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## Town of Grantham Grantham Conservation Commission

### MEETING MINUTES March 19, 2012

Chairman Richard L. Hocker called the Conservation Commission to order on Monday, March 19, 2012, at 7:00 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; Merle Schotanus; Kristina Burgard; David Wood; Lindsey Dixon (*Alternate*); and Joe Watts (*Alternate*).

**Absent:** Jeremy Turner

**Members of Public:** None

#### ADMINISTRATIVE

##### *Approval of Minutes for 20 February 2012 Meeting*

Chair Hocker asked the Commission members if there were any additions, corrections, or modifications to the draft minutes for the February 20, 2012 meeting. There were none.

*With no corrections suggested, a motion was made by Schotanus to approve and accept the February 20, 2012 Minutes as written; second by Watts. There being no further discussion, the motion was put to a vote.*

*Unanimously Approved & Accepted*

#### NEW BUSINESS

##### Town Meeting Review

Schotanus reported that although the warrant article requesting replacement funds for the Land Preservation Capital Reserve Fund was successfully amended to reduce the amount to cover the unexpectedly expended funds in connection with the mitigation parcel and to have the funds come from surplus, the amended warrant article was narrowly defeated. He felt that some confusion among the voters was created by the erroneous reporting of the available balance, which was reported by the Trustees of Trust Funds as approximately \$140,000 without mentioning the encumbered amount relating to UVLT's purchase of the Hastings lot in connection with the Recreation Park wetlands mitigation. Watts noted that one of Selectmen subsequently acknowledged that funds were committed but not yet withdrawn from the fund, but he feels many in the audience did not hear this. In addition, there was some confusion about whether taking the requested funds from the surplus would create too low of a balance in the surplus. Wood noted that it is still not clear what amount the Town considers to be available in

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this capital reserve fund, and he would like the Selectmen to clarify this at their next meeting. The Commission agreed that this should be done. The Commission discussed ways in which such confusion can be avoided at future Town Meetings, and mechanisms for trying to ensure that voters have access to accurate and complete information prior to voting on warrant articles.

### **Upper Valley Trails Alliance**

Schotanus opened a discussion of Upper Valley Trails Alliance (UVTA), which is an organization promoting trails in the Upper Valley that has been in existence for about 10 years. UVTA is a coalition of trail and land conservation groups in our area, and its members include a number of conservation commissions in both Vermont and New Hampshire. They have a staff of 2.5 FTE's, are very knowledgeable about building and maintaining trails and trail signage, and provide maps and information about trails and related activities. The trails UVTA supports are multi-use – hiking, snowmobile, skiing, etc. They provide several hours of free consulting time to members regarding trail building and maintenance, thereafter charging a relatively nominal fee, and UVTA members may borrow tools for work on trails. Members can also post maps of their trails, list events in an electronic newsletter and calendar, and participate in their “Passport” program, which is a program that promotes reading & hiking by posting pages of a book along a trail. GVS has been participating in the Passport program for about 4-5 years.

Schotanus believes that membership in UVTA would provide the Conservation Commission with many benefits and expert assistance on creating and maintaining trails for the low cost of \$100 per year. He noted that individuals could also join at a cost of \$30 per year. In addition to tangible benefits such as hands-on expertise regarding trails, Schotanus feels that membership will help with networking and keeping more eyes and ears on our trails. The Commission discussed UVTA and what membership would mean for Grantham.

*A motion was made by Schotanus to approve expending \$100 to pay for the Conservation Commission's membership in UVTA; second by Dixon. There being no further discussion, the motion was put to a vote.*

### ***Unanimously Approved***

Chair Hocker indicated he would put the request for the money and take care of paying for a membership. Schotanus indicated that it would be beneficial to have one person on the Commission be the primary contact person with UVTA. Burgard indicated that since many of the benefits of membership relate to public outreach, she is willing to be the liaison with UVTA once the Commission is a member.

