

APPROVED

;

Town of Grantham Grantham Conservation Commission

MEETING MINUTES NOVEMBER 18, 2013

Chairman Richard L. Hocker called the Grantham Conservation Commission to order on Monday, November 18, 2013 at 7:10 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; and David Wood (Alternate)

Absent: Joseph Watts (Alternate)

ADMINISTRATIVE

Approval of Minutes for 21 October, 2013 Meeting

Chair Hocker asked the Commission members if there were any additions, corrections, or modifications to the draft minutes for the October 21, 2013 meeting.

There being none, a motion was made by Wood to approve and accept the October 21, 2013 Minutes as written; second by Brown. There being no further discussion, the motion was put to a vote.

Unanimously Approved & Accepted

NEW BUSINESS

Shoreland Protection

Review of Eastman Cutting Application Procedures

Chair Hocker expressed concern that the review process for cutting applications from Eastman has become inefficient and cumbersome. The Town, through the Conservation Commission, requires the submission of an application from all property owners wishing to clear trees within fifty (50) feet of Grantham's six (6) ponds, the Sugar River, Sawyer Brook and Skinner Brook. This requirement enables the Town to verify that the restrictions imposed by the New Hampshire Shoreline Protection Act (SPA) are observed. Eastman, however, requires that its residents also submit an internal application to its Environmental Control Committee (ECC). This second, more stringent application imposes an additional layer of requirements, including the submission of a 5-year Forest Management Plan drawn up by a licensed forester. So at the present time, the Commission and the ECC each require a separate application, separate site visit and render separate judgments. The Selectmen are also brought into the mix to give final approval. The result has been a breakdown in the sequencing of reviews, an overlap in procedures and an

APPROVED

inefficient flow of information. Hocker asked Commissioner Wood, a former member of the ECC, to present his ideas for simplifying the process for Eastman residents. Wood explained that, beyond the SPA requirements, the ECC is concerned with erosion risk and adequate screening of buildings from the vantage point of the water. Since the Eastman review process is much more rigorous than that of the Town, he recommended that the Commission consider eliminating the Town application requirement for Eastman residents and instead ask to have the ECC's review and recommendations forwarded directly to the Selectmen for final approval. Lefebvre and Brown expressed concern with the prospect of eliminating the Commission from the process altogether. A discussion followed on ways to structure a new system that would minimize redundancy but include a limited level of Commission oversight. Wood agreed to broach the subject with the ECC to solicit their input and to structure a motion formalizing a new system to present to the Commission at its next meeting.

OTHER BUSINESS

Town Forest Management

Smith Lot Plan

Hocker announced that the Selectmen had approved forester Jeremy Turner's preliminary Forest Services Agreement for management services at the Smith Lot and that the project is in the active planning stage. He passed around a map that Turner had provided showing the Lot's major features and the areas where the work would be focused. He affirmed that skidder trails would be laid out with a view to providing a framework for future recreational trails. He also stated that Turner had offered to lead a walkabout of the various work sites for those interested. Wood suggested that the optimal timetable for such a tour would be for Turner to circulate an updated project plan in advance of the outing and then for him to attend a subsequent Commission meeting to discuss the project in depth.

Hocker reported that unfortunately the problem of the 15-ton weight limit on the Miller Pond Road bridge remains a stumbling block. Further, Turner had communicated that the extraordinary measures needed to keep trucks under the limit would be cost prohibitive for logging contractors, some of whom had already signaled a lack of interest. Hocker stated that it is now unlikely that work can begin this winter and that actual execution of the project would need to be deferred until such time as the bridge issue could be settled. The Commission would, however, still need to compensate Turner for his work to date. He noted that the Selectmen are considering replacing the bridge at some future date when funds can be made available. He regretted that they have declined to make an exception to the weight limit for this project, even though such exceptions are not unusual. Brown stated that he had reviewed RSA 234:40 which pertains to bridge weight limits in the state and quoted from it that "the Selectmen of the town or the Street Commissioner of the city in which such bridge is situated may grant a written permit to carry a load in excess of such posted load limit on such conditions and under such regulations as such Selectmen or Street Commissioner believe will permit a safe travel of such excessive load without damage to such bridge." Brown also reported that Grantham's own ordinance regulating "heavy hauling over Town highways" spells out three exceptions that are permissible locally. The one most pertinent to the Miller Pond Road bridge limit specifies that exceptions may be made for "emergency vehicles and any motor vehicle operated by or for the town," a provision that Brown believed could properly be applied to vehicles used for the Smith Lot project. (The other two exceptions are "delivery vehicles making occasional trips to service

APPROVED

residences or any vehicles issued a special permit under Section 2.”) It was agreed that these regulations might bolster a renewed effort to secure a weight limit exception for the Smith Lot project and Hocker said he would pursue this approach with the Town Administrator.

Hocker announced that he and Wood planned to liberate some apple trees on the Smith Lot the following Wednesday morning at 9:00 a.m. and invited others to join them.

Open Space Initiative

GCC Volunteer

Hocker announced that Sue Buchanan had agreed to serve as the Commission’s representative on the new Open Space Committee. Buchanan stated that her understanding of the scope of this committee’s work, as per the Selectmen’s adjustments to the Commission’s original proposal, was to “map, inventory and analyze” all undeveloped areas of ten (10) acres or more and then to prioritize those areas in terms of importance to preserving the rural character of Grantham. There is at this point no actual protection program being undertaken. Hocker confirmed this assessment and asserted that the simple identification of undeveloped land would be a help both to the Commission in its consideration of land preservation and to the Planning Board in its revision of the Town Master Plan. He stated further that he would soon be sending a letter to the Selectmen requesting that the Town invest \$100,000 in its Land Preservation Capital Reserve Fund. This fund was created to conserve open space either through conservation easement or outright purchase. Hocker is concerned that the Town is not currently in a position to effectively control development and is vulnerable to changes imposed by outside commercial interests.

Planning for Conservation

Wetlands Overlay District

Hocker reported that the formulation of the wetlands overlay district is still in process.

ANNOUNCEMENTS

Wood reported that he had been contacted by Russell Hirschler, Executive Director of the Upper Valley Trails Alliance regarding Grantham’s possible participation in the Quabbin to Cardigan trail project. Some of that trail might be routed through Grantham. A discussion of other possible trail construction projects within Grantham ensued, with Brown noting that the Student Conservation Association in Charlestown, NH was another organization specializing in trail construction

HANDOUTS

2013 Harvest Map of the Smith Lot section of the Grantham Town Forest (see below)

ADJOURNMENT

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

The Commission voted unanimously to adjourn at 8:30 p.m.

APPROVED

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Grantham Conservation Commission will be held at 7:00 p.m. on Monday, December 16, 2013, in the Jerry Whitney Memorial Conference Room.

Respectfully submitted,

Caroline Hoen

Caroline Hoen, Clerk

