



TOWN OF NEW LONDON, NEW HAMPSHIRE

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CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEETING MINUTES February 17, 2010

PRESENT:

Andy Deegan (Chairman), Vicki Koron, Emma Crane, Sue Clough, Bob Brown, Laura Alexander, Dan Allen, Terry Dancy

ALSO PRESENT:

Bob Crane, Peter Stanley, Judith Guyer-Almstadt (Recording Secretary)

Andy Deegan opened the meeting at 9:00 am.

January 2010 Minutes

Several small errors were brought to the attention of the recording secretary, and once these had been corrected, the Minutes were unanimously approved.

Petitioned Warrant Article 18

Andy began the meeting by starting a discussion about the Board of Selectmen's decision not to recommend the appropriation for \$25,000 to be placed into the Conservation Commission Land Acquisition Fund. An extensive discussion followed, and focused on whether or not the Commission should withdraw their application completely, change the requested sum, or leave things as they are and focus on preparing for the upcoming Town Meeting.

Andy explained the current situation the town's employees were facing. Salary increases didn't cover the increase in health insurance costs. The result was a reduction in salary for the Town's employees. If the Commission decided to stay on course and stick to their goal of \$25,000, he expressed concern about the kind of message this would send.

Terry was in agreement with the \$25,000 fund request. He said the Planning Board had unanimously recommended moving forward with the request, and believed it was still important to save for legitimate objectives, even during bad times. He said the Town's long-term objectives didn't go away just because of a bad economic situation.

Sue said that she had encountered some reluctance while she was collecting petition signatures. People had been reluctant to sign because the Town budget had been reduced at the expense of many of the Town's employees as well as other good projects. She said there were many good projects not being funded this year, not just the Conservation Commission's.

Sue said that the current situation might have something to do with the \$500,000 goal. She said the Commission Members were all in agreement that the last project had been very useful, and protects a beautiful piece of property, however, she didn't feel this had been widely acknowledged by most of the Town. She said since she hadn't been on the Commission at that point, she didn't know all the related

details. She believed it was the price, in particular, that had bothered a lot of people. She said she thought many people felt that there were enough funds available now to put down on a piece of property if one came up. She also realized, however, that the pieces of property that could come up might be much more than that. She said that it was awkward because the Commission members weren't supposed to talk about specific properties they knew would be coming up.

Andy said a difficult situation would be created if that information became public knowledge. The nature of the project would have to be disclosed at that time when Town money would be needed to proceed with the project, and not before.

Laura said it was important to bring attention to the fact that the Commission had reduced the amount by one-half in light of the situation the Town's employee's are facing.

Terry wondered whether anything should be said at all in light of the small amount they were asking for (if they were to decide to move forward). He thought saying nothing would send a stronger message. He said it emphasized the point that this was only ever intended to be a temporary cut, and that in the event they do decide to withdraw the Warrant Article it should be reemphasized that 90% of the Commission is in favor of conservation, i.e., acquisition of property for conservation purposes.

Emma said that they had been through this one year ago at the Budget meetings, and that they had been assured then it would just be for one year. She thought they should leave it up to the voters. There were many positive responses (from the members present) to this suggestion.

Sue spoke about the importance of everyone's participation, i.e., all of the Commission members, not just one spokesperson. She recognized that might be difficult for everyone, but felt strongly that Conservation had to stand and come forth and hopefully find some friends who would also be willing to come forth.

Peter said that speaking clearly about what the issues and problems are helps at least to move things in the right direction. Peter urged the Commission to speak to these issues. He suggested making a list, writing it out, and deciding ahead of time who would say what. He said that someone needed to talk to the Article before the objections began. He felt that only a friend of an Article should be introducing that Article, and therefore, the Board of Selectmen shouldn't be permitted to say anything. Also, he felt that this should be discussed with the moderator (Cotton Cleveland) in advance.

Andy asked, at that point, what the members thought. He said they would have to make a decision first before discussing the specifics of the Town Meeting.

Terry said he would be more supportive of moving forward with the Article as it now stands provided there was an adequate presentation, i.e., doing what Peter suggested. He thought the atmosphere would change completely with respect to the audience. He said he thought the Commission should make it clear (to the Town) it might be more appropriate to withdraw the Article in these tough times, but that saving was such an important part of a reasonable, long-term plan for the Town. The voters of the Town had always been so supportive of conservation that the Commission felt they would not be doing their duty to the town unless they continued to ask for this money despite tough times.

Emma didn't think it was a good idea to mention the fact that the Commission had ever even considered withdrawing the Article.