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## OTHER BUSINESS

### Land Issues

#### *Cote & Reney Properties*

Schotanus reported that at the end of February he met with Mr. Todd McIntire to discuss the Commission's concerns about the proposals in two of Mr. McIntire's letters to the Commission, in which the offered sections described in the proposal were small pieces of the overall wetland areas on his properties. He noted that Mr. McIntire is still very interested in having conservation outcomes for some parts of his properties, and they discussed various means to accomplish this, including involving third parties such as Ausbon Sargent Land Preservation Trust and NH Fish & Game. Schotanus indicated that he and Mr. McIntire will meet with NH Fish & Game in the next week so that they can look at the sections Mr. McIntire is willing to offer for conservation and determine Fish & Game's interest in these pieces of land.

Schotanus further reported that Mr. McIntire is proceeding with an application for current use for the wetland portions, and possibly some unproductive forest areas that are upland buffers for wetlands, of his properties. As the wetlands on Mr. McIntire's properties are in a high-interest conservation area and play major roles in the ecology of the area and water quality, Schotanus feels it is important that the Commission advise the Selectmen of the conservation value of these portions of Mr. McIntire's properties when they are considering his application for current use. The rest of the Commission concurred.

#### *Smith Lot Activities*

Chair Hocker reported that since the warrant article passed at Town Meeting, the Smith Lot is now part of the Town Forest, and the Conservation Commission is responsible for managing this parcel. He indicated that he and Turner have discussed a potential harvest on this parcel, in particular, in the eastern one-third of the parcel as it is heavily forested with very mature white pine that needs to be thinned to release the understory, and many of these trees have good timber value but are so mature they could be lost in a heavy storm. Burgard asked if there was already a management plan for this lot, and Hocker confirmed that a forest management plan is already in place for this lot and he will forward a copy of the plan to all the Commissioners.

Schotanus noted that creating trails on the Smith lot is of high interest to both the Commission and Upper Valley Land Trust (UVLT), who holds a conservation easement on the property, and a timber harvest on the lot would also help make creating one or more trails easier. Chair Hocker noted that two individuals have expressed an interest to him in volunteering to work on a trail on this lot that would lead to the historical sites further back on the property, including the cellar hole and cemetery. The Commission agreed that a timber harvest would be beneficial to the health of the forest as well as helping to create trails, and UVLT should be contacted to discuss these issues. Chair Hocker indicated that he will contact UVLT to get their thoughts on creating trails and forest management, and in particular, the idea of coordinating timber harvest activities with trail formation.

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### **Planning for Conservation**

#### ***Continued Planning for Wetlands Inventory project – Next steps***

Schotanus asked if there were any updates regarding the Wetlands Inventory project. Watts reported that little had changed from the last meeting with regard to the responses received to the landowner follow-up letters sent out to date. He and Burgard confirmed that the last set of letters should go out by the end of March.

Dixon stated that she was working on scheduling a date for the volunteer refresher training. The Commission discussed various possible dates, the result of which was that Dixon would proceed with scheduling the refresher training sometime the weekend before April 30<sup>th</sup>.

Schotanus indicated that he felt that the confusion created at Town Meeting reinforced his belief that the Commission needs to continue to reach out to the public through various modes of publicity to ensure that people are aware of all aspects of the Wetland Inventory and other Commission activities. Burgard noted that another *Eastman Living* Wetlands Inventory update article will appear in the Spring issue, and she intends to submit another one for the Fall issue once the evaluations are complete. She will also try to get some pieces in the local papers, particularly in late Summer/early Fall. In addition, there are various public walks, talks, and other activities scheduled throughout the Summer, as well as the Clean-Up Day on April 22<sup>nd</sup>, the seedling giveaway at the Garden Club Plant Sale on May 19<sup>th</sup>, and possibly a table/tent with “take away” information at Old Home Day. Moreover, the next e-newsletter will go out in late April/early May, and everything is being publicized through the Grantham News listserv and where appropriate, local newspaper and other community calendars, and our community TV channels.

