



Town of Merrimack, New Hampshire

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Planning - Zoning - Economic Development - Conservation

MERRIMACK CONSERVATION COMMISSION

MARCH 2, 2020

MEETING MINUTES

A regular meeting of the Merrimack Conservation Commission was held on Monday, March 2, 2020 at 6:30 p.m. in the Merrimack Memorial Conference Room.

Matt Caron, Chair, presided:

Members of the Commission Present: Steven Perkins, Vice Chair
Gina Rosati, Secretary
Michael Boisvert
Cynthia Glenn (arrived at 6:36 p.m.)
Gage Perry
Eric Starr, Alternate Member
Michael Swisher, Alternate member
Tim Tenhave, Alternate Member

Members of the Commission Absent: Councilor Peter Albert

Also in Attendance: Don Laliberte, Horse Hill Nature Preserve Subcommittee (HHNP)
Peter Mikolajczuk, Chair, HHNP
Marc Gagnon, 10 Danforth Road
Mike Drouin, 3 Drouin Way

Chair Caron designated Michael Swisher to sit in for Cynthia Glenn and Eric Starr for Councilor Albert.

PUBLIC COMMENT

Don Laliberte, Horse Hill Nature Preserve Subcommittee (HHNP)

Spoke in support of appointing Marc Gagnon as a member of the HHNP. Marc is recently retired, and has a vision of being able to help in various capacities. He is an individual who, while utilizing the trails, pays attention to what needs to be addressed, and does not hesitate to put the work in.

Mr. Laliberte commented, at this point, a lot of the bridges in the HHNP are 10⁺ years of age. The subcommittee is having to apply the 3 Rs (repair, rebuilt, or replace). Marc is knowledgeable in construction and has already been a big help having that knowledge as well as the tools and materials needed.

PUBLIC HEARINGS - None

APPOINTMENTS - None

STATUTORY/ADVISORY BUSINESS - None

NEW BUSINESS

- Peter Mikolajczuk – Chair, Horse Hill Nature Preserve Subcommittee
 - HHNP 2019 debriefing and 2020 goals

The subcommittee identified its goals understanding the need for them to encompass safety, education, communication, and outreach with the Town.

Major beaver activity on Lastowka Pond in 2019 required the closure of trails for safety reasons. This resulted in educational opportunities; an expert was brought in to identify if the behavior witnessed was typical. Mr. Mikolajczuk thanked the Town and members of the subcommittee for the assistance provided in removal of trees that posed a safety hazard.

On the Quarry Trail, a new bridge was constructed, and a large, existing boardwalk was re-decked. A boardwalk on the Loop Trail by Watanic Bowman was repaired.

Tim Adams led a number of nature walks. He caught and put an end to some illegal trail building.

Bruce Peterson and Don Laliberte have been instrumental in repair of the current bridges. Given their age and the materials used during construction, repairs are becoming necessary.

Lynne Wenz has been instrumental in the gardens and upkeep of the Amherst Road parking lot; putting in native species. Tim Adams has gone after invasive species. Mr. Mikolajczuk has been working with the Watanic Bowman. They do a number of archery activities in the area. Work continues to maintain an open line of communication, and on signage at entrances.

An increase has been seen in the number of horses utilizing the property. This brings to light the need for the bridges to be safe for human and animal travel. A number of mountain bike demos have occurred. They are well versed in that activity.

Moving Forward

Following the loss of the Watanic Bowman clubhouse, discussions ensued relative to security. There is the desire to mark boundaries; focus on the boundary lines of the HHNP ensuring placement of proper signage.

Bridges are a big concern; constructing to increase useful life. The subcommittee discussed the naming of bridges. Each will be given an I.D., e.g., L for Loop Trail, etc. followed by post numbers and then numbering the bridge itself.

- Project funding – Watanic Bowman parking area upgrade

Representatives of Watanic Bowman attended the last meeting of the subcommittee to discuss the parking lot. There exists a verbal agreement whereby there are 10 parking spaces in their parking lot, which is not

lit. There had been two signs denoting the area of the 10 spaces. One has disappeared and the other is faded. Proposed is placement of two new signs on 4 x 4s, with LED solar powered lights (motion sensing). A quote for material was provided along with the request for approval of a budget not to exceed \$300.00.

Asked about the area that would be illuminated by the lights, Mr. Mikolajczuk responded the lights put out 2,000 lumens (3-head selected), and 120 degrees of coverage.

Mr. Laliberte questioned if the Town is involved in maintenance of the parking lot. Mr. Mikolajczuk stated his understanding the lot is not plowed. The Town will come through and help grade the road on a requested basis, but beyond that, he does not believe it to be maintained by the Town at all.

