

WEATHERSFIELD CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Thursday, March 24, 2021, 7:00 PM

Location: Martin Memorial Hall, 5259 US Route 5, Ascutney, VT

Remote: <https://www.weathersfieldvt.org/home/news/public-meetings-zoom>

Present: Ryan Gumbart, Roy Burton, Cheryl Cox, Jeff Pelton, Ellen Clattenburg

Minutes: Ryan Gumbart shared several corrections to the minutes of February 24, 2022:

- In the town forest update, Roy told her how impressed he was (not she)” and “managing the town forest on the lower, flatter (not steeper) sections”
- managing the forest on the lower flatter section (not the steeper section)”
- section b. of this section on 6th line, “permitted properly (not permitted prope)”
- Roy Burton moved, and Cheryl Cox seconded the motion to approve the minutes as corrected. All voted in favor.

1. Reorganization – Chairperson Ryan Gumbart, Vice Chair Jeff Pelton, Treasurer Roy Burton, and Recording Secretary Ellen Clattenburg all agreed to stay in their positions another year. Roy Burton made a motion for the secretary to cast one ballot for the slate of officers. Cheryl Cox seconded and all voted in favor.

2. Commissioner input – Ryan Gumbart asked for input from everyone about what they liked doing as WC commissioners and what they would like to see the Commission focus on. First he reviewed the State statutes on conservation commissions and the newly adopted Weathersfield policy. He also briefly reviewed the Vermont Conservation Commission Handbook. One suggestion in this is to put together a welcome packet for new commissioners to orient them (what projects the WCC has done in the past, why the WCC exists; another was to collaborate with other boards; and work on existing projects (like the Town Plan).

Ideas from commissioners were the photo contest with the top three photographs getting mounted and framed by the WCC and put on display before returning to the photographers. Roy Burton has a lot of accumulated knowledge in the field of forestry and he looks forward to following through on certain interests once the long range management plan for the town forest is completed. Ellen Clattenburg and Cheryl Cox enjoy having input on maintaining the rural and cultural character of the landscape. Ellen is interested in protecting viewsheds; Cheryl enjoys the educational aspect of the WCC work. She noted that the people of Weathersfield are really interested in learning about wildlife,

garlic pulls, Ascutney and trails, and there's always a good turnout at WCC sponsored educational events. Jeff Pelton first listed his concerns: with such a small budget, it makes it difficult to put on educational programs; attendance at WCC meetings can be sparse although he recognizes that everyone is busy with many obligations; and he finds that it is hard to get people to volunteer. His interests are focused on having Weathersfielders get better acquainted with the town forest and continuing to offer educational events like walks and speakers. Ryan Gumbart hoped that with a clearer mission statement and an orientation for new members, it might help get people more involved.

Relative to the mention in the documents above (handbook, local policy), he wondered: do Howard Beach and Tyler Harwell actively update the planning commission on a regular basis on conservation commission work? Ryan Gumbart is regularly attending as he is the land use officer and he suggests that they update us on planning commission work.

3. Programs: Ryan Gumbart suggested that we work in pairs to come up with a program for each season of the year. Cheryl Cox and Ellen Clattenburg will come up with a summer program; Roy and Jeff will do a winter program. Jeff Pelton offered to do a program this spring, hosting a walk in the town forest before the leaves come out. The soils in this area are well drained and dry even now. Cheryl Cox will post this to the newspapers and other outlets – April 3. Maybe Jeff will even find a few volunteers to help with the deconstruction of the cabin in the town forest. Jeff will be in touch with the Abbotts.

A last suggestion was to invite Weathersfield Parks and Rec to a meeting to see if we can coordinate on programs.

Jeff Pelton wanted to know when the State plans to log in the State Park? Ryan Gumbart had met with Brian Renfro – the job may be put off or maybe it will happen this summer (it's still in the air). The logging will mean that the access road is shut off.

4. Town Forest

a. Cabin removal – Ryan Gumbart had spoken with the town attorney who went through the volunteer waiver. They provided us with a volunteer service statement and agreement which is sufficient to protect the Town from liability. There's an addendum – a power tool waiver and release. Jeff Pelton and Ryan Gumbart will come up with a plan on April 23.

b. Trail building – Ryan Gumbart and Eric Schutze, Stan Spencer, and Brian Renfro walked yesterday to fill the State in on what's been going on. The State had tabled the ATA request for alternate access. The ATA is doing a mountain bike fundraiser this summer and that money will be put into building trails in the town forest. Trail marking? The ATA philosophy is to minimize signs, using them only at junctions. In the Windsor Town Forest there are too many signs and it is dizzying, so the ATA hopes to correct this in Weathersfield by having longer sections of trail without signs. ATA will make signs for double track.

c. Powerline treatment – Ryan Gumbart has been in touch with Scott Carlson of VELCO via email to find out the date treatment will occur, whether VELCO will post warnings before/after treatment; and whether they have old timber mats for stream crossings. No date has yet been set for herbicide treatment, but it will probably be late in the season; a single sign on Rick's road would be sufficient to warn people of the treatment. VELCO doesn't intend to use timber mats, but they will look into whether they can sell any, but they need to know the length and number of mats we'd need. Stan Spencer suggests less is more – a few good stones to cross the brook is better than a bridge. Lasts longer, less expense. Ryan will run that by the Rivers Coordinator. Jeff Pelton suggests that as VELCO takes out trees, we plant shrubs – as an early successional habitat enhancement (VELCO's goal is low growing; ours is native species for wildlife). Usually they just do trees, but they can treat the invasives as well. We can make this an educational opportunity. Also remember to do an inventory of ash trees near the trail that are potential hazards.

5. Springfield Reservoir Dam Removal- The Zoning Board had a hearing for a dam removal project because the failing dam is a flood hazard. Town of Springfield and the Mt Ascutney Regional Commission hired out an engineering plan. The reservoir is in an actively managed Springfield Town Forest – it's been managed for the past 50 years. The WCC was asked to review the project and make comments: a deer wintering yard and endangered species bubble show up on the map.

Jeff Pelton wondered about having the reservoir property go back to Weathersfield. Springfield does not seem to have a long term plan. This is an opportunity to create an educational experience as the area will be a stream restoration site. Jeff Pelton pointed out that this property extends almost all the way to Weathersfield Center Road. It's a beautiful walk and there's great potential for recreation and wildlife. Roy Burton pointed out that there's a large file on this property in the Forest and Parks office. *The WCC agreed to walk the property on April 3 at 9.*

6. Waterway naming project – The petitions are moving around. The large map from voting is now at the Proctor Library.

7. Other/new business – none

8. Jeff Pelton moved, Cheryl Cox seconded the motion to adjourn at 8:35 p.m.

Respectfully submitted: Ellen Clattenburg

Next meeting: April 28, 2021, 7:00 PM