Bob B. said the increase in insurance costs was affecting many people, and not unique to the Town of New London. He said withdrawing the Article would make people question whether or not the money had ever really been needed. He agreed with Emma, and thought the voters should decide.

Emma said she had encountered a lot of enthusiasm while she was out collecting signatures.

Andy summarized the discussion thus far, and said it sounded like the members had decided to go forward, stay the course, and talk a lot at the town meeting. He said that he had sent an email stating that he didn't believe he should do the presenting at the Town Meeting due to the fact that he had only been part of the Commission for two years. He didn't feel that he had gained the respect of some of the members of the Commission. He said that he thought it would be more effective if someone else spoke at the Town Meeting.

Peter suggested it should be someone who was comfortable doing it. He felt a statement should be drafted to ensure all points were being covered. He said that whoever speaks should either speak freely or read the statement, and that it shouldn't last longer than 3-4 minutes.

Andy said he is comfortable writing up the points. Sue said she would be happy to be part of the team who presents, but didn't want to be standing alone. Laura suggested that she did the introduction piece. Sue said she thought the whole Commission should be up front during the presentation so people know who's on the Conservation Commission. Each member would then be responsible for answering specific questions. Sue was not sure if Cotton would approve the proposed approach.

Peter said he felt that time would be the issue. He felt there wasn't always enough time allotted for the presentation of Articles even though there should be. He definitely recommended approaching Cotton ahead of time. He stressed the importance of ensuring the motion was presented by a friend of the motion. He said since both the Board of Selectmen and the Budget Committee were opposed to the Article, it should be presented by a member of the Conservation Commission (or more typically presented by the first name on the petition).

Vicki talked about a previous project (the Clark property). She said the presentation had been a group effort, and that almost everyone had had a chance to speak (each one supported specific items or ideas). It worked very well, and was supported by an overwhelming majority.

Laura said that she had worked on the last presentation. Peter stated that he felt the visual presentation was very important, and should at least present what the Commission had last got, as well as briefly talk about what it had become. He also suggested talking about the Phillips property if they needed an example of a potential project. He didn't think anyone was going to be there that had anything to do with it. He said that property would become available in the very near future, and conceivable cost way more than what the Commission has.

Terry said it was not public knowledge although it's on the list for Lake Sunapee Protective Association and land preservation.

Sue added that this would be an important subject to bring up in connection with the presentation. She said that groups like the Ausbon Sargent Land Preservation Trust and Lake Sunapee Protective Association needed help from the Town (that it had to be a cooperative effort). She added that it was the Town people who were going to benefit the most from their efforts, and should be prepared to contribute.

Sue said that there were many places being used all the time by people who had no idea how it had got there—it had got there not only because the Conservation Commission had been looking far enough ahead, but also because Town support had been available, and had always been available.

Sue didn't think that a vote by the Town in support of the funds was going to be as easy as in the past due to the current economic situation, as well as due to the other points made by Peter earlier in the meeting.

Dan said that it was the reality everyone was now facing whether real or perceived.

In light of the controversial feedback received with regard to the way the Clark property was handled, Peter felt it would be important to emphasize the quality of the Commission's projects, i.e., both Ausbon Sargent and the state were very much involved in the Low Plain project, and also emphasize the kind of land that's being acquired. Also, he said, rather than pointing out other examples of what happens when you don't save, he recommended a focus on the advantages of saving, being prepared for a capital investment, and the impact on the tax rate.

Vicki brought up a question that came up while she was out petitioning. She indicated that several people had asked why Ausbon Sargent didn't buy the land. She said there appeared to be a general misunderstanding among the Town's people, and that maybe some of these points could be clarified. Sue agreed, and thought it might come up in the Town meeting, and should be anticipated.

Andy suggested creating a list of possible questions with the appropriate responses.

Peter said that it should be stressed that the Commission wasn't in a position to change the funding for the Town employees, but that the Commission did feel the responsible thing to do was to keep moving in the direction of saving for these key pieces of land. Terry added that the Commission was charged by the Town for preserving the long-term quality of life in the town.

Peter thought there might be some people that really didn't understand how the tax rate would be impacted if the voters passed the Article. He explained that the monies were put in a fund, not expended, and the decision whether or not to spend it was made at a later date. And the town would have to vote on it first. The money wasn't being spent, but the Town is taxing for it. Sue said people were worried about the immediate tax impact.

Peter said that the whole concept of saving had been woven into our tax rate for many years now, and that it made it worse down the road if you abruptly stopped doing that for a short time reduction or holding of the tax rate. You might end up not being able to do something that is really important.

Peter said he would start off by saying that there was no contribution to the fund last year with the agreement it would be put back this year. And now one year later there is no contribution to this fund. The Budget Committee was responsible for the decisions made regarding the Town's employees. In fact they have received are getting a 1,5% increase in pay.

