Conservation Commission Meeting, February 14, 2024

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

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

STCC Commissioner absent: Linda Garat

Associate Members present: Sally Merchant, Theo Pratt

Others present: John Poirier

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

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

**III. Review and Approval of Prior Meeting Minutes (January 10, 2024).** Henry Spencer moved to accept the minutes, Catherine Lerme seconded; the minutes were unanimously approved.

**IV. Old Business.**

1. Commission vacancies; recruiting. Sally Merchant introduced John Poirier, who has been invited to consider being appointed as a Commissioner. At the end of the meeting, John agreed to be proposed to the Select Board for appointment.
2. STCC budget; annual report. Sondra submitted the annual report to the Town Administrator on Feb. 4. She presented the STCC budget request to the Select Board (SB) on Feb. 13. The only change from our current budget is a $100 increase, to allow for unforeseen expenses for the Preserve, for a total of $618. The SB approved. (See also IV.e. below.)
3. Proposed Reuse Event (to be held at Gilford Butler). Theo Pratt is organizing this event, which would be a trial run, to see if there is sufficient interest to repeat it. We agreed a Saturday in April would be best, avoiding the Clean-Up day (see V.a. below); Theo will discuss dates with Pennie Alley. Funds are available in the STCC for modest costs for the event.
4. Letter of support for Maine trails bond bill (LD 1156). We voted at our Jan. 10 meeting to recommend that the Town join other Maine towns, organizations, and businesses in supporting LD 1156. Sondra emailed our recommendation to the SB on Feb. 5, asking that it be put on an upcoming meeting agenda. We have not yet heard back.
5. Proposed forest preserve. The working group created at our Jan. 10 meeting (Sondra, Catherine, and Sally) reported on developments since then:

Land for Maine’s Future (LMF) grant application. The LMF 2024 grant cycle is open for applications. We submitted our LMF Inquiry (the first step in the application process) on Jan. 18 (the Town, as owner of the land, is the applicant; the STCC is applying as its representative). There are two notable changes from the “pre-Inquiry” submitted in August 2023: We include in the proposal only the Smith and Cline land, with no previously Town-owned land. And, because the purchase qualifies as a “bargain sale,” we are applying for the full amount ($67,000) of the purchase price, with the excess land value counting as our match. Our Inquiry was accepted, and we are working on the full application, due Mar. 22. If it is successful, we will need to meet additional requirements before funds are released, among them a boundary survey, appraisal, environmental hazards assessment, and title insurance, for an estimated total cost exceeding $26,000.

(LMF grant applicants can also seek additional funding for costs of land stewardship and for access improvement (road repair, parking, etc.). However, the grants are small and have considerable strings attached; the working group will need to decide whether on balance they’re worth seeking. There are other grant options; we can also seek donations of cash, materials, and labor.)

Boundary survey; grant for its cost. On Feb. 6, the working group and SB member John Spear met with surveyor Nate Beal, to discuss having him produce a recordable boundary survey of the Preserve, expanding his preliminary survey of the Smith land to encompass also the Cline land. He can do it this spring for an estimated $12,000. We have secured a commitment for a foundation grant to cover this cost, to be paid through Georges River Land Trust (GRLT) (a 501(c)(3) nonprofit organization) as our representative. GRLT will keep 8% of the amount for this service; we will raise the remaining amount through donations.

Town and donation funding for the preserve. In advance of the Feb. 13 budget meeting (see IV.b. above), Sondra wrote to the SB, identifying steps needed concerning funding for the Preserve to support our LMF grant application, among other reasons. At the meeting, the SB accepted the recommendations. They agreed to set aside $20,000 from surplus for the Preserve (they are prepared to create a dedicated Reserve Fund, but that will require Town Meeting approval). They also agreed that letters can be sent to the townspeople (following up on the SB’s Nov. 13, 2023, letter seeking donations to repay the land purchase costs) asking that their donations be more broadly available for costs of the Preserve.

1. *Dark Skies* program co-hosting proposal. There is nothing to report. We have received no update from the KCCC-WG sub-group planning the events.

**V. New Business.**

1. Earth Day Clean-Up Day. Earth Day this year is Monday, April 22. Henry and Leslie will take the lead on organizing a Clean-Up Day for a Saturday close to that date, preferably April 20, second choice April 28. Henry will consult with Pennie Alley on choice of date, to be sure it does not conflict with other plans for Gilford Butler. He proposes to reach out through the schools to encourage participation of families with children. Plans to be discussed further at our March meeting.

**VI. Correspondence.** None.

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

**VIII. Adjourn.** Without objection, Sondra adjourned the meeting at 5:56 PM.

*STCC approved on April 10, 2024.*