town). She is also working on Dalton's NRI currently. Bethlehem – where she lived in the past - has scheduled a meeting to discuss doing an NRI.

She explains her usual NRI process: 2 or 3 days of fieldwork, augmented by local people's knowledge. We are welcome to accompany her during the fieldwork. Per the 2007 FCC, that NRI did not include field work or management recommendations for the State lands and National Forest within Franconia borders. Discussion that we agree that makes sense, since we don't have any control over management there. After doing the field work, she uses that info to create the augmented draft maps and the analysis: wetlands, slopes, soils, forestry productivity, and multiple other resource maps. Much more is available now than in 2007. With CC input about priorities, she writes the draft report, gets feedback from the CC, then revises. The town's priorities for conservation are prominent in her analysis and recommendations. Example: Whitefield's FCC said surface water protection was their #1 priority, so that's prominent. They also valued deer yard protection (softwoods), and continued wetland conservation, and land conservation. Lancaster wanted a section on carbon sequestration. The NRI helps with applying for grants focused on the stated conservation goals. Elise is thinking about how we can make it more readable for the public. Pat suggests that FCC can make it accessible by, for example, working to pinpoint key locations for invasives for the community. Chris wonders once we work on the NRI if FCC can at some level coordinate with Easton and Sugar Hill. Easton's is good, but was done in 2012. Elise wonders if we have anyone in town who is adept with the GIS mapping, because that would be a way for us to combine and coordinate with neighboring CCs. She says the UNH software is free to towns, and annual licenses for others are inexpensive. Ginny says UNH Extension offers inexpensive online classes on how to learn to use it. Chris thinks we don't have anyone locally who knows it. Further discussion about GIS options. Elise says digital maps are preferred by some, paper maps by others, so having both accessible is helpful. Elise answers guests' questions about Wildlife Action Plan, Granit, and carbon sequestration on large acreage wooded parcels as a conservation opportunity for landowners. Discussion among guests about town possibly selling carbon credits on town lands. Elise says that's an option, though it isn't much money for a town. Foresters are now being taught how to estimate carbon sequestration potential in woodlots.

Ginny wants to make a motion that sometime within the next year when she's next available, we hire Elise to do an NRI with the funds coming from the Conservation Fund. This is one of the acceptable uses for Conservation Funds. Elise prefers to let FCC discuss this without her being present. She says she sent Chris her current hourly and daily rate, and if we decided to pursue it, she would give us a formal quote. Chris says that conservation fund approval and payment would involve the Select Board. Ginny clarifies that per the Conservation Fund RSA, using those funds does not require the Select Board – it's only requires a motion of the CC, then the Town Treasurer releases the money. We would keep them in the loop. Further discussion occurs.

Mark comments that Ginny proposed Elise be hired at our last meeting. Ginny clarifies that her proposal then wasn't for an NRI update - we didn't know then that she'd done the previous one. Ginny had proposed in June that Elise independently assess the NEMBA-proposed new mountain bike trail in Lawrence Family Forest, and also to look at the wetlands on the Town Forest for purposes of the upcoming conservation easement priorities. Elise says that she has the time available now for a half-day or day-long walk with us with discussion of those specific issues, if we decide to. She thanks us, and leaves the meeting.

Ginny makes a motion: That we make a resolution that we hire Elise to do an updated NRI sometime within the next year, and cultivate a relationship with her for short-term more narrow projects. Chris seconds. Art asks what she charges. Chris and Ginny reply – about \$600 per day, or \$75-\$100 per hour for a limited project. Chris says she can quote on a project basis. Art thinks we should leave an open door based on cost. Since we will be getting an NRI quote, Ginny proposes that it will need to make financial sense from a Conservation Fund standpoint. Vote: The motion passes unanimously.

Guest asks if we can pursue the tri-town approach to the NRI. Ginny explains that each town per NH RSA has to have their own NRI. Discussion that there are specific NRI content requirements, but no frequency is mandated. Pat clarifies that for a Master Plan, 5-10 years is a suggestion but not mandated. Chris thinks we can explore coordinating over time.

Art thinks we should ask her for an NRI quote now rather than wait. Discussion and agreement that her work for other local towns is impressive. Chris will contact her.

Chris mentions that FCC appreciates the short-term project volunteer offer today by a guest, and says we're looking to add alternate members if interested.

Ginny: UNH Cooperative Extension is offering an Old Growth Forest conference Sept 21-23 in Moultonborough, with the Old Growth Forest Network. Option to attend just one day. Wide variety of classes and old growth forest walks with experts.

Next meeting: First week of September, maybe Tues September 5th.

Minutes by Ginny Jeffries