Asked if the parking area is on Town public land, Mr. Mikolajczuk stated his understanding it is on Watanic Bowman land. Asked if there is a reason why they are not willing to do this, he indicated they do not have the funding.

Commissioner Tenhave stated it to be a negotiated, written agreement having a renewal period.

Chair Caron stated his belief the balance in the HHNP fund is approx. \$500.00.

Commissioner Tenhave commented what was being discussed was an improvement to property not belonging to the Commission/Town. There is the need for a written agreement. The existing agreement should be reviewed. When considering lighting as part of that improvement, a review should be done to ensure there isn't a planning restriction or a process that has to be followed to install lighting. The allocation of funding has to go through the Commission.

Mr. Starr commented on the need to replace the plexiglass in the kiosk noting the cost of that is likely \$100-\$200.

Chairman Caron suggested the existing agreement be reviewed with the Commission and a new agreement/amendment devised to include lighting, etc. Verify whether there are lighting restrictions/requirements, and submit a written proposal to the Commission with a request for funding.

Noted was that the agreement is with the Town. Final approval/negotiation will have to be with the Town, e.g., Town Manager or designee.

- Project funding – HHNP Loop Trail bridge improvements

With the goal of bridge improvements, the first 2 bridges the subcommittee wishes to focus on are in the area of Abbey Road and the Loop Trail. The intent is to re-deck the Abbey Lane Bridge. Mr. Gagnon has provided a scope of work; remove/replace decking with 24 new pressure-treated 4 x 6 x 5' timbers (spaced to allow water to pass through). The 3 stringers located underneath are in pretty good shape. They will be preserved with the use of aluminum flashing as a rain cap. Both approaches will be dug out and headboards put down to protect the end grain of the stringers. The areas will be backfilled and regraded with gravel. From there, the curbing on either side will be replaced (at higher height). Running planks will be added (go down middle and act as wear layer to protect the decking). Will help with horse hoofs or snowmobile tracks on the bridge. It will be anchored down with timber locking screws.

The second project is down Loop Trail towards White Pine Swamp. The three-section plank walk is falling apart. Project scope would remove the entire structure, lay out a new alignment with mud sills and reattach

some 30” pressure treated planking with timber locking screws.

The anticipated cost for the combined project is not to exceed \$900.00. There is a small stockpile of pressure treated wood that will be able to be incorporated into the project. Volunteers have been identified.

Commissioner Perry suggested he visit Reedy Ferry Lumber commenting on the support they have provided in the past for projects that benefit the community.

Asked if the plank walk would be similar to existing; simply more robust, Marc Gagnon commented on the sharp turns with the existing walk and the difficulty for mountain bikes to stay on a narrow plank with a sharp turn. Users are not using it, which is causing erosion. He suggested there is enough room to straighten out the turns. The walk will be wider and much straighter.

Commissioner Swisher questioned whether horses could traverse the walk. Mr. Gagnon commented horses will naturally walk to the side of something like that. The wet area is seasonal.

Mr. Gagnon commented on future bridges being snowmobile and horse ready. Having done research on U.S. Forest Service Guidelines, he noted the bridges we have are close to the design standards cited. There is some detail that is not right, e.g., plank spacing, headwalls, etc. As the bridges are addressed, they will be brought up to U.S. Forest Service standards.

**MOTION BY COMMISSIONER PERRY TO APPROVE THE BRIDGE PROPOSAL FOR
BRIDGES 1 AND 2 IN AN AMOUNT NOT TO EXCEED NINE HUNDRED DOLLARS (\$900.00).
SOURCE OF FUNDING IS FUND 53
MOTION SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER BOISVERT
MOTION CARRIED
7-0-0**

- Marc Gagnon – Horse Hill Nature Preserve Subcommittee

Mr. Gagnon remarked he has resided at Danforth Road for 30 years. He’s been walking the property since prior to the Town’s ownership. He wishes to participate in the preservation/maintenance of the property. He has been a hiker, biker, and snowmobiler. He is mostly retired, and has the time to commit. He spoke of an uptick in use over the past few years, and his interest in preserving and protecting the asset.

Commissioner Perry commented on having worked with Mr. Gagnon on a professional level, and of what a great asset he will be to the subcommittee.

Although it was noted that Sharon Hickey has expressed a desire to move from a full member to an alternate member, that action has not yet taken place (July 31, 2020). Chair Caron suggested the motion could be to appoint Mr. Gagnon as an alternate member, and, in July, that he be moved to a full member.