Peter recommended Bob B. be the designated speaker at the Town Meeting. He said Bob B. had the projection and presence that would work well. He speaks clearly, has a bold voice, announces well, and if he was willing, he'd be a good person to speak to the group. Sue added that he would be a new presence. Bob B. said he would be comfortable doing it as long as he had a good script.

Vicki went over some of the points she felt should be covered, i.e., savings, the kind of land, the responsibilities of the conservation members, etc. Peter said the visual presentation would have to be integrated into Jessie's presentation, and that she would be the only one with a projector there.

Peter said some slides on the Clark Pond piece already existed. Andy said he felt it was important for the presentation to show that the properties are being used, i.e., cross-country ski tracks at Clark Pond (our

newest property), Low Plain. Laura added it would be important to stress the partnership involved in Low Plain.

Peter said also the land on Arbon. The Commission was aware of what's happening there, i.e., if it ends up being developed someone is going to have a road right through the middle of the Phillips preserve. He said that nobody would want that. It should be used as an example including picture, etc. He said he would try to find one, or if else he would get a digital area photograph.

The suggestion was made to meet as a subcommittee. In the meantime, it was agreed that everyone would contribute by sending an email to Andy stating the arguments/counterarguments to the Commission's position. Andy would compile it into one document, and resend to all members for review. Peter offered his help with doing any required research (finding facts and figures).

The subcommittee agreed to meet on Friday, February 26, 2010 at 9:00 a.m. at the Town Offices. Minutes will have to be taken. Judith agreed to take them. Andy will advise Jessie.

Milfoil Monitoring

Andy received a report from LSPA regarding the amount spent for milfoil monitoring last year. Bob B. asked Vicki to discuss the letter Jessie had sent out to the Lake Association (2007). Vicki reported that Terry, Bob B. and she had gone over the letter, and made a few small changes: a date change, a comment was added that the money was subject to Town Meeting, and a deadline of April 16, 2010 was set for the applications (so the Commission could review them at their meeting on April 21, 2010). The revised letter had yet to be shown to Jessie. The letter wouldn't be going out until after the Town Meeting. If the members wanted to review the applications beforehand, copies would have to be made.

Terry pointed out that the original letter included an eight-point list that was well worded and still valid. Vicki added that they did not feel harsh wording with regard to deadlines was necessary. Vicki said she would submit the revised letter to Jessie.

Trees

Bob B. shared a thought he'd had about trees. Bob said he ordered trees from the state nursery every year. He wanted to know if there was anything the Commission could do with regard to trees whether it be planting, education for school kids, or some worthwhile project. He said he had exchanged some emails with Laura who had had some ideas. He also said he had approached Jessie to find out the name of the tree warden who he had also spoken to in the meantime.

Laura said that they had been thinking about trees on their campus too, and were considering putting in a little nursery with the intent of growing some native species up that they would be able to put in different places on campus when they wanted to replace the trees that are dying or the ones they want to take out. She said they thought it would be exciting to get involved in the American chestnut project where they were working to come up with a disease-resistant American chestnut. She did not feel the project was advanced enough at this point to become involved, but it was something to think about down the road. Another idea Laura had was to launch a model project which involve convincing someone to get rid of several of the "invasives" in town (like Norway maples) and replace them with something native. If a project like that got good publicity, it would encourage others to do the same thing. She said there were many Norway maples in town. Examples of natives: Sugar Maples, Red Maples or Silver Maples (they are several beautiful ones in town).

Most of the members supported the idea. Bob B. said that the tree warden worked closely with Richard. He plants and organizes planting, and is open to any ideas, and encouraged the Commission to come forward if they knew of any places where trees needed to be replace. Bob B. said he had asked him for

any ideas he might have as far as tree projects go. He suggested two things: setting up a seedling bed somewhere where you could grow young trees into something large enough to transplant. The other idea was about chestnuts. Currently there are at least two locations in Town where there are thriving chestnut trees. One of these trees seeds into a garden, and subsequently picked up and thrown away.

Bob B. said that if the Commission wanted to do a project like this, a piece of land with decent soil would have to be found. The cost of the seedlings in small quantities are about \$1 a piece. Bob B. said the order would have to be placed soon. He asked the group if anyone had any idea with regard to an appropriate piece of land. He thought Richard Lee would be a good person to ask.

