Conservation Commission Meeting, December 13, 2023

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

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

Associate Member present: Sally Merchant

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

**II. Adjustments to Agenda.** Sondra noted that item IV 6 should start with “Budget and funding…”

**III. Review and Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes (November 8, 2023).** Leslie Spear made a motion to accept the Minutes, seconded by Catherine Lerme, then unanimously approved.

**IV. Old Business.**

1. **Commission vacancies; recruiting.** Sally Merchant sent a note to Rob Sherrell, one of the original members of the Conservation Committee group (circa 2020). He is currently in Antarctica, but is potentially interested in becoming a Commissioner when he is in Maine. Sally will forward her correspondence with Rob to Sondra, who suggested that in the interim we invite him to be an Associate Member.
2. **Proposed forest preserve:**
3. **Condition of land; potential trails.** Leslie distributed a composite map (tax maps 8, 9, and 13) and reported that she and her husband, John Spear, walked parts of the parcel of land and made a small trail. In her opinion and that of Catherine, we don’t need to go to the expense of a forester quite yet. The agreement is that surveying the land is currently the priority as a recent survey of the land is a requirement of most grant applications. Henry Spencer wondered if there was anyone involved in the 1999 survey whom we could ask questions. Sondra said we should get proposals from several surveyors, and Henry volunteered to call some prospects.

Regarding the small uninhabited plot of land owned by Nicholas Bourque (surrounded by Town land, the Smith and Protheroe properties), Catherine noted that the STCC might consider asking if he might donate it. Henry suggested that during the summer we host a trail maintenance day, to get the community involved.

1. **ATVs (including December 11 public meeting).** There is evidence that people from other towns are riding their ATVs on Town land. ATVs are a concern, especially vis-à-vis the Smith property. Sondra stated that the Select Board spoke to the Town attorney, who indicated that “no ATV” signs can be posted, but we could not take any enforcement action without an ordinance, which would have to be presented at a Town Meeting.
2. **Consultant forester: Granstrom proposal, other candidates.** It was agreed, as above, that surveyance of the land takes priority over hiring a forester. Sondra said that per Maren Granstrom, it is possible some trees may have to be felled for the good of the forest.
3. **Surveys.** As above.
4. **Adding Town land? Select Board request for STCC proposal.** Adding Town land to form an identified conservation space, with ordinances to protect it, is a goal, but we will need to reach at least a tentative agreement with the Select Board on how much Town land to include and where to put the boundary before we can have it surveyed. Sondra reminded that the Town may put forth ordinances, but without a conservation easement, the land is not protected in perpetuity.
5. **Budget and funding: possible grants and donations.** John Spear’s letter to Town residents regarding donations yielded $3,369.38, including $2,500 from McLoons Lobster Shack. One individual donated $519.38, the equivalent of one acre of the Smith/Cline property purchase. In future we might consider soliciting contributions - to help defray the cost of a survey, purchasing gates to prevent ATVs from accessing environmentally sensitive land, education efforts, etc. - via an acreage fundraiser, similar to a brick fundraiser.
6. **GRLT assistance.** The Commissioners agreed to put this aside for the time being.
7. **New working group.** Catherine (unavailable until January 8), Henry, Sondra, and Sally are interested in forming a working group. There might be different working groups for different purposes; Leslie and Henry could be interested in a group inspecting the land.

V. New Business.

1. Co-host *Dark Skies* film showing and discussion? Sondra said that the Knox County Conservation Commissions Working Group is proposing to present *Dark Skies* (a short documentary), with a discussion, possibly at Watts Hall in Thomaston. The film rental fee for a non-profit is as low as $50 for 50 attendees. The Commissioners agreed that this is an excellent idea, and Sondra, as representative of the STCC, will move forward with it.

**VI. Correspondence.** None.

**VII. Items for next Agenda.** The budget.

**VIII. Adjourn.** Without objection, Sondra adjourned the meeting at 6:12 PM.

***STCC approved on January 10, 2024.***