**MOTION BY CHAIR CARON TO APPOINT MARC GAGNON AS AN ALTERNATE MEMBER
OF THE HORSE HILL NATURE PRESERVE SUB-COMMITTEE FOR A TERM TO EXPIRE
JULY 31, 2021
MOTION SECONDED BY COMMISSIONER PERRY
MOTION CARRIED
7-0-0**

- Discuss salt mitigation presentation from Emery & Garrett made to the Town Council

Commissioner Rosati commented based on the information provided, the Commission is doing everything it can be doing to stay compliant. A lot of the discussion related to the salt from the highway that is getting into the waterways.

Commissioner Boisvert commented it appears the Merrimack Village District wells that are having the most trouble are those located in the south where commercial parking lots are located. Commissioner Rosati commented on learning during the meeting that salt is not utilized at the outlets. Commissioner Perry commented the cars in the parking lots are coming off the highways (road wash sits on the cars). Chair Caron remarked because Continental Boulevard is a State maintained highway, when the State trucks are going down the F.E. Everett Turnpike three wide, they will get off exit 10, do Continental Boulevard top to bottom, and then get back on and do exit 10 again.

Commissioner Boisvert questioned if the Town intends to discuss the issue of salt with the State.

Commissioner Swisher questioned if mention was made of whether Nashua/Pennichuck is experiencing any of the same problems of high salt levels. Commissioner Boisvert did not recollect any mention of that.

OLD BUSINESS

- ARM Fund Grant: Top 8 properties to consider

As the analysis provided by GZA GeoEnvironmental, Inc. (GZA) was not readily available for review, the Commission tabled the item until its next regularly scheduled meeting.

- Update Maps with Safety Zones

Having not received any feedback on the item, and in the absence of Councilor Albert, the item was tabled until the next regularly scheduled meeting.

- Educating Local Students about Conservation – Eric Starr

Commissioner Starr commented on a previous discussion of starting a new educational program. He had a college professor who taught general biology/conservation biology and aquatic ecology. For his classes they would go out to Francistown Land Trust lands, and perform general studies to learn the basics of conservation biology. Commissioner Starr commented he always wanted to convert those ideas into a high school program. He reached out to his former professor via email, and has taken his responses and compiled a summary, which was included with the agenda packet.

In his request, he asked for something that could be useful to the Town and students, simple enough for high school students to understand, and financially feasible.

The first thing listed was tracking transects, which is when you take random coordinates on a property and go in a direction of about 10 meters and record everything in that section. The purpose is if doing that study enough, eventually you get a really good idea of the makeup of a forest. You are identifying species and learning the basics of scientific experimenting. Documenting vernal pools is something Commissioner Starr indicated he does not have much study of in the field for his job. That is really what he does in the lab. The information provided identified several opportunities for studies.

One suggestion was for properties with fields about 15 acres or more in regard to benefits to Bobolinks, e.g., delaying of mowing a hayfield until August 1st would give time for bobolinks to raise and fledge their broods that would otherwise suffer over 90% mortality from mowing.

Commissioner Starr stated this is something he has always been interested in doing. He works as a scientist now. He is not a former teacher, but is a former educator at various places. He has been testing out some of the studies on a property located behind his home (Indian Rock open space). His idea was that of an internship program.

When he was in middle school the Conservation Commission conducted walks in Grater Woods. He was thinking of something more specialized. It would involve less students, and be geared more toward high school students with an interest in conservation biology. The student could turn it into a report that could be cited as a scientific study in college applications.

Commissioner Starr questioned the will of the Commission relative to conducting such a program, whether it would be year-round or during the summer months, if it could be started this year or would be best planned for the start of the next school year, etc. He stated an interest in teaching. He does not believe there to be the need for there to be much in the way of cost; depending on the direction the Commission wished to take.

Commissioner Swisher suggested there may be citizen scientists that may have an interest in participating. Commissioner Starr commented on the UNH Cooperative Extension Nature Groupie program. There is a whole section of the volunteer things that are citizen science oriented. The educational opportunities could be geared towards high school students or could be more generalized.

Commissioner Starr stated his intent to go through the properties on his own over the next year or so and conduct the studies himself to see how many people would be needed, e.g., is it a 1 or 20 person job, and how he could best bring these activities to Merrimack.

Commissioner Perry commented the documentation of vernal pools is something the Commission has been asked to do. Moosewood Ecological has done a lot of studies for the Commission and has conducted the vernal pool parties. The number of vernal pools within Grater Woods is great. Commissioner Tenhave stated his belief Moosewood Ecological is doing that work now in Grater Woods.

Commissioner Rosati asked, and was informed, if looking to have this as a curricular change, it would have to be coordinated with the School District. Commissioner Perry commented the Commission went after something like this with one of the teachers in the Biology Department in the past, but, at the time, it was understood an entire lesson plan would have to be developed and approved. Commissioner Starr spoke of being uncertain of the amount of time commitment required, which is another reason he would like to first conduct some of the studies on his own. Commissioner Starr was acceptable to the idea, information, and his contact information being shared with members of the School Board.

