

GROTON CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Minutes

Monday, August 12, 2013

The meeting was called to order by Chairman Peter Morrison at 6:40 p.m. in the 1st floor conference room in Town Hall as part of the regularly scheduled Board of Selectmen meeting underway. Members Craig Auman, Bruce Easom, Nadia Madden, Peter Morrison, and Rena Swezey were present. Members John Smigelski and Marshall Giguere were absent. Conservation Administrator Barbara Ganem was present.

GELD Permitting Process - Board of Selectman Chairman Peter Cunningham explained that the issue which the Select board is examining is what caused the delay in the permitting for the proposed GELD facility. He thanked Mark Haddad and Kevin Kelly for their work in pulling the Town Manager GELD report together. This is an opportunity for members to look at the consequences outlined in the report and to determine what we can learn from what happened. M. Haddad pointed out an outline on Page 9 of the report which includes various recommendations, including improved communication to applicants on peer review costs, the appointment of a Wetland Bylaw Review Committee to make the Bylaw more user-friendly and understandable, and improve flexibility, and the implementation of coordinated permitting. Mr. Haddad indicated that an earlier letter from Attorney Collins would be an addendum to the report.

Selectman Stuart Schulman commented that it was a great report and done in a conscientious manner.

(N. Madden arrived at 6:35 p.m.) It provides an outline of how we got to this point. He believes looking forward is the right idea.

Selectwoman Anna Eliot added there are a lot of ways to improve the system, and the report points out some flaws. The Town is struggling to bring applicants more congruence, but in some cases it is more problematic. The report attempts to interpret the process in a purposeful, courteous and aboveboard manner, and she hopes it will provide constructive steps going forward. Selectman Josh Degen said each board needs to take ownership for its own presentation and not go outside the lines of what they need to comply with. Mr. Degen felt the Town Manager and Board of Selectmen can take away an improved process.

Chairman Peter Morrison called the Conservation Commission meeting to order at 6:40 p.m. Attorney Robert Collins was present and commented he was appreciative of the amount of energy and time put into the report. He noted GELD was happy with the report but asked that an additional letter, which he handed to Mr. Haddad, be part of the record and added that this was a positive experience from which we can move forward. Mr. Morrison submitted a statement from the Conservation Commission and asked that it be included in the record as well. Selectmen assured him they had previously received copies of the document.

Groton Herald reporter Connie Sartini pointed out the report includes a recommendation for a streamlined permitting process, and she asked what progress has been made along these lines. M. Haddad mentioned the localization of departments into one Land Use Department as one step. P. Cunningham suggested talking with Town Counsel about providing a seminar on conducting town hearings. There are nuances to managing a meeting.

A. Eliot expressed concerns that an applicant must go before separate boards, and she felt the pooling of committees would help as each committee would be aware of others' issues and concerns. She stressed that it is a major fault in the system that each board acts independently of other boards. M. Haddad mentioned the Form of Intent process helps address this issue, but each board is responsible for managing its own jurisdictional issues. M. Collette said the Form of Intent gets the process off on a good note in that information is shared among department staff. The Land Use Department also invites applicants in to meet with staff at the beginning of the process. Thorough early vetting, the applicant learns of where the questions and issues will be. Permitting for 134 Main St. is an example in which there were joint board meetings at the beginning, middle, and end of the permitting process. Flow charts are being worked on.

P. Morrison noted the Conservation Commission provides communication with other boards and, in turn, receives comments from other boards. P. Cunningham added that the Town Charter calls for the Board of Selectmen to "bring all town agencies into harmony", and the Selectmen expect to carry this out in a rigorous manner with high expectations.

There being no further business before the Commission, the meeting was adjourned at 6:50 p.m.

Notes by

Barbara V. Ganem
Conservation Administrator

Approved as drafted 8/27/13.