

WEATHERSFIELD CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MINUTES JANUARY 28, 2020

COMMISSION MEMBERS PRESENT: Heather Shand, Jeff Pelton, Roy Burton, Ellen Clattenburg, Cheryl Cox, Howard Beach, Tyler Harwell and Ryan Gumbart

Meeting called to order at 7:08 PM and adjourned at 8:42 PM

APPROVAL OF MINUTES DECEMBER 3, 2020 MEETING: Minutes were approved without amendment.

TOWN FOREST DISCUSSION ITEMS

WEATHERSFIELD/ATA COOPERATIVE AGREEMENT: The agreement is currently being reviewed by the Town's legal team.

OTHER: Howard conveyed information from a discussion with Dave Fuller (Chair of Selectboard). It is unclear how the town will move forward regarding access to the Town Forest off of Thrasher Road. Currently access is available to the public year-round through the Ascutney State Park.

MT. ASCUTNEY REGIONAL COMMISSION (MARC) NATURAL RESOURCES CHAPTER INPUT:

Howard explained that in the past, MARC, formerly Southern Windsor County Regional Planning Commission, had advised the Town that the amount of land zoned as conservation was excessive at around 80%. Since then, the amount of land zoned as conservation has dropped and is currently around 15%. This is in part due to rezoning of land from conservation to other residential use categories, as well as land that no longer meets criteria as the requirements for conservation zoned land have changed. He informed the commission that a new Town Plan is being prepared and suggested that the commission get involved to address issues related to forest fragmentation and other concerns brought up in the MARC Natural Resources Plan. Howard referenced an AARP project that expressed a desire for more high-density housing as an example of a potential conflict between land use goals. Tyler suggested having a joint meeting with the Planning Commission to provide input on the new Town Plan. Ellen explained that historically the Conservation Commission has always been heavily involved in town planning. Tyler recommended that the commission reach out to Chris Whidden (Town Land Use Administrator) and invite him to a meeting and/or get on the Planning Commissions email list to find out about upcoming meetings. Heather agreed to contact Chris. Jeff provided the following input via email. He suggested that they could elaborate on the matter of climate change considering the recent above average temperatures. Hemlock wooly adelgid and Asian longhorned beetle could be included in the exotic invasive species. Under the wildlife resources section, they could include nesting habitat. Animal waste from livestock and lead from gun ranges could be listed in the list of potential groundwater pollutants. He also found the reasoning for the reduction of vegetated buffers widths to accommodate certain development to be unclear. Ellen also replied by email, agreeing with Jeff's point concerning buffers. She pointed out page 12 in relation to addressing climate change, a few sentences where MARC relates increased risk of flooding to climate change and warming average temperatures. Heather also suggested that the commission members provide further input on the Southern Windsor County Regional Plan via email by February 12.

WOODY BUFFER BLOCK GRANT: Tyler had this item added to the agenda as he felt like this grant was relevant, as it relates to past discussions about acquiring grant money.

WCC SPONSORED WORKSHOP/HIKE IDEAS

OUTDOOR ANIMAL TRACKING WORKSHOP: Heather has been in contact with Alison Thomas, VT State Educational Programs Coordinator. Due to COVID-19, the department is no longer doing field workshops. Alison offered to present the workshop virtually over a video chat but the commission agreed to delay the workshop until it can be done outdoors.

FALL/WINTER: BEAVER DECEIVER: Ryan has been in contact with Tyler Brown, VT State Furbearer Project Technician, to set up a walk to see and learn about beaver management and their impact on human infrastructure. The commission agreed to arrange the walk to take place sometime around April or May, as this is a particularly relevant time as flooding caused by beaver activities tends to occur in Spring. Ryan will connect with Tyler to set up a date that works.

OTHER/NEW BUSINESS: Ellen updated the commission on the status of the Harry Temple memorial plaque on Mt. Ascutney. Tim Morton has ordered a sign to be made that matches the State's format and will reach out in the future about installation.

Jeff updated the commission on the status of the waterway naming project. There has been lots of advertising in various locations to solicit information from longtime residents about historic names of waterbodies. Jeff may have a draft prepared by the next meeting. He spoke with the individual who prepared the waterway names for the Town of Rockingham who informed him that each brook name that is to be updated needs to be accompanied by a petition with at least 25 signatures.

Next WCC Meeting: February 25, 2021, at 7:00 PM, Virtual meeting unless COVID restrictions are lifted

Respectfully Submitted,

Ryan Gumbart