Conservation Commission Minutes, June 14, 2023

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

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

Commissioners absent: Theo Pratt

Associate Members present: Sally Merchant

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

**II. Adjustments to Agenda.** Sondra Wallace indicated that Terri Baines, for insurance purposes, requires the names of individuals who have volunteered for our clean-up events. Peter Mecklenburg and his wife, along with Charlotte Bacon and her son, were mentioned. Keeping track of anyone who assists with STCC efforts is a must. None of the lists are currently available, although it is possible that Theo Pratt has them.

**III. Review and Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes (May 10, 2023).** A motion was made by Catherine Lerme to approve the Minutes, seconded by Neil Cambridge, then unanimously approved.

**IV. Old Business.**

A. Report on District Forester’s May 15 visit to assess Town land. Catherine affirmed that Jared Gregory of the Maine Forest Service wrote a comprehensive report after the visit. He strongly advised that a forester and a consulting firm be hired, being a one-time cost to develop a long-range plan regarding species, invasive plants, optimum ways to blaze trails (woven around parts of the land in need of restoration, redirection of the existing road), and perhaps cutting trees to generate revenue. Catherine also stated that any work that is accomplished needs to be recorded, so we can apply for grants to help pay for it.

B. Update concerning Cline and Smith property offers. Sondra will ask John Spear if there is anything the Select Board wants the STCC to do at the Annual Town Meeting on June 20. Information about the property offers will be included in the Town Meeting packets.

C. Update on Community Resilience Committee (including requested STCC letter of support). Neil said that the proposal to the state for a grant will be submitted on July 7. Regarding the STCC letter of support, Catherine made a motion to accept it in its revised form, Henry seconded the motion, and it was unanimously approved. This letter will be dated June 14, 2023, Sondra will ask Hannah to print it on Town letterhead, Henry will sign it, and Neil will pick it up.

D. Update on Knox County Conservation Commissions Working Group. Sondra reported that there will be little or no Working Group activity during the summer, and no conference in the fall. The group seems to be evolving into an entity that might meet periodically to remain informed, share ideas, and potentially collaborate on initiatives such as connecting trails, sponsoring educational programs, or obtaining grant money to combat sea level rise.

E. Discussion of procedures for handling correspondence. Leslie Spear agreed to assume responsibility as Correspondence Secretary. Any letter or email addressed to the STCC from the public should be forwarded to her. Leslie will confirm to the individual that their communication has been received and that the question or concern raised will be discussed at our next meeting. She will draft an “auto reply” and share it with the Commissioners for comment. Henry said that we should all approve the contents of an outgoing communication before it is sent, and Sondra recommended that correspondence be saved in either a physical or electronic file.

F. Further discussion concerning priorities for the coming year. Priorities cited included land acquisition (with fundraising through grants and donations), fostering conservation relationships, spring and fall clean-ups, the repair café in the fall, and lectures. With respect to the latter, Catherine brought up forestry management as well as trash, i.e., how recycling and garbage is handled. Sally Merchant said that her son, Skip, would be willing to speak on this subject. In addition, Catherine would like to hear John Fancy of Thomaston speak about the town’s two solar farms (e.g., how funds were raised, how the farms work, what the town might do differently). Henry added that we could align speakers and subjects with applications for grants.

**V. New Business.**

A. Report on June 5 Climate Resilience Resource Workshop hosted by the Gulf of Maine Research Institute, the Island Institute, and MCCOG. Sondra and Nancy Goslin attended the Workshop, which was very informative, its goal being to render participants aware of resources available to meet resilience needs. There were nine presenters, and specific topics included climate financing and grant info, the importance of and approaches to vulnerability assessments (hiring experts, as some neighboring communities are doing), using natural materials rather than seawalls to prevent shore erosion, and dealing with tidal overflows of roads and culverts. Catherine remarked that we need to establish priorities and ascertain when issues become an unbearable risk. There is abundant grant money available, and when the Town faces a costly project, grants should be sought. Sally suggested driving around South Thomaston and making a survey of low points, so we have them pinpointed before the next king tide hits.

B. Discussion of STCC’s reestablishment ordinance concerning acquisition of land. The STCC is currently in no position to actually acquire land. It can make a recommendation to the Select Board, but that is the extent of it. Should a change to the ordinance be reviewed and promoted? Sondra said that this issue has been referred to the Town’s Ordinance Review Committee, headed by Jeff Northgraves, and there is nothing the STCC has to do at the moment.

**VI.**  **Correspondence.** None.

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

**VIII.** **Adjourn**. A motion to adjourn was made by Catherine at 6:35PM, seconded by Leslie. The motion passed.

STCC approved on July 12, 2023