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**Town of Grantham
Grantham Conservation Commission**

**MEETING MINUTES
May 20, 2013**

Chairman Richard L. Hocker called the Grantham Conservation Commission to order on Monday, May 20, 2013 at 7:08 p.m. The meeting was held in the Jerry Whitney Memorial Room at Grantham Town Hall located at 300 Route 10 South in Grantham, NH.

Present: Chairman Richard (Dick) Hocker; Sheridan Brown; Susan Buchanan; Connie Howard; Lindsey Lefebvre; Joseph Watts (Alternate); David Wood (Alternate); and Caroline Hoen (Clerk)

Absent: None

Members of the Public: Jeremy Turner

ADMINISTRATIVE

Approval of Minutes for 18 March, 2013 Meeting

Chair Hocker asked the Commission members if there were any additions, corrections, or modifications to the draft minutes for the March 18, 2013 meeting. Clerk Hoen reported that Merle Schotanus, prior to his resignation from the Commission at the end of March, 2013, had requested the following corrections: page 4, delete the first full paragraph in its entirety; in the second full paragraph (wording for the motion), middle of line 1, delete the words “as amended”; in the 3rd full paragraph, middle of line 7 after the word “proposal” delete the comma and insert the word “and”; and at the end of line 11, delete the words “and candidate list”.

With no further corrections suggested, a motion was made by Wood to approve and accept the March 18, 2013 Minutes as amended; second by Lefebvre. There being no further discussion, the motion was put to a vote.

Unanimously Approved & Accepted

NEW BUSINESS

Town Forest Management

Chair Hocker noted that it is the responsibility of the Commission to oversee the Town Forest which includes the thirty-eight (38) acre Smith Lot plus an additional four hundred and thirty-eight (438) acres in the Four Corners section of Grantham. Both can be accessed from Miller Pond Road. To help the Commission assess the advisability of instituting management activities in these wooded areas, he recognized Jeremy Turner, a professional forester and former Conservation Commissioner with extensive knowledge of these properties. The Town retained Turner’s firm, The Ecosystem Management Co. of New London, to draw up forest management plans for the Smith Lot in 2010 and the larger area in 2007. Hocker said he would forward PDF

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versions of these plans to the Commissioners.

Turner stated that with both properties, the scheduling of timbering activities is tricky because dry conditions are needed with this type of wet “mountain ground” in order to bring in the required trucks and machinery. This is not as much of a consideration during the winter, but the work is more difficult. He also pointed out that both these areas have been compromised by three factors over the last several decades. First, timbering activities have not been properly regulated. These forests have been used as open wood lots without professional oversight and properly timed harvesting. Second, as a result of poor management, the area has been subject to infestations of *saddled prominent*, a forest pest which attacks northern hardwoods in fifteen to twenty year cycles. The last outbreak occurred in the mid-1980's with another one currently overdue. Third, because these properties are at high elevation, they suffered particularly severe damage in the Great Ice Storm of 1998. Given the negative impact of these influences, Turner's management plans prescribe measures to restore the forests. This work has been delayed, however, because access is both difficult and expensive, and because the available timber is of insignificant value and suited only for low quality wood products such as pulp and chip wood. Turner advised, however, that with the economy beginning to turn around, this could be a good time to consider cost neutral timbering activities that would be beneficial to the health of the forests. He suggested that this summer would be appropriate for beginning to implement the management plans which are based on comprehensive data collection and Turner's personal oversight of execution. Stands of trees of similar species and age have been identified and prescriptions for their harvesting laid out. Turner advised starting slowly with just a few stands before expanding into the wider area at some future date. He noted that publicly held land has special considerations that must be taken into account, including recreational and wildlife factors and potential disturbance to the public. He mentioned that he generally conducts public education sessions before this kind of commercial harvesting work begins, so that the public can be made fully aware of what is involved.

Hocker raised the issue of the over-growth of white pine stands on the Smith Lot. Turner recommended that, at a minimum, the Town do some cutting this winter to thin out some of these areas. Though there would be almost no value in wood products taken from this type of over-growth, a cutting program would be of biological and ecological benefit, allowing the return of other plants and trees, such as dogwood and apple, which had once flourished in these areas. In terms of the restoration of landscape and wildlife habitat, a very robust upland meadow environment could be recreated. Howard recalled that the Smith Lot used to be a farm with apple orchards. Turner suggested that this smaller area would also represent a manageable project for the Town to take on this summer, depending on weather conditions.

Wood raised the question of cost to the Town of such harvesting projects. Turner assured the Commission that he would bring in high quality operators who would conduct timbering activities according to the management plan and under the condition that no out-of-pocket expenses would accrue to the Town. He also mentioned that a further advantage to the Town was that access road construction could be included as part of the wider job. The profit to the operator from the sale of the timber would offset costs.

