

GROTON CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Minutes

December 26, 2006

Clerk Bruce Easom called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. in the 2nd floor conference room in Town Hall. Members Craig Auman, Holly Estes, and Peter Morrison were present. Commissioners Bruce Clements, Marshall Giguere, and Evan Owen were absent. Conservation Assistant Barbara Ganem was also present.

Upon a motion by C. Auman, seconded by P. Morrison, it was

VOTED: to approve the minutes of December 9 and December 12, 2006 as drafted.

B. Easom abstained from the vote.

B. Ganem explained the FY'08 Water Safety budget will remain the same, with the exception of an extra \$1,000 to cover a possible increase in the expenses line item for contractual lifeguard coverage. It was estimated the revenue gained from the parking stickers for Sargisson Beach represents less than a third of the expenses.

7:15 p.m. - Appointment Josh Degen - Williams Barn

Williams Barn Committee member Lili Ott and her husband, John, were also present. Mr. Degen indicated the Williams Barn Committee has done a tremendous amount of work over the past six years to create the operational facility there now. Work has been done on the barn, on the land, and the farmers' market is well established. Old dumping grounds have been cleaned out, the silo rebuilt, and part of the clean-up of the grounds requires annual bonfires to eliminate landscape debris. In summary, J. Degen pointed out the Committee has been a good steward of the land and does not wish to take possession of the land but would prefer to not have to come before the Commission every time they do something unless it is a matter under the Commission's jurisdiction. He noted they maintain the area around the barn up to the trail posts, the barn, and are contemplating an additional 2-3 acres of land where apple/fruited trees or possibly victory or community gardens may be planted.

P. Morrison concurred that the Williams Barn Committee has been a tremendous steward of the property, and the Commission has not experienced any problems with the site. He recommended the group come before the Commission if any work is contemplated in the area of the vernal pool, but, in general, he felt the Committee deserved the requested latitude. H. Estes admitted she was not terribly familiar with the property, but did have concerns about the invasive plants around the field. J. Degen indicated the group has been trying to clear the honeysuckle, buckthorn, and bittersweet from the area. A 175 ft. by 200 ft. parcel is to be contributed by the Cemetery Commission, and there are plans to have additional parking in the cleared area. Mr. Degen explained the sumac and the old apple trees will be saved, and they are not working within the vernal pool area. The area that is already cleared and maintained is generally the area where they prefer not to report regularly to the Conservation Commission. The clean up involves removing 50 years of growth since the site was an active farm. C. Auman thanked those present for the work they have done in creating such an asset for the Town. He did not feel there were any issues with work in the cleared area. He suggested the Committee draw up a one page general maintenance plan. Mr. Degen noted Tom Delaney has the grass cut at the front of the barn, and the Committee takes care of the rear. The garden concept is something that may be of interest in the future.

B. Easom worried about the implications of government competing with private enterprises. He suggested the Committee take a look at a cranberry bog the town of Westford operates as a possible model to avoid criticism of town vs. private enterprises. He thought the Williams Barn Committee had an excellent track record in managing the barn and also in removing some of the management burden from the Conservation Commission. Mr. Easom noted, however, the Commission has a legal obligation to oversee the land. He encouraged the Committee to advise the Commission of plans for clearing or a new well. Acton has a community garden, and the town provides water and

farmers pay a fee to use the land. He thought this could be an opportunity for people who otherwise would not have a chance to garden.

J. Degen indicated the planting of apple trees would likely result in enough apples to make cider and would not approach a commercial operation. Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by C. Auman, it was

VOTED: to name the Williams Barn Committee as official stewards of the currently cleared land from the edge of the roadway to the trailhead posts for the purposes of maintenance and minor improvements. The Committee is to notify the GCC of anything major or within Commission jurisdiction.

Commissioners thanked those in attendance for the work they have done on the Williams Barn.

Upon a motion by C. Auman, seconded by H. Estes, it was

VOTED: to nominate Peter Morrison as the Commission's representative in the FY'08 budgeting process.

P. Morrison abstained from the vote. B. Ganem indicated Selectmen/Finance Committee meetings are scheduled for Saturday, February 3rd and Saturday, February 10th.

Resuming discussion on the FY'08 Conservation budget, P. Morrison recommended the doubling of clerical hours for the Land Use Assistant. Regarding the Commission's request for a GPS unit, he pointed out the Commission is constantly in disputes with property owners to determine where property boundaries are located. He also felt there needs to be improvement in the maintenance of trails, and the alternative is to let them grow over. The Trails Committee would definitely support efforts to make their work more efficient. He felt all three elements should be of the highest priority to the Commission.