Peter said they could look to conserved land (the Town wouldn't have to own it necessarily), and ask for a long-term agreement where it would be permissible by the terms of easement to actually plant them. It would have to be somewhere where you could get in there and do the maintenance. Also, he said there must be a commitment to the project. The members talked about the requirements of the required land, and several suggestions were made as to possible locations. Sue said she there is a suitable piece of land on her property, and she would discuss it with her husband. In the meantime, Bob B. said he would look at other easement properties. Sue said she would encouraged the Commission to consider purchasing the appropriate land. In the meantime, she suggested finding temporary places for the project for a year, until a definite place had been found. Bob B. said it would not be good for the trees to be moved too often. He suggested waiting until the plan had been finalized and a permanent solution found.

Laura asked if there was a plan to take down any trees before they something was available to replace it with. Bob B. said the tree warden had seemed receptive to new plantings. Laura said the Commission needed to find out who had the authority to give permission to cut down the trees. Bob B. said it would be a joint decision between Richard and himself. Another way of planting is to wait to pull down the old trees, until the new trees planted next to them had achieved a certain age/height.

Trails

Dan said that he and Mark had been working on replacing a bridge on sargent brook. A couple of 16 ft planks have to be purchased. He said it wouldn't happen until the snow melts. Also, three big rocks have been moved from the Norman trail (one of them was at least 2500 lbs). He said the only way to get a smooth trail was to move rocks. He hopes to have the wheelchair accessible trail ready soon. Two months ago, Dan reported that he had groomed only half way, and that in the meantime he'd opened up the trail and was expecting to have it groomed all the way to the pond today. He said it was important to let people know it's there, and asked Bob B. to make a sign. Dan also said he had asked Richard Lee for his mini blaster (\$1800 worth of equipment). It puts a charge in with a drill hole. He said even though it sounded like blaster, it was minor enough that you didn't need a license. Apparently it has the capacity to break up a 10000 lb rock. Dan said he wanted to use/planned to use the blaster with the trail work. The problem was acquiring the charges. They cost \$230 for 100. Dan wanted permission to buy the charges as well as the drills (\$75). Andy gave him the approval to do that.

Dan brought up the liability problem with the ski trail as it's not patrolled. He said he had ask Bob B. to make a sign "Ski at your own risk, trail not patrolled". He said he had also put up several blue trail markers indicating that it was a ski trail. Terry added that Mark Vernon was still working on the forest trail, and had asked him (Terry) to make more replacement signs.

Other business

Andy said that he had received John Hay National Wildlife Refuge Comprehensive Conservation Planning Update. The Draft Plan is available for public comment, and comments will be accepted through March 31, 2010. The next public meeting will take place on February 24, 2010 from 7pm to 9pm at the

Newbury Town building. Terry informed the members that the John Hay website offered a list of interesting publications.

Laura moved that the Commission renew their Lake Sunapee Protective Association membership. All members were in favor.

Laura said that a student group had asked for time in the March 17th meeting. It was agreed that the group will come at the beginning of the meeting.

Terry said that the Sunapee Watershed Interest Project had a series of meetings (public work sessions) coming up: Feb. 17, March 31, and April 21 from 6:30-8:15 p.m. at the LSPA office. Peter told Terry that these meetings were scheduled on dates when the Regional Planning Commission meets, and therefore he would be unable to attend. Terry said he would bring it to their attention.

Peter said that he had gone to Low Plain and did the wood duck boxes (nobody else showed up). Out of 11 there was one wood duck nest. There were five Hooded Merganser nests, two abandoned hooded Merganser nests, and three empty nests. The most successful nests were the ones were over water.

Peter also showed the members a lot owned by the Kroll family wedged between I89 and Phillips Preserve. He still needs to get the specifics, but at the very least, the Krolls own the right of way that has no access to it, and they may even own the triangle above it. Peter had approached the family before Kroll Senior died a few years ago about working something out to get what they own rolled into Town land. He said the discussions had never gone anywhere, and now that Kroll Senior was gone he thought it might be a good time to begin to talk to the boys to see what's possible (if nothing else then an acquisition). He said the land was stuck in the middle of land the Town owns, and that it would be nice to have the whole parcel. It said it would be a potential acquisition, and would have expenses associated with it (Title and Deed issues) whether it was bought or given to the Town as a gift. He didn't think the value would be high won't as there is no right of way to it. Peter thought it was something that could be budgeted out of the capital reserves. He said that if everyone were in agreement, he would make some initial "overtures" although he's not a member of the Conservation Commission, and he would not be acting in his capacity as Zoning Administrator, just as a concerned citizen. Peter asked if anyone from the Commission would be willing to support him. Sue volunteered.

The motion to adjourn the meeting was made by Laura at 10:58, and seconded by Bob B.

Respectfully submitted,

Judith Guyer-Almstadt
Recording Secretary