

GROTON CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Minutes

August 2, 2005

Chairman Peter Morrison called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. in the 2nd floor meeting room at Town Hall. Members Craig Auman, Bruce Clements, Kris Corwin, and Marshall Giguere were present. Evan Owen arrived at 7:04 p.m. Member Bruce Easom was absent. Conservation Assistant Barbara Ganem was present.

Engineer Bob Pine explained the revised plans for Brooks Orchard. Four equestrian building lots are proposed as opposed to the 14-unit condominium cluster originally planned. This is due to changed market conditions inspired by Meredith Scarlet's purchase of Angus Hill. The state has spent \$800,000 for the purchase of the 113-acre Agricultural Preservation Restriction on the orchard and hayfield portion of Brooks Orchard. Mr. Pine assured the Commission there would be few wetland impacts. There are plans to modify the location of the road so that it will not cross a wetland, but there will be driveway work in the buffer. The wetlands near the work area will be re-delineated. This revised proposal will put 30 acres in private ownership whereas the original plan proposed 15 acres. A conservation restriction will be placed on the remaining land. An extensive network of trails is proposed.

Marion Stoddart was present to explain a proposal by the Fitch's Bridge sub-committee of the Greenway Committee for a Community Preservation application. She pointed out the project has a strong conservation element that meshes with the goals outlined in the Community Preservation Plan. If the Town acquires the old Hollis railroad branch that parallels portions of the Nashua River, it will make a wonderful connector to Fitch's Bridge. The application covers design plans in the amount of \$60,000. This design phase must be done in order to qualify the project for state and Federal grant funds. Ms. Stoddart explained it would be costly to take the Bridge down, but there are historic reasons for re-connecting W. Groton to Groton through a walkway that provides pedestrian, equestrian, and bicycling access.

K. Corwin agreed it would be a great connector, but expressed reservations about the amount of money needed for restoration, especially the possibility of taking funds away from conservation purchases. Ms. Stoddart stressed that the project would be eligible for state and Federal monies.

B. Clements noted there is substantial competition for CPA funds. Upon a motion by C. Auman, seconded by M. Giguere, it was

VOTED: to send a letter of support to the Community Preservation Committee, with a copy to the Board of Selectmen, supporting the Community Preservation application of the Fitch's Bridge Sub-Committee as the project falls within the Town's Open Space Goal and objectives of maintaining scenic vistas including the cultural and overall rural landscape, facility (bridge) for active recreation, linking current and future public land holdings with trails and additional holdings while bringing people closer to the natural environment.

The vote was unanimous.

Commissioners indicated they would be going into Executive Session for the next matter on the agenda. Planning Administrator urged them to discuss the abandoned railroad bed purchase in open session, noting the Selectmen had done so in their meeting the previous Friday. The Executive Office of Transportation (EOT) has made it clear the price is non-negotiable or the property will be offered to an abutter. Ms. Collette pointed out the abandoned railroad is a critical link with the trail easement off Wallace Road, then to Spencer Circle and south to the Town Forest. It would

connect Fitch's Bridge with the Town Forest. She noted the Pepperell land trust, Nashoba Conservation Trust, has purchased part of the railroad bed north of this section. The purchase has a 90-day turnaround deadline, and the Town does not want to take any chances on meeting the deadline. She asked the Commission to consider a letter of support or even a financial contribution if possible. Unless the Town purchases the land the corridor would be obliterated.

The Greenway Committee has expressed support for this acquisition. A possible funding source is the Conservation Fund as this would allow a quick turnaround. K. Corwin said it is a worthwhile project and pointed out this is an excellent example of why CPA funds should be allocated to the Conservation Fund. There is not enough time to file and receive CPA funding. M. Collette stressed that the Town's application to the EOT is stronger if there is a ready source of funds which does not require a Town Meeting to expend. The Trails Committee is also supportive of the purchase. Upon a motion by K. Corwin, seconded by M. Giguere, it was

VOTED: to commit \$43,050.00 from the Conservation Fund to the purchase of the

Hollis branch of an abandoned railroad bed running from near Fitch's Bridge

to Hill Rd.

Upon a motion by B. Clements, seconded by M. Giguere, and a roll call vote of B. Clements, E. Owen, K. Corwin, C. Auman, M. Giguere and P. Morrison, it was

VOTED: to enter Executive Session for the purpose of discussing the purchase of land

to return to Open Session at the conclusion of the Executive Session.

Reporter Pierre Comptois was asked to leave and the meeting temporarily adjourned at 7:40 p.m.

With no further business to conduct, the meeting was fully adjourned at 8:25 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara V. Ganem

Conservation Assistant

Approved as drafted August 9, 2005