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Conservation Commission Meeting, October 11, 2023
In-Person Meeting at the Town Office, with Zoom Video Conferencing

STCC Commissioners present: Catherine Lerme, Leslie Spear, Henry Spencer, Sondra Wallace

STCC Commissioners absent: Neil Cambridge, Linda Garat

Associate Members present: Sally Merchant, Theo Pratt

Others present: Maren Granstrom (Consultant Forester), John Spear (Select Board)

I. Call to Order. Sondra Wallace, Chair, called the meeting to order at 5:04PM.

II. Adjustments to Agenda. Added New Business: Resignation of Neil Cambridge.

III. Review and Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes (September 13, 2023). Henry Spencer made a motion to accept the Minutes, seconded by Leslie, then unanimously approved.

IV. Old Business.

- a. Land conservation plans: interview with forester Maren Granstrom.** Maren introduced herself. Forestry is a change of career for her. She is now a licensed forester, with a 2019 graduate degree in forestry from U-Maine Orono. She has worked for several years at Mid-Maine Forestry with Barrie Brusila. Now that Barrie is retiring Maren has started her own forestry consulting business. She has worked with other towns to develop forest management plans. (Maren expects, however, that Barrie will still be willing to share her expertise and give advice, when needed.)

To develop a forest management plan for us, Maren would walk the property, and map it using GPS, locating/identifying elevations; the forest cover by location, species, numbers (including notable stands of trees), age, and health of trees; soil composition/condition; invasive species (plants and pests); wetlands and streams (we told her there is a former quarry that is now a sizable pond); etc.

She would then give us a comprehensive report of findings and recommendations, including a multi-year plan for forest management, dealing with invasives, repair of damage, locating and preparing sites for trails, and more. The plan could include selective harvesting of trees; if feasible at a reasonable cost, that could become a source of funds to maintain and develop the land.

The STCC explained the current status: The Town has just completed purchase of the Cline and Smith properties, totaling 129 acres. STCC proposes to create a forest preserve, encompassing these acres and an undetermined amount, possibly 50-70 acres, of adjoining land already owned by the Town (but this addition will need approval by the Select Board and the Town Meeting). We showed Maren the location of these adjoining parcels on the geologic survey map and the survey of the Town lots. Conditions of sale of Smith's 118 acres, included in the deeds, are that the land be put into permanent conservation protection; logging is permitted only for the health of the forest; and ATVs are barred.

Maren further explained that her on-site assessment covers about 50 acres a day, so there would be 4-5 days of fieldwork for 180-200 acres, followed by several days of mapping. Her fee is \$23/acre, or about \$4,100-4,600. She said the best time for the on-site assessment is summer (with late spring second best) – so that gives us some months to consider her proposal, fundraise, etc. She will send a formal proposal in a couple of weeks.

Following Maren's presentation, the STCC discussed seeking donations for half the cost, and applying for matching grants for the balance. As Maren suggested, Project Canopy would be a likely prospect: it's a State program, providing 50/50 matching grants -- \$12,000 maximum for planning; \$10,000 maximum for tree planting and maintenance. Volunteer labor and in-kind donations of materials and equipment, properly accounted for, are recognized as contributions toward a matching grant.

It was also noted that while ATVs must be banned on the former Smith land, it has not been decided whether to ban them on other land in the preserve. On the one hand, a total ATV ban may encounter resistance from those already accustomed to use them on the proposed preserve land. On the other hand, ATV use has severely damaged that land, notably along the existing road.

- b. Update on Community Resilience Committee.** It was noted (with congratulations) that the CRC's grant application for \$50,000 for a solar installation has been approved.
- c. Update on plans for October 14 roadside cleanup day.** Plans are completed: publicity has been distributed; Henry is getting the signs; Leslie will have the truck and has notified the Transfer Station. One important note for future reference: we should coordinate with Pennie Alley on dates, if we are to use the Gilford Butler Center as the meeting point: October 14 is also the date of the last Community Swap Event [is that the correct name?] of the season, which will also be setting up tables outside.

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- d. Report on Knox County Conservation Commissions Working Group (KCCC-WG) September meeting.** The WG has decided to meet quarterly, by Zoom. Sondra gave the report from the meeting (she and Sally Merchant are STCC's representatives). Rockport and Thomaston each have a focus on water quality monitoring (and would welcome collaboration with other CCs). Rockport is also completing climate-related work under its Community Resilience Grant, including public education and a multi-pronged assessment of vulnerabilities. St. George reported on its Green Energy Tour of 8 solar installations in homes, a business, and public facilities; and also on progress on the ADA-compliant Fort Point Trail. Camden reported on its stormwater mapping, tree planting, and invasive species mapping initiatives. South Thomaston reported on the Town's land purchases and the plans to develop a forest preserve. Owls Head CC did not attend.

V. New Business.

- a. Resignation of Neil Cambridge.** Neil emailed Sondra and Henry today, saying with regret that, given other demands on his time, he needs to withdraw from the Conservation Commission. Sondra and Henry accepted his decision, also with regret, but asked him to consider becoming an Associate Member. He said he will consider it. This means we have 2 vacancies on the Commission.
- b. Maine Association of Conservation Commissions (MEACC) news; October 21 annual conference.** Our annual MEACC dues (July-June) have been paid. The annual conference will be held in Brunswick on October 21. The keynote speaker will discuss Bridgton's Open Space Plan, funded with a Community Resilience Partnership grant. There will also be an opportunity for each attending CC to share what they have been doing. Sondra plans to attend.
- c. Proposal concerning Community Swap Day (October 14).** Theo Pratt said she still has some of Andrew Stancioff's geologic maps of South Thomaston. We could offer them for sale for \$20 at the Clean-up Day sign-in table, with the proceeds going to STCC's discretionary fund. Henry will take charge of that.

VI. Correspondence.

VII. Items for next Agenda. As listed above.

VIII. Adjourn. Without objection, Sondra adjourned the meeting at 6:10 PM.

***STCC Approved on November 8, 2023
(In the absence of Linda Garat, Sondra Wallace took these Minutes)***