B. Easom disagreed, stating he wasn't sure of the need for a GPS unit as the level of accuracy does not approach surveys, and it is labor intensive. C. Auman suggested looking at how many acres we maintain and also the linear miles of trails managed by the Trails Committee. Commissioners pointed out operators from either committee would be covered under the Town's insurance policy. B. Easom questioned the level of anticipated revenue for the upcoming year. Because much of the inexpensive land has already been taken up, and there is a slowdown in residential construction, it is anticipated revenues will drop, but Commissioners thought 20% was too much. Station Avenue is an upcoming commercial development, and this will involve wetland filings. Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by C. Auman, it was

VOTED: to accept a 12.5% reduction in estimated revenue projection for wetlands filings due to the general reduction in residential building and to approve the draft FY'08 budget requesting a total of 14 clerical hours, a brush hog, and a GPS unit..

B. Ganem reported Town Counsel has certified the title for the Sampas parcel and approved the deed. Because of their meeting schedule, the Selectmen have already signed off on the acceptance. Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by H. Estes, it was

VOTED: to accept the gift of the 11-acre Sampas parcel (Assessors' Parcel 227-91) on Longley Rd.

In response to an MACC article and correspondence from Town Counsel dated September 11, 2006 on adjudicatory hearings, P. Morrison questioned to whom certification (that a member has examined all evidence received at a missed session) should be addressed and should the member vote or abstain in order to make a quorum. He thought the problem is less likely to occur with a positive decision rather than a denial. Hearings should be continued to a time certain, and no discussion should take place if it is continued and no applicant is present.

P. Morrison expressed dismay at the way in which work was being conducted at 1 Lost Lake Dr. They have cleared an area for the driveway that is not shown on the submitted RDA plan, the entrance is not being haybaled after work hours, and the Commission has previously issued both an Enforcement Order and a fine. He pointed out the haybales are inadequate to close the gap in the silt fencing. C. Auman said he observed, during the Saturday rainstorm, that no one was at the site and silt was washing across the road. It was also noted that an underground propane gas tank has been installed within the 100-ft. buffer zone. Commissioners doubted whether the Board of Health has approved this installation.

H. Estes questioned whether the Commission should ask the applicant to come to a meeting. Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by C. Auman, it was

VOTED: to issue a \$100 fine for the violations at 1 Lost Lake Drive.

This amount could increase to \$150 if the applicant does not comply with the Enforcement Order and \$50 fine the Commission previously issued. . Estes said it is critical that the erosion issue be addressed immediately. If an applicant ignores an Enforcement Order and fines, the Building Department should be made aware that the Commission will not sign off on an Occupancy Permit. Members discussed how often additional fines could be issued if the applicant fails to address the issue in a timely manner. The owner needs to be made aware that the issue of violations in Groton is taken very seriously, and it was suggested a constable be used to deliver the fine. Upon a motion by C. Auman, seconded by H. Estes, it was

VOTED: to issue a fine of \$100 every three days until the owner complies with the Commission's requests.

The fine will be hand delivered.

Commissioners will do a site visit for the relocation of the trail at Groton School which links Surrenden Farm and Sabine Woods on January 6, 2007 in connection with a Request for a Determination of Applicability.

C. Auman updated the board on the status of the change in title and job description for conservation staff. He has met with Personnel Manager Elizabeth Currier and Interim Administrative Office Jeff Ritter. Ms. Currier will be benchmarking the grade level with other towns. He noted that Mr. Ritter requested a brief description of the Commission's intention for the Selectmen's Thursday packets. Mr. Auman indicated the emphasis will be on the changes in the job and the amount of conservation land the Commission is responsible for managing. The older job description emphasizes the clerical and administrative aspects associated with the Wetlands Protection Act and Bylaw. B. Ganem prepares draft Orders of Conditions and meeting notes to assist the Commission in dealing with the administrative tasks. P. Morrison suggested the change in job description will enable the Commission to move from passive neglect to a more active form of conservation land management.

Mr. Auman noted there have been some impediments to moving this process along, including the fact there are new people in the jobs that oversee the process and the adoption of the union contract, but the size of the Town, the population, and the amount of conservation land all speak to the need to make the change. He pointed out this is a volunteer board whose members change, and the new job description provides a sense of authority in which the holder acts as a department head. He emphasized this discussion focuses on the job description, not the individual holding the position.

There being no further business, the meeting was adjourned at 8:50 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara V. Ganem

Conservation Assistant

Approved as drafted January 9, 2007