

APPROVED

**Town of Grantham
Grantham Conservation Commission**

**MEETING MINUTES
April 21, 2014**

Chairman Sheridan Brown called the Grantham Conservation Commission to order on Monday, April 21, 2014 at 7:07 p.m. The meeting was held in the Jerry Whitney Memorial Conference Room at Grantham Town Hall located at 300 Route 10 South in Grantham, NH.

Present: Chairman Sheridan Brown; Susan Buchanan; Dick Hocker; Connie Howard; David Wood (Alternate); and Caroline Hoen, Clerk

Absent: Lindsey Lefebvre

ADMINISTRATIVE

Approval of Minutes for 24 March, 2014 Meeting

Chair Brown asked if there were any additions, corrections, or modifications to the draft minutes for the March 24, 2014 meeting.

There being none, a motion was made by Wood to approve and accept the March 24, 2014 Minutes as written; second by Hocker. There being no further discussion, the motion was put to a vote.

Unanimously Approved & Accepted

Approval of Correction to Minutes for 17 February, 2014 Meeting

Brown asked for a motion to approve the following correction to the previously approved minutes for February 17, 2014: page 1 under “ADMINISTRATIVE/Approval of Minutes for 20 January, 2014 Meeting”, on the 6th line down, delete “December 16, 2013” and insert “January 20, 2014.”

There being no further discussion of this correction, a motion was made by Wood to approve and accept the deletion of “December 16, 2013” on page 1 of the previously approved February 17, 2014 minutes, and the insertion of “January 20, 2014.”

Unanimously Approved & Accepted

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NEW BUSINESS

Membership in the New Hampshire Association of Conservation Commissions (NHACC)

Regarding the Commission's lapsed membership in the NHACC, Wood stated that he would request new application materials. Brown proposed postponing a formal motion to rejoin until the next meeting when full information as to cost would be available.

Conservation Funding Options & Current Land Protection Opportunities

Wood referenced the voters' rejection of the Commission's last two Town Meeting warrant articles requesting funds to augment the Land Preservation Capital Reserve Fund (LPCRF), currently valued at about \$80,000. He also noted the inadequacy of this amount to purchase any major properties for conservation. He again raised the possibility of submitting a warrant article at the March 2015 Town Meeting authorizing the Selectmen to issue bonds, at their discretion and up to a specified amount, as a way to raise funds needed for the purchase of significant properties as they become available. He handed out examples of warrant articles used by other towns for this purpose and variations in approach were noted. Stating that he intended to do further research, Wood invited discussion of the concept and the following points were made:

- Hocker stated that the bond concept was entirely consistent with the goals of the current Master Plan and that the citizenry must act in the interest of land conservation if the Town's rural character is to be preserved. He believed the Selectmen's backing would be required to win the voters' support. Hocker also emphasized the truism that developed land is more expensive for a municipality than conserved land because of the services required. The possibility that increased development could precipitate the need for the expansion of the Grantham Village School is of particular concern. He was clear that land conservation is one way to keep expenses, and therefore taxes, under control. Brown mentioned that Ausbon Sargent Land Preservation Trust can provide presentations on the actual cost of services for developed land versus undeveloped. The possibility of arranging such a presentation for the Selectmen and/or the public at large was discussed.
- Hocker enumerated the significant properties in Grantham that are currently on the market and those that are already under development.
- Brown observed that there is at this point no visible constituency for conservation activity in Grantham, as evidenced by the failure of the 2013 prime wetlands initiative. He believed that such support does in fact exist but has not yet been cultivated and organized adequately. He also noted that elected officials will generally respond to a strong constituency and therefore suggested that the Commission work through outreach activities to foster goodwill and to build a larger core of citizens who understand the issues and support land conservation.
- Buchanan observed that the constituency that would support land conservation is probably much larger than the constituency that supported prime wetland designation.
- Wood affirmed a point previously made by Buchanan that the surest way to sell the case for land conservation, and the bond strategy to finance it, is to make the public aware that increased development means higher taxes. Along with the Master Plan mandate for the preservation or rural character, that is a strong and easy case to make to the Selectmen and to the public.

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- Brown suggested that the Commission set the goal of presenting a warrant article covering the bond strategy to the public at Town Meeting in March, 2015. He also recommended creating a program of activities from the present until Town Meeting to build public understanding and support for the concept. Hocker mentioned that the actual wording of the warrant article would need to be established by November 1st of this year.
- Wood wondered whether the proposed warrant article should give the Selectmen sole authority to issue bonds for the purchase conservation lands or whether that authority should rest with the voters.
- Brown observed that the identification of an important conservation property, up for sale by a “motivated” seller, would add urgency to discussions with the Selectmen of the bond warrant article. The Commissioners were able to name such a property and Brown agreed to open conversations with the seller. He noted that making such a conservation purchase together with other interested parties, such as land trusts, could be an option.
- Buchanan mentioned the importance of educating sellers as to different ways to structure a conservation sale to maximize their tax benefits. It was understood that conservation transactions could take the form of a land or easement purchase.
- Wood said he would contact Select Board Chair Warren Kimball to discuss the proposed warrant article.

Shoreline Cutting Plan Filed by Robert and Julie Harris

Wood reported that the Harris cutting application would be reviewed in the near future.

Conservation Commission Strategic Planning / Capacity Building

Because of time constraints, Brown suggested taking up the possibility of a Commission strategic planning process at a future meeting.

Conservation Commission Programming / Outreach Possibilities

Brown stated that he would like to see the Commission organize some outreach activities in order to both foster goodwill and educate the public about important conservation issues. He asked the Commissioners to start to think about some possible themes and events. Many ideas were discussed such as the sponsorship of future Earth Day activities, organizing clean up and trail maintenance projects, and teaming up with scouting troops and other groups for conservation activities.

OTHER BUSINESS

Conservation Land Purchase Update

Hocker stated that the Town’s purchase of a parcel of land, previously recommended by the Commission to the Selectmen, was still in process. The acreage in question is on Route 10 South adjacent to Brookside Park.

Saving Special Places April 5, 2014 Conference Report

Buchanan attended the Saving Special Places conference and found the keynote presentation by Peter Forbes from the Center for Whole Communities to be particularly useful. He spoke on ways to engage the public in land conservation issues.

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Open Space Committee Report

Buchanan was unable to attend the last meeting of the Open Space Committee but reported that the group was looking into open space assessment methods and the experience of other towns. They are also considering a survey of Town residents to assess the public's opinions and priorities regarding land conservation. Buchanan expressed concern that there was not sufficient time to complete these tasks, in addition to the assessment and prioritizing of Grantham's open spaces, by the winter of 2015. Brown suggested that assessment tools available from the the Ausbon Sargent Land Trust and the Upper Valley Land Trust might be helpful. Methods for prioritizing properties for conservation were discussed.

Planning for Conservation

Wetlands Overlay District

Hocker said he would try to have a draft version of the Wetlands Overlay District ready for the next Commission meeting.

HANDOUTS

Sample conservation funding warrant articles from other municipalities

ADJOURNMENT

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

The Commission voted unanimously to adjourn at 9:13 p.m.

NEXT MEETING

The next meeting of the Grantham Conservation Commission will be held at 7:00 p.m. on Monday, May 19, 2014 in the Jerry Whitney Memorial Conference Room.

Respectfully submitted,

Caroline Hoen

Caroline Hoen, Clerk