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Turner made the point that organizing for forest work takes time and that the optimal timbering season is summer. He advised that decisions be made quickly as to what sort of forest management activity the Town wishes to initiate. He requested that the Commission get back to him promptly so that he could put together a forestry service agreement and begin to line up operators and complete other organizational tasks. It was agreed that Watts would serve as the Commission's point person in this effort. If agreement to proceed is reached, Turner offered to do an on-site education session for interested parties.

OTHER BUSINESS

Conservation Commission Finances

Hocker asked that the Commission consider two budgetary issues. First, he pointed out that the Commission's July 1, 2012 to June 30, 2013 budget had allocated \$1,200.00 for secretarial services but that this amount had almost been depleted with another month remaining in this fiscal year. The impending shortfall would require a transfer of funds into the Operating Account from one of the Commission's other accounts. Hocker reported that the Commission has \$25,000 in its Current Use Account which is funded exclusively by penalty fees levied against property owners who wish to cancel their "Current Use" agreements with the Town. These agreements provide tax advantages to the owner along with some use restrictions. Hocker asked that the Commission allocate \$500.00 from the Current Use Account to the Conservation/Clerk line item of its operating budget.

Second, Hocker introduced a request from the Select Board that the Commission provide \$3,000.00 to fund secretarial support for the new Open Spaces Inventory initiative. The Selectmen have agreed to oversee this project at the Commission's suggestion. Watts, however, stated that it was his understanding that the Selectmen had in fact finally agreed to fund these services and Wood offered the opinion that if the Selectmen were unwilling, the obligation should fall to the Planning Board rather than the Conservation Commission. Hocker recommended that the Commissioners read the minutes of the May 8, 2013 Select Board meeting and that further discussion of this question be postponed until final clarification of the Selectmen's position could be obtained.

A motion was made by Watts to transfer the amount of \$500.00 from the Commission's Current Use Account into its Operations Account to cover the Commission's secretarial service costs; second by Buchanan. There being no further discussion, the motion was put to a vote.

Unanimously Approved & Accepted

Planning for Conservation

Wetlands Inventory and Protection Program

Hocker noted that with regard to the Wetlands program, there remained the task of creating a wetlands conservation overlay district to be based on the wetlands map developed by the Commission and adopted by the voters at the March 2013 Town Meeting. Hocker stated that ultimately this task is the responsibility of the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA), with possible input from the Conservation Commission, and that he would be meeting with Conrad Frey, Chair of the ZBA to get the process started. In answer to a question from Buchanan as to the purpose and nature of the overlay, Hocker stated that he was not yet sure exactly what form it would take

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but that it would clarify how and where Town conservation ordinances and state conservation laws would apply in the Town of Grantham. He explained that the overlay is not a map but a detailed account of the specific application of conservation regulations to different wetland areas in the Town.

New Initiatives

Invasive Species Inventory and Eradication

Wood reported that eradication activities had begun on the Heath property in Eastman. He reviewed his plan to work within the framework of Eastman's already active invasives program before instituting education, mapping and eradication activities in the Town as a whole. The pace for rolling out the Commission's program will be deliberately slow, so that the public will have plenty of time to become familiar with its rationale and objectives. It will focus on four species common in Grantham: Japanese knotweed, phragmites, glossy buckthorn and autumn olive. Watts recommended posting pictures of these plants at Town Hall and in other public spaces as an education measure.

Perambulation Status

Wood reported that perambulation activities had been suspended until later in the summer.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Butternut Pond Dam

Hocker apprised the Commissioners that he had received notification from the NH Department of Environmental Services that the NH Fish & Game Department has submitted an application for the removal of the old dam at Butternut Pond. The dam is deemed to be a safety hazard, is leaking and serves no useful purpose in that the body of water it was intended to hold back is now marshland. The local beaver population has apparently assumed responsibility for water containment.

Quabbin-to-Cardigan Partnership (Q2C) Request for Proposals

Hocker reported receiving a request for proposals from the Quabbin-to-Cardigan Partnership and wanted the Commissioners to be aware of this source of potential future funding.

Upper Valley Land Trust Event

Hocker announced that the Upper Valley Land Trust would be holding its Annual Meeting in Hanover on June 5, 2013 starting with activities at 4 p.m. followed by a dinner. The event is open to the public and will celebrate the Trust's conservation activities.

Planning Board Interface

In response to a question from Wood, Hocker reported that no progress had been made on the Selectmen's suggestion that a Conservation Commissioner be appointed as a non-voting member of the Planning Board. Howard emphasized the importance of a representative of the Commission at least attending the Planning Board's meetings on a consistent basis, as a way of facilitating communication.

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HANDOUTS

None

ADJOURNMENT

Chair Hocker asked if there was any further business. There being none, Brown moved to adjourn the meeting and Watts seconded the motion.

The Commission voted unanimously to adjourn at 8:52 p.m.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Grantham Conservation Commission will be held at 7:00 p.m. on Monday, June 17, 2013, in the Jerry Whitney Memorial Conference Room.

Respectfully submitted,

Caroline Hoen

Caroline Hoen, Clerk