Conservation Commission Minutes, May 10, 2023

In-Person Meeting at the Town Office, with Zoom Video Conferencing

Commissioners present: Neil Cambridge, Linda Garat, Catherine Lerme, Theo Pratt, Leslie Spear, Henry Spencer, Sondra Wallace

Associate Members present: Sally Merchant

Public Attendee: Peter Mecklenburg

**I.**  **Call to Order**. Henry Spencer, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:30PM.

**II. Adjustments to Agenda.** None.

**III. Review and Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes (March 8, March 29, and April 12, 2023).** For March 8, a motion was made by Sondra Wallace to approve the Minutes, seconded by Catherine Lerme, and unanimously approved. For March 29, a motion was made by Catherine, seconded by Sondra, and unanimously approved. For April 12, a motion was made by Neil Cambridge, seconded by Theo Pratt, and unanimously approved with an amendment to IV. New Business, Item B, second paragraph.

**IV. Old Business.**

A. Report on Earth Day, April 22, Clean-Up Day. Henry said that in future he would like to see a greater turnout. The trash collected appeared to be about the same as the last clean-up event, and the barbecue was simple and seemed to be enjoyed. Our signs are stored in the GBC basement.

B. Update on Smith and Cline property offers of sale; land conservation. The STCC has fulfilled its responsibility in indicating to the Town that we recommend purchasing Jeff Smith’s 118-acre tract, currently assessed at $179,000, but which he is offering for $50,000. The warrant article provides that the purchase price would come from town surplus, donations, and/or grant monies. The next imperative is to support and publicize this opportunity in advance of voting that will take place at the Annual Town Meeting on June 20. There will be two separate votes: one for acquiring the Smith property, and the other for the Cline property.

Prior to this, on May 30, the Select Board will hold a public hearing at 6PM at the Town Office for articles that will be on the Town Meeting Warrant, including these options to purchase land. In advance of the two meetings, Catherine and Sondra will keep working on a major educational campaign. Sally Merchant suggested that we invite members of the press to attend the May 30 meeting.

Regarding the Cline property, according to his realtor if the Town does not accept the asking price of $17,000, his acreage - the 10-acre parcel and another one-acre parcel in the middle of Jeff Smith’s land - will be put on the market.

Sondra touched on the subject of Jeff Smith’s right of way (ROW) across Don Protheroe’s abutting property, which the Town would acquire in buying the Smith land. To address Mr. Protheroe’s concern about possible heavy use by residents, language is being added to the warrant article authorizing the Select Board to extinguish the ROW at a later date, most likely after a year or so, giving the Town time to cut a trail across its own land. At that point the Town should have no further need of the ROW.

Finally, Catherine reminded that on May 15 at 1PM at the Town Office parking lot, she will meet with Jared Gregory, District Forester, Maine Forest Service, for a walk on the Town property to survey it and gather information about the health of the woods, species, potential for trails and recreation, etc. Mr. Gregory is an expert on trails.

C. Update on STCC budget request for FY 2023-2024. Sondra commented that unlike the previous fiscal year, the Select Board and the Budget Committee approved the amount the STCC requested.

D. Update on Community Resilience Partnership. Per Neil, John Spear is the contact person, and last Friday he made a site visit. The project has changed from putting solar panels on the Town Office roof to a grid power system. There are now two vendors involved, and it is uncertain if the job can be completed for $50,000. Theo remarked that if this is the case, the Partnership should seek additional sources of funding, including from the Town.

E. Update on greenhouse gas data collection project (Neil Cambridge). No report.

F. Further discussion of Repair, Repurpose, Recycle event. Theo presented a poster on repairing, repurposing, and recycling, and reiterated that it would be best if this event is held during the fall.

G. Further discussion of Peter Mecklenburg’s proposal for walking trail. At this point in time, Mr. Mecklenburg wants to withdraw his proposal for a walking trail because there is at least one homeowner opposed to the idea.

H. Further discussion concerning priorities for the coming year. Priorities cited were the Knox County Conservation Commissions’ joint efforts; establishing a list of proposed programming, including speakers (on our own and in conjunction with other communities); waste disposal; trail grants and development. Sally said that Skip Connell, who is on the OHSTT Waste Board, would be willing to speak about how trash removal works. Regarding the last priority, Henry indicated that he is considering offering public access to trails on his property.

I. Status of non-appropriated funds. If we want to know what the balance is, we have to ask.

**V. New Business.**

Theo stated that the term for her appointment as a Commission Member is expiring, and she will notify the Select Board that she does not wish to be reappointed. She would like, though, to carry on as an Associate Member.

**VI.**  **Correspondence.**

A. April 28 email from Linda Oakes concerning pond near Route 73. Both Leslie Spear and Sally replied. Sally wrote that the water is only temporary. Catherine recommended that the STCC initiate a formal process to responding to emails from the public. Henry said that this subject should be discussed at the next meeting.

**VII. Items for next Agenda.** As listed above.

**VIII.** **Adjourn**. A motion to adjourn was made by Catherine at 6:25PM, seconded by Leslie. The motion passed.