Schotanus noted that it is important to increase the distribution of the e-Newsletter, and queried whether Burgard had any ideas on how to do this. Burgard stated that there is a mechanism for people to sign-up through the website, and she also brings a sign-up sheet to every Commission walk, talk, event, etc. She indicated that perhaps a short piece could go in the Grantham News listserv to advertise the e-newsletter more broadly.

### **OTHER BUSINESS – Additional Items**

#### ***Perambulation***

Chair Hocker advised that the Selectmen must perform a perambulation of the Town’s boundaries every 7 years. Essentially, the perambulation is done by working with the bordering towns (Enfield, Croydon, Springfield, and Plainfield) to walk the common borders and locate each of the boundary markers, and then a perambulation report is filed with the Secretary of State. The last one was done in 2005 and thus it is once again time for performing the perambulation. Chair Hocker noted that it should be a bit easier to locate the markers during this year’s perambulation GPS coordinates are now recorded for all the markers. In 2005, the Selectmen delegated this responsibility to the Conservation Commission, and Chair Hocker requested that the Selectmen take up this issue at their next meeting. The Commission discussed who would coordinate the perambulation should the Selectmen once again delegate to them, and Wood and

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Watts volunteered to lead and carry out the perambulation should it be delegated to the Commission.

### ***Town Forest Maintenance Fund***

Chair Hocker reported that in keeping with the Commission's discussion at the last meeting, he will be sending a letter to the Selectmen requesting that they open a separate Town Forest Maintenance Fund, and that they transfer into that fund the last known amount attributable to the Town Forest activities, which amount is currently in the Conservation Fund, as well as the proceeds received from this year's harvest in the Town Forest. Schotanus noted that there should be no issue with creating this separate fund, as according to the RSAs and the warrant article establishing the Town Forest, this money should be kept separate from all other money. Burgard noted that this is reinforced by the fact that authorization to expend money from the Town Forest Maintenance Fund can only come from a vote of the legislative body, i.e., Town vote, whereas the Commission has authority to expend money in the Conservation Fund.

Burgard suggested that the Commission also request that this fund be established at NH PDIP where the Commission's other two accounts are located (i.e., the Conservation Fund and the Sherwood Forest Fund), and request that the Selectmen ask the Town Treasurer to arrange for the Commission to receive view only access to the monthly statements for all of these accounts so that the Commission can keep its own account records. She believes that this will provide a better system of "checks and balances". The Commissioners all agreed with this.

### ***Potential Commemorative Plaque on Hastings Parcel***

Chair Hocker informed the Commission that he opened a dialogue with Karen Hastings regarding obtaining and posting a plaque in memory of Wilfred Malcolm Hastings on the newly conserved Hastings lot purchased by UVLT. At Chair Hocker's request, Ms. Hastings provided some thoughts on the type of plaque and suggested language. Burgard stated that she feels it is extremely important for the Commission to recognize and memorialize people's contributions to conserving land in our Town whenever possible. The Commission agreed that it would be desirable to do this if funds permit, subject to approval by UVLT. Watts volunteered to check on prices for various types of plaques and engravings in rock, and report back to the Commission. Chair Hocker will follow-up with UVLT to confirm that placing such a plaque on the Hastings parcel is acceptable to them.

### ***Other***

Chair Hocker noted to the Commission that he is unable to attend the March 22<sup>nd</sup> Ausbon Sargent Conservation Chair meeting, and queried whether anyone could attend in his place. Several indicated that they may be able to attend, and would confirm with Hocker after the meeting. Chair Hocker also reminded the Commission that any one planning to attend the Saving Special Places meeting on April 14, 2012, should register soon to ensure that they are able to attend.

## **HAND OUTS**

None

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### **ADJOURNMENT**

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

*The Commission voted unanimously to adjourn at 9:00 p.m.*

### **NEXT MEETING**

The next meeting will be at 7:00 p.m. on April 16, 2012, in the Jerry Whitney Memorial Conference Room.

Respectfully Submitted,

*Kristina Burgard*

Kristina Burgard  
Grantham Conservation Commission