

GROTON CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Minutes

March 22, 2008

Chairman Marshall Giguere called the meeting to order at 8:10 a.m. in Town Hall. Members Wayne Addy, Craig Auman, Bruce Easom, Holly Estes, and Ryan Lambert were present. Member Peter Morrison was unavailable for the meeting. Conservation Assistant Barbara Ganem was also present.

Chairman Giguere called the meeting to order and announced that the purpose was to discuss whether or not to withdraw the Commission minor capital request of \$7,410 for a GPS unit in the FY'09 budget. He noted this is a tool that supports the Commission's land management efforts. Tom Orcutt, Superintendent of the Water Department, has sent a memo volunteering the use of the Water Department's GPS unit with 24 hour advance notice. Mr. Giguere pointed out that access to the GPS unit has sometimes been better than other times, but it often presents a challenge in coordination and can be problematic.

The option appears to be whether the Commission wishes to have it voluntarily removed or to have the FinCom/Selectmen remove it. Member Auman pointed out the newspaper carried an article about the FY'09 budget in which it is stated General Government took a hit of 2% when the Conservation department lost \$5000, almost 7% of its budget, while Water Safety was essentially wiped out. W. Addy asked if we would keep the beach gate closed, would parking stickers still be available, and would the docks be put in. H. Estes said she would not be in favor of charging for parking stickers if there are no lifeguards on duty. This topic will be handled in a future Conservation meeting when we have a more definitive idea of the budget.

C. Auman argued that the Commission has already given up a lot of funds, and this has become more of a political question. They want to have the Commission make the withdrawal and then they can say it was the Commission's decision. H. Estes expressed concern that the GPS unit was non-essential when viewed against labor costs. In addition, what will the Commission have available to cut next year if everything is reduced now? Will the Commission be perceived as frivolous for this expenditure?

B. Easom asked for clarification about the Town Manager position, and it was explained this will depend on whether the Town votes to accept a town charter form of government. The thinking appears to be that it will be necessary to offer a substantial salary to attract a manager with appropriate qualifications. This may be playing a part in the requests to reduce current labor costs. The Town Manager would perform many of the functions currently done by the Selectmen in running the Town although the Selectmen would have final say.

M. Giguere noted that the other GPS units referred to in the memo may not be compatible with the software capabilities of Arc GIS which is what is available on the Town GIS computer.

B. Easom questioned whether there are grants available. Land management activities are becoming increasingly important, and the Commission needs to be more involved with the

process. H. Estes was uncomfortable having town employees work for the town for free, i.e., Michelle Collette, and having the Commission make this kind of request. W. Addy said it would be a showing of good faith if the Commission opts to withdraw the request. B. Easom said the Trails Committee had experienced the same difficulty in trying to set up a time to use the Water Department GPS unit. The parcels map layer must be downloaded to the GPS unit prior to going into the field, and coordination is often difficult. M. Giguere maintained that our volunteer time is worth something, and sometimes the scheduling simply doesn't work. Many times the GPS unit is needed on the weekend, and this should not conflict with the time it is needed for Water Department purposes.

C. Auman questioned how practical the 24 hr. advance notice is. The Garmin unit is regarded as too inaccurate for Commission purposes. M. Giguere added that the Trimble unit was invaluable in the case of the Deerhaven conservation-restricted land where we learned in advance of acceptance that the trash was on the land. This avoided legal expenses down the road.

In response to H. Estes' question about the longevity of the GPS unit, M. Giguere said they would easily last 5 years. The accuracy level with the Trimble unit is much better, with measurements coming in within 1 ft. rather than 15 ft. One of the benefits of having the Commission own a GPS unit is that it could serve as a backup were the Water Department unit to go on the blink. B. Ganem pointed out the Water Department is a separate entity from the Town and purchases its own equipment. W. Addy suggested agreeing to the arrangement if the unit can be available at Town Hall. Members recommended wording the motion more positively i.e., leaving it in the budget unless an agreement with the Water Department is reached that it can be readily available at Town Hall. B. Easom offered an amendment, seconded by R. Lambert, specifying that the GPS unit be left in the Board of Selectmen's office (they also have charge of the LCD projector). All were in favor of the amendment. The final motion, as amended, by W. Addy, seconded by H. Estes, was

VOTED: to leave the Minor Capital request for a GPS unit in the amount of \$7410 in the Conservation FY'09 budget unless an agreement can be reached with the Water Department to have the unit readily available in the Board of Selectmen's office.

It was agreed to include in the memo to the FinCom/BOS that the Commission has already made significant sacrifices within its budget and within the Water Safety budget.

There being no further discussion, the meeting was adjourned at 8:40 a.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara V. Ganem
Conservation Assistant

Approved as drafted 3/25/08.