Conservation Commission Meeting, January 10, 2024

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

STCC Commissioners present: Linda Garat, Catherine Lerme, Leslie Spear (via Zoom), Henry Spencer, Sondra Wallace

Associate Members present: Sally Merchant, Theo Pratt, Wes Pratt

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

**II. Adjustments to Agenda.** Sondra (at Theo Pratt’s request) added item V.d. Theo noted it should start with “Reuse event.”

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

**IV. Old Business.**

1. Commission vacancies; recruiting. Postponed: a potential Commissioner was unable to attend the meeting.
2. Proposed forest preserve. Sally Merchant, Catherine, Henry, and Sondra have formed a Working Group and will meet on January 15 at 9AM at Sondra’s home. Topics to be covered include determining boundaries, raising money to do the survey, identifying other costs and procedures, establishing a timeline and moving as quickly as possible. They will report back at our next meeting.

Meantime, Sondra suggested that we propose the creation of an account for the preserve, which should be included in the Town budget, and maintain a folder for receipts, being sure to submit every expense (e.g., survey copies). Volunteer time, such as the hours that John and Leslie Spear have spent walking the land, should be kept track of as in-kind matching for grants.

1. *Dark Skies* program co-hosting proposal. Sondra reported that the Knox County Conservation Commissions Working Group (KCCC-WG) set up a sub-group to plan a series of programs to be held every couple of months during 2024. Possible programs include one showing the *Dark Skies* film, perhaps another featuring a speaker, one held outside under a dark sky, and a hands-on program for children. This smaller group will meet later this month.

**V. New Business.**

1. Budget. Thus far, the STCC has not used much of the 2023-2024 budget ending in June, and other than potentially substantial costs related to the preserve, the forthcoming budget will be very similar to this current one. Sondra said there may be some *Dark Skies* expenses, but they would be shared by the six towns in the KCCC-WG.
2. Report from 12/14/23 KCCC-WG meeting. Sondra reported items that could be of interest to South Thomaston. Camden CC stated that a summer resident used a pesticide banned in Maine to poison a neighbor’s trees and this poison leached into the soil. They were fined by both the DEP and Camden (as well as sued by the neighbor).

Thomaston CC reported, re: Dragon Cement, decontaminating and environmental enforcement, that John Fancy’s successor in Thomaston is looking into what is getting into the water. All the towns in the St. George watershed below Dragon Cement may have harmful substances originating from Dragon in their river water, groundwater, soil, and wells.

The Owls Head CC has an agreement with the town for a reserve fund for its Plaisted Preserve, and wants to establish an endowment account. The STCC might think about options of this nature, to make the protection of our preserve endure. For Halloween, the Owls Head CC hosts an early evening Pumpkin Walk, with a pot for donations at the end of the walk. We could consider a similar event.

St. George CC reported that work on the Fort Point Trail is expected to be completed in the spring. John Knuerr, a Member of the St. George CC, has posted information on the town’s website on invasive plants and invasive pests.

1. Letter of support for Maine trails bond bill (LD 1156). There is extensive statewide support for LD 1156. Henry made a motion that the STCC should fully endorse it, Catherine seconded it, it was unanimously approved, and Sondra will write the Select Board and attach the sign-on letter, seeking their approval to add South Thomaston to the list.
2. Reuse Event. Theo wants to plan a reuse event, like a yard sale or “potluck for stuff” at the Gilford Butler Center on a Saturday, hopefully towards the end of March. Interested individuals could bring in items they no longer need or want, receive a chit for each article, then use it for something else on a table(s). No money would be exchanged. She will discuss the logistics with Pennie Alley.

**VI. Correspondence.** None.

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

**VIII. Adjourn.** Without objection, Sondra adjourned the meeting at 5:50 PM.

*STCC approved on February 14, 2024.*