- New Hampshire Association of Conservation Commissions (NHACC) survey

The Commission reviewed the questions included in the survey received from the NHACC, and identified the collective responses. Commissioner Rosati will complete the survey with the responses provided and submit.

OTHER BUSINESS

1. Discussion on communications or correspondence received concerning regulated Commission activities and any issues concerning Commission managed lands.
2. Sub-Committee Updates

Commissioner Tenhave noted the Commission is tentatively scheduled to appear before the Town Council on April 23rd to discuss updates to Chapter 111. An April meeting date was requested so that the new sitting Council could participate in the discussion.

Grater Woods

The Grater Woods Sub-committee will meet on March 31st.

Wildcat Falls

Commissioner Rosati commented she is not expecting the March 9th moonlight snowshoe walk will take place.

PRESENTATION OF THE MINUTES

Merrimack Conservation Commission. [February 10, 2020](#)

MOTION BY COMMISSIONER ROSATI TO ACCEPT, AS PRESENTED

MOTION SECONDED BY CHAIR CARON

MOTION CARRIED

5-0-2

Vice Chair Perkins and Commissioner Swisher Abstained

PUBLIC COMMENT

Mike Drouin, 3 Drouin Way

Spoke of having just moved to Town. When returning from the Navy he resided in Hudson and joined the Hudson Conservation Commission. Now residing in Merrimack, he is interested in becoming involved in Town properties. He questioned if, like in Hudson, there is the need to educate residents on the availability of the properties, which was done through monthly hikes on the various properties.

Chair Caron stated the Commission does not host a hike series; however, there are a lot of meet up groups that utilize the properties. The properties in Merrimack are very well utilized. Because of the level of traffic, amount and condition of trails, and the maps and information made available, the properties are user friendly.

Asked if he would like to start up such a group, Mr. Drouin stated he has time available, and would like to become involved. Commissioner Perry spoke of the various subcommittees and meet up groups that exist in Town. He was open to the idea of a scheduled walk series.

The Commission made Mr. Drouin aware of the Sklar Waterfront Park property, and efforts to create a subcommittee for that parcel. There is also the need for membership on subcommittees for the Wasserman Conservation Area as well as Fields Farm. Asked if he has a favorite property, Mr. Drouin commented he

has just gotten settled into his new home. He is happy to help in any way he can. He provided his contact information.

COMMISSIONER COMMENTS

Vice Chair Perkins and Commissioner Boisvert will meet with Conservation Officer Shawn MacFadzen at the Sklar Waterfront property. He has expressed an interest in collecting feedback and tailoring OHRV enforcement. He is extremely familiar with the property.

Commissioner Rosati and Commissioner Glenn were in attendance for the Winter Carnival. Commissioner Glenn spoke of the great job Commissioner Rosati did in preparing their display for the carnival. She had available a board displaying maps, a book containing bird information, and a duck box with the plushies. The duck box was a big hit. The event was well attended.

Commissioner Tenhave noted he would likely be unable to attend the next meeting.

Commissioner Perry commented on the information received regarding maps. The large signs (16 x 36) are likely too large for what is being sought for the top banner for the kiosks. If the signs are made narrower, the font will have to be decreased. It was suggested 7-8" of the top of the kiosk could be utilized as the kiosks in question do not have a great deal of information contained therein; Sklar Waterfront, Wasserman Park. Commissioner Boisvert will identify the dimension of the kiosk at the Sklar property. Also printed were the cover maps with the QR codes.

The Commission has discussed having, on the face of the kiosk, a copy of the cover of the map with the QR code identifying it as a downloadable version of the map.

The suggestion was made that the QR codes could simply be placed on the maps, a copy of which could be placed within the kiosk.

It is believed if QR codes are located within the kiosks, users of the trails will begin to become accustomed to seeing them there, and will notice the codes and the intent if they are later introduced within the trails.

Chair Caron remarked all of the ideas put forth are worthwhile. He suggested the Commission begin with the materials provided for the kiosks. He suggested the QR code could be laminated to the front of the box that holds the maps.

An order will be placed. Quantities will be based on prior orders. The Commission expressed its sincere gratitude to Papergraphics for the continued support.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION BY COMMISSIONER PERRY TO ADJOURN

MOTION SECONDED BY CHAIR CARON

MOTION CARRIED

7-0-0

The March 2, 2020 meeting of the Merrimack Conservation Commission was adjourned at 8:52 p.m.

Submitted by Dawn MacMillan