

GROTON CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Minutes

November 20, 2004

Chairman Bruce Clements called the meeting to order at 9:00 a.m.. Members Craig Auman, Kris Corwin, Bruce Easom, Marshall Giguere, Peter Morrison, and Evan Owen were present. Conservation Assistant Barbara Ganem was also present. The meeting took place at the trailhead to Conservation Commission land adjacent to 77 Hidden Valley Road. Trail Committee member Vic Burton was present as were residents Hakan Elmali of 77 Hidden Valley Road and Bill Woodbury of 59 Hidden Valley Road.

Chairman Clements explained that the Conservation Commission is responsible for managing conservation lands that include a system of trails throughout the Town for the benefit of all residents. Some of the trails that go through subdivisions may go close to houses, and the Commission finds that lawns tend to intimidate the public from using these public trails. B. Clements observed that the Commission usually encourages adjacent residents to not mow the grass at all or to cut the grass at different heights in order to distinguish between private land and the public trail. Vic Burton noted that sometimes the trail winds between trees, and it is only necessary to maintain a narrow trail width.

Mr. Elmali pointed out that this trail is right next to privately maintained lawn, and it is not realistic to treat the area differently as it becomes an eyesore. He indicated that people are using the area now, particularly neighborhood kids on bikes who know where the trail is located. Mr. Woodbury added that the neighborhood knows where the trail is although there was some surprise when the trail posts went in. He thought that the developers did not envision a trail system, but now people understand it, and it is well-established in the neighborhood. P. Morrison replied that residents outside of the subdivision are unsure where the trails are unless the area is visually different from adjacent private land. He suggested that the distinct visual distinction could be accomplished by not fertilizing and mowing the grass at the different heights.

B. Clements acknowledged that other trails adjacent to private land have had wood chips put in with the trail cut between the posts. Vic Burton pointed out that the trail was specifically put in this location in order to provide a link between roads with other town-owned conservation lands. Chairman Clements noted that the Commission attempts to work with neighbors in developing management plans. V. Burton commented that sometimes people do not understand that it is public land, and it is intimidating to the public when it is maintained as private property. Residents tend to have a high level of respect for private property. Chairman Clements urged the residents not to cut the grass, and E. Owen advised especially against the use of pesticides and herbicides.

Commissioners noted that the way the hillside has been allowed to grow in naturally is more appropriate for the maintenance of a trail area. Bill Woodbury disagreed, stating that it was not in tune with the neighborhood. Given the range of alternatives previously discussed, P. Morrison asked the residents what they would choose. He noted that the trail should be legally accessible to every resident in Groton. Planting trees and letting the area grow into forest is another alternative while installing a fence could also be considered. Mr. Elmali responded that this was not in keeping with the aesthetics of the community. Chairman Clements maintained that the posts were not sufficient, and the Commission's responsibility is to the public at large. E. Owen also pointed out that the Commission has a responsibility to maintain the area's value for wildlife, and a lawn tends to be barren of wildlife.

Mr. Elmali said maintaining the area for wildlife would be very difficult since it is not wild. V. Burton commented that it could be if native grasses are allowed to re-grow as they have on the hillside. B. Easom offered a proposal that the grasses be cut no shorter than 4", but B. Clements and V. Burton did not feel this was good solution as mowers typically can't cut at this height. B. Clements noted that the Skyfield trail is cut through tall grasses. V. Burton said that a 4' wide trail of bark mulch is another alternative. K. Corwin warned that this could be maintenance nightmare for the Commission because of the Commission's low budget for land maintenance.

H. Elmali asked if it would be possible to change or get rid of the trail posts, and members assured him that these were

standard throughout the Town. Members asked Vic Burton if the Trails Committee has funds to put in bark mulch or could do the labor, noting that the work would involve the removal of a 3' to 4' wide swath of sod to be replaced by 4" of bark mulch. B. Easom made a motion, seconded by K. Corwin, and it was

VOTED: to allow the cutting of the grass no lower than 4" between the trail posts.

The motion carried with B. Clements dissenting.

The Conservation Commission will review the situation in six months to see if this treatment proves satisfactory. The goal is to maintain a visual difference between what is private and what is public property.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 9:35 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara V. Ganem
Conservation Assistant

Approved as drafted December 14, 2004