

## **Conservation Commission Meeting Notes- 10/15/13 – Interviews, Town Meeting Warrant**

**Members present:** Bruce Easom, Marshall Giguere, John Smigelski, Peter Morrison, Rena Swezey, Nadia Madden, Craig Auman

Others present: Conservation Administrator Barbara Ganem, Land Use Director Michelle Collette, Human Resources Director Suzanne Loverin  
Chairman Morrison convened the meeting.

### **First Interview – Heidi Gaffney**

Heidi M. Gaffney, outlined her education and previous experience. Currently employed by the Town of North Andover.

Chairman Morrison asked what a typical day is for a field inspector.

Ms. Gaffney said there is no typical day, noting that she works the counter at the building department, handles application for permits, answers the phone, checks on sites and writes orders of conditions.

Chairman Morrison asked where she learned about wetlands and how to delineate.

Ms. Gaffney said she went to classes at UNH for wetlands delineation and has taken many one day and multiple day courses.

Chairman Morrison asked how she envisions the position here in Groton.

Ms. Gaffney said she feels it is a one-man operation and eyes and ears and follow through for the Commission, noting that educating the public is very important.

Chairman Morrison asked what she would like the most about the position.

Ms. Gaffney said something different and new every day, noting that she enjoys interacting with people and the outside time.

Chairman Morrison asked what is least exciting.

Ms. Gaffney said paperwork, noting that she doesn't mind doing it but finds it least exciting.

Chairman Morrison said an application for an addition on house was received and there is a swamp near the house and the applicant knows nothing, asked what she would do.

Ms. Gaffney said she would explain the rules and depending on their level of understanding tell them details about the clean water act, etc., and also about

bylaws because they tend to be more restrictive. She said she would help them see if the project is viable, look for past conservation files for property, building file, etc.

Chairman Morrison asked about a hardcore case where there is no cooperation.

Ms. Gaffney said she would remind them of the rules and lines drawn and would suggest a wetlands consultant.

Chairman Morrison asked what are bylaws used for and why are they important.

Ms. Gaffney said to individually regulate what is important to town/s and to give them better control.

Chairman Morrison asked how wetland regulations would interface with bylaws and the wetlands protection act without going to town meeting.

Ms. Gaffney said that depends on how the bylaw is written and what the Commission is allowed to do.

Chairman Morrison asked about experience with grant writing.

Ms. Gaffney said she assisted with obtaining a grant for a parcel for water protection, etc.

Chairman Morrison asked about vernal pool knowledge.

Ms. Gaffney said vernal pools are very important for wildlife habitat, etc. frogs, salamanders, fish.

Chairman Morrison asked about vernal pool size.

Ms. Gaffney said it depends on whether there are no fish and thus no predators, noting that they can be the size of a large pond but also quite small.

Discussion ensued regarding schedule of meetings, site walks, etc. and the taking of minutes, which is very important.

Member Madden asked how a large parcel of 60 or so acres for sale would be evaluated for potential town purchase.

Ms. Gaffney said she would look at historic use, aerials, wetlands and what is protected around it, and if a CR possible, then work on getting money from the State.

Member Auman went over the job duties.

Ms. Gaffney said she is already familiar with most if not all, including drafting orders of conditions.

Member Swezey asked whether she had done any research on the town of Groton.

Ms. Gaffney said she looked at GIS maps, read the Bylaws, looked at protected land and the make up of the town.

Discussion ensued regarding length of commute time.

Member Easom asked whether DCS land grants have been worked on.

Ms. Gaffney said she worked on PARC and LAND grant, as well as the town planner and administrator.

Member Easom asked about CR monitoring.

Ms. Gaffney said she has a lot of experience, noting that there are many in N. Andover. She said she uses a Garmin to make sure there are no encroachments.

Member Giguere said Groton has a lot of sustainable forestry and wanted to know her feelings about that.

Ms. Gaffney said she just did a large one in N. Andover.

