

GROTON CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Minutes

Tuesday, August 26, 2014

Chairman John Smigelski called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. with Peter Morrison (Vice Chairman), Susan Black (Clerk), Rena Swezey, Bruce Easom, Marshall Giguere and Mary Metzger present. Conservation Administrator Takashi Tada was present.

7:00 p.m. – Discussion: Signs, Mike Roberts

Mike Roberts, member of the Groton Historical Society, discussed the role of heritage in community well-being and presented his ideas for placing informational signs and/or brochures on Town-owned properties. The purpose of the signs would be to promote the historical and natural significance of the property. Prior to this year's RiverFest event at the Petapawag Boat Launch, Mr. Roberts put up temporary signs highlighting the historical prominence of the site. He received positive feedback about the signs from those in attendance. He said he is in the early stages of formulating a plan, but he anticipates seeking funding for the project through the Community Preservation Act.

Commissioners expressed broad support for Mr. Roberts' initiative. P. Morrison mentioned that the Commission owns land of significant natural and cultural interest, and has some money that it could use to pay for signs. S. Black said she liked the idea of highlighting the historical links between various properties throughout the Town. R. Swezey asked if the location of Tinker's Tavern has been identified; Mr. Roberts said the Nashua River has been altered over time and the location is likely in the river. M. Metzger said she is working on a conservation property inventory report that would benefit from more historical background/context. M. Giguere suggested that Mr. Roberts expand his focus to include the large New England Forestry Foundation properties in town. B. Easom said Mr. Roberts' idea is a good way to combine history and hiking; it would serve to enhance our conservation lands.

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by S. Black, it was

VOTED: to support Mike Roberts' efforts to promote the historical and natural heritage of conservation lands by increasing the information available to the public.

The vote was unanimous.

Moving on to General Business – Meeting Minutes, the Commission reviewed draft minutes from the May 27th and August 15th meetings.

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by R. Swezey, it was

VOTED: to approve the meeting minutes from 5/27/2014, as written.

Five voted in favor (Smigelski, Morrison, Black, Swezey, Metzger); two abstained (Easom, Giguere).

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by B. Easom, it was

VOTED: to approve the meeting minutes from 8/15/2014, as written.

Six voted in favor (Smigelski, Morrison, Black, Swezey, Metzger, Easom); one abstained (Giguere).

7:15 p.m. – Public Hearing: NOI, Septic Upgrade, 96 Mill Street, DEP # 169-1113

Chairman Smigelski opened the hearing for the Notice of Intent (NOI) and S. Black read aloud the public hearing notice. The applicants submitted written request to continue the public hearing to September 23rd. They need time to revise the plans based on new information.

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by R. Swezey, it was

VOTED: to continue the public hearing for 96 Mill Street, DEP #169-1113, to 9/23/14.

The motion was approved unanimously.

On the topic of Land Management, the Commission discussed vegetation management at Baddacook Field. T. Tada recapped a site walk conducted 8/25/14 with Tom Christopher of Christopher Environmental Associates. He is a licensed applicator and specializes in controlling invasive species through herbicides. He does not do any mowing/cutting. After viewing the property, Mr. Christopher said he typically recommends mowing/cutting in the springtime followed shortly thereafter by spraying. However, he was unfamiliar with black swallowwort. He said he could put together a detailed proposal after he returns from vacation in October. His standard rate is \$90 per hour, plus mileage reimbursement at the IRS rate.

S. Black reported that she also met with Harris Farms (Fitchburg) at Baddacook Field to get another opinion/quote. Harris Farms does the tree trimming and vegetation control for Meredith Scarlet (Scarlet Farm, a.k.a. Angus Hill); Ms. Scarlet had high praise for the work they do. S. Black said Harris Farms does not believe in spraying, and they are very knowledgeable about identifying/controlling invasive plants and working in rare species habitats. They use mechanical methods to control invasive plants and they have specialized equipment that can mow on the steep slopes, around the old foundations, and along the roadside at Baddacook Field.

M. Metzger said one of the important questions to consider is whether to act now (cut and/or spray) or wait until we have more detailed proposals from potential vendors. M. Giguere said he preferred to wait until all viable proposals are on the table, including Christopher Environmental, Harris Farms, and a more detailed proposal from Bay State Forestry. M. Giguere also reported that he contacted the Goat Girls in Amherst, MA, to see if they would be interested in bringing their goats to Baddacook Field to eat some of the invasives. Their pricing is \$500 for the first week; \$300 weekly thereafter. But they said Groton was too far for them to travel.

They mentioned another “goats for hire” outfit near Plymouth that might be within range. