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Conservation Commission Minutes

Date: March 9, 2022

Zoom Meeting Hosted by Catherine Bendheim

Conservation Commission Members Present: Catherine Bendheim, Theo Pratt, Eileen Skarka, Sondra Wallace.

Others Present: Pennie Alley, Lori Biagvela, Sally Merchant, Wes Pratt. Lori is a resident of South Thomaston and a member of a fledgling outdoor club that potentially would be interested in assisting the STCC, for example, by improving the Stump Dump Trail.

I. Call to order by Chair Theo Pratt at 5:10PM.

II. Adjustments to Agenda. Sondra Wallace brought up a webinar on trash disposal that Theo had previously mentioned. Theo said that it would be beneficial to identify each month a webinar(s) that we could watch then discuss the following meeting.

III. Review and Approval of February 9 Meeting Minutes. Catherine Bendheim made a motion and Sondra seconded, to accept the Minutes. The motion passed 4-0.

IV. Old Business. A. Update regarding possible donation of land (Sondra/Catherine). Sondra stated that Mr. Brown is still interested, but not ready to proceed at this time.

B. Possible topics/speakers for program for South Thomaston residents. It was agreed that this item should be tabled until next month.

C. Update on programs for schoolchildren (Henry). Tabled since Henry Spencer was not present.

D. Update on proposed budget: Select Board, March 10, 8:30AM. Sondra will try to contact Henry to ask if he can attend the meeting. She said that if there are no STCC Commissioners present, it will be up to Terri Baines to make whatever presentation she can, and any questions will be passed on to the Budget Committee.

E. Webinars on conservation issues. This is an ongoing process. Theo would appreciate input from the group and the subject will be on the agenda of future meetings.

F. Possible setup of Facebook page to increase visibility of Commission activities (Catherine). Despite Pennie Alley having offered a tab on the library website, Catherine feels it would be advantageous to have our own domain name and site, and that the cost to do so would be modest: \$20 to register a domain name and hosting would be \$150 per year. Content and communication by the STCC are vital, and we would still use the Town's website to post agendas and the minutes. Discussion of this topic will continue next month.

V. New Business. A. Review of existing trails in South Thomaston. Presentation by Wes Pratt. Wes presented a comprehensive and informative Powerpoint entitled "A Look at South Thomaston's Trails and Public Areas." It covered the Weskeag Marsh, Riverview Hayfields Preserve/Bobolink Trail, Weskeag Preserve, Weskeag Headlands, East Coast Greenway, Town Dock Park and Boat Ramp (Town Landing), and Stump Dump Trail.

Catherine inquired about funding and for what is it needed? Wes said that funds may be required for land acquisition or legal aid. Woods and trails need bridges, upgrading, and maintenance. Catherine also made the point that if a large property becomes conservation land, a benefit, there is the concomitant obstacle of loss of tax revenue, but we can do it, we have the resources!

The consensus was that Wes's Powerpoint could be posted and/or presented to the community, with Pennie indicating that it could be on YouTube (as could the entire meeting). It might jumpstart the help we need from the citizenry, including financial aid. Theo suggested that another effective means of raising money is via commemorative benches, i.e., benches sold "in memory of ...," or as a "gift from the ____ family." This might appeal to older residents of which, as Eileen pointed out, there are many in South Thomaston, and would provide welcome resting and meditative spots on our trails. The properties on Chapel Street would be ideal for this.

Wes, Catherine, and Theo proposed that in April we walk one of the above trails - perhaps one of the Weskeag ones - evaluate its condition, perhaps place partial boardwalk, and take photos of our efforts to promote future assistance by the public. Theo would be happy to lead the outing. The topic of short hikes will be revisited during the next meeting.

Catherine briefly described a webinar she attended sponsored by the Knox/Lincoln Soil & Water Conservation District, www.knox-lincoln.org. It offers conservation landscaping certification for property owners motivated to landscape from scratch or restore their land via conservation principles, either on their own or with help. Catherine chose the latter option and has an appointment for an initial consultation. Improving one's land can take 1-2 years. If one fulfills the organization's requirements, they get certified and can become a spokesperson for the results. Catherine stated that the process is not more expensive than regular landscaping.

VI. Adjourn. A motion to adjourn was made by Sondra at 6:30PM, seconded by Eileen. The motion passed 4-0.