Member Giguere asked about her experience and opinion about invasive species.

Ms. Gaffney said it is best to set it up so invasives can't and don't grow, noting that removal is difficult and can be upsetting.

Member Giguere said the administrator would be working with foresters because there are large parcels of bittersweet in the forests being managed.

Member Giguere asked what the most important thing about a vernal pool is.

Ms. Gaffney said habitat around it and then discussed N. Andover's rules regarding vernal pools and what buffers are required.

Member Giguere asked about experience working with other boards.

Ms. Gaffney said she works with building, planning, zoning, health, etc.

Member Giguere asked kind of stream crossing is the best to be made by an applicant.

Ms. Gaffney said on the bottom and proper sizing is also important.

Member Giguere asked what the craziest thing that ever happened dealing with an applicant was.

Ms. Gaffney said she was called a bully, noting that she does violation letters for smaller issues and planning enforcement orders for bigger ones.

Ms. Gaffney asked what the biggest reason that each member volunteers for the commission is and how long have each have been on the board.

Each member gave a short explanation of their experiences.

Chairman Morrison said that Groton has a right to farm bylaw and asked whether N. Andover has much farming.

Ms. Gaffney said there is some haying, etc.

Member Giguere asked why the applicant wants to leave N. Andover.

Ms. Gaffney said she wants to be an administrator and is ready for the next level.

Discussion ensued regarding the Town Meeting Warrant and the mosquito control item.

Discussion ensued regarding thoughts on the candidate.

The HR Director went through the hiring process to date, noting that the Commission needs to take a vote tonight.

### **Second Interview - Takashi Tada**

Takashi Tada is currently employed by the Town of Shirley as their Conservation Administrator. He said he was an army contractor at Devens as an environmental specialist and had a lot of first immersion in the Wetlands Protection Act and rare species protection working for Oxbow Associates.

Chairman Morrison asked whether the Groton job would be a promotion.

Mr. Tada said Shirley is only 19 hours a week and has been good because of his daughter not needing to be in daycare.

Chairman Morrison asked when he was at Oxbow and whether he has done any work in Groton.

Mr. Tada said he was at Oxbow for six years and did some work in Groton in the Throne Hill/Academy Hill area during the later stages, counting Blanding turtles. He

said he also worked at Crystal Springs on Old Dunstable Road, dabbles in farming in Groton and runs on trails in the Town Forest.

Chairman Morrison asked how the purple loosestrife beetle project worked out.

Mr. Tada said he wife doesn't work for the organization any more so he has less knowledge.

Chairman Morrison asked what the primary role of the Groton conservation agent is.

Mr. Tada said to serve the Commission and Town in whatever capacity the Commission asks for or needs. He said he feels he has a good understanding of the hierarchy and structure and what sort of administrative guidance and support is needed.

Chairman Morrison asked about interfacing with the public.

Mr. Tada said it is very important, noting that he is on the Cons. Comm. in Ayer and facilitates two meetings/month, which are recorded and broadcast.

Chairman Morrison asked what he likes most and least about this position.

Mr. Tada said he is excited because the job brings together elements that mesh well with his experience, noting that he sees himself as somewhat of a biologist. He said this brings together aspect of science with policy and the public with an analytical component. He said he doesn't get excited about some of the administrative functions but can do them well.

Chairman Morrison went over the schedule of meetings and site walks.

Mr. Tada said the only potential conflict could be with Saturday morning site walks because of his seat on the Conservation Commission in Ayer.

Chairman Morrison asked him, as the first face for an applicant proposing an addition in wetlands, what he would advise.

Mr. Tada said his approach has been in Shirley to smile and hear them out, taking notes and working to see how the project may fit in with regulations.

Chairman Morrison asked why bylaws are good and what they are used for.

Mr. Tada reiterated the importance of the Wetlands Protection Act, noting that most times towns enact stricter requirements and restrictions that gives the Commission more enforcement ability.

Chairman Morrison asked whether Shirley has a bylaw.

Mr. Tada said Shirley's is similar to Groton's, noting that Ayer technically has a bylaw but it doesn't do much of anything because it has no teeth.

Chairman Morrison asked about his experience with wetlands delineation.

Mr. Tada said he has experience with that and with soils as well. He said his job at Oxbow was instrumental in furthering his education, noting that he also wants to take more courses to upgrade his education.

Chairman Morrison asked about his grant writing experience.

Mr. Tada said he hasn't had to do any yet in Shirley although some discussion has started, noting that he is familiar with the process.

Chairman Morrison asked about vernal pools.

Mr. Tada said he understands the importance of vernal pools in supporting species, noting that they are a high priority to protect.

Chairman Morrison asked how big or small vernal pools could be.

Mr. Tada said in his experience they come in all shapes and sizes, noting that they don't have to dry out but can't have some of the fish populations that a full wetlands would have. He said some are as big as a good size pond or as small as a puddle but big enough to support breeding of species.

Chairman Morrison asked about the areas around vernal pools.

Mr. Tada said they are important because they provide non-breeding habitat, noting that that habitat needs to be protected because otherwise the species are not being protected.

Member Giguere said there is a lot of sustainable forestry in town and asked about his experience.

Mr. Tada said he has done some work related to forestry projects at Oxbow and Shirley has one conservation property that has a forestry plan in place and one plan that has lapsed that is being discussed to rewrite.

Member Giguere asked about his experience with invasive control measures on conservation land.

Mr. Tada said he has experience with beetle control, aquatic invasive species in Ayer and pond management.

Member Giguere asked about his preference on how to control.

Mr. Tada said it is important to control the spread so native species can survive.

Member Giguere said bittersweet is a major issue.

Mr. Tada said he doesn't have experience on a large scale with that.

Member Giguere asked about stream crossing.

Mr. Tada said that if it is necessary then it needs to be done in the least invasive way, allowing wildlife passing and using a box culvert rather than a round pipe. He said he would evaluate this on a case-by-case basis, noting that he is not intimately knowledgeable with stream crossing guidelines.

Member Giguere asked about his opinion/experience with wetland replications.

Mr. Tada said it is mostly less than ideal, noting that he worked on a few at Oxbow and Ayer has regulated more than a few replications. He said that if there is a need to then there should be as much regulation up front and in the Order of Conditions to avoid ambiguity. He said he is not very happy with replications as a Commissioner, but noted that they can be done successfully.

Member Giguere asked about the craziest thing heard from an applicant.

Mr. Tada said from a seller of a house with an order of conditions that she hadn't read.

Member Auman asked about his biggest accomplishment.

Mr. Tada said his daughter first, and professionally, the Peace Corps, Army and Oxbow are all related and challenging in a good way, noting that they all allowed him to become a good field technician quickly.

Member Madden said he looked familiar because she had met him in her backyard, tracking turtles. She asked about his dabble in farming and what he learned from that that he could bring to this position.

Mr. Tada said he likes farming because of working with soil and honing his skill as a plant person. He said it is done organically as much as possible, treating the land with respect, noting that he feels this is closely related to being a conservation administrator.

Mr. Tada asked what the Commission would hope to get in the person replacing Mrs. Ganem.

The general comments were: good public rapport, technical competence, multitasking with many components/projects

Member Giguere said it is like being a law clerk to the Supreme Court.

Discussion ensued regarding what qualifications this applicant had vs. the other.

Member Easom made a motion to recommend that Takashi Tada be hired as Conservation Administrator pursuant to background checks, etc. The motion was seconded.

Mrs. Collette said that the Town Manager has the hiring authority with ratification of the Board of Selectmen.

The motion passed unanimously.

Discussion ensued regarding getting a week of overlap so the current administrator could aid in training, etc.

A motion to adjourn at 9:15 pm was made, seconded and passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,

Margot Hammer  
Zoning Board of Appeals Assistant

**Approved as drafted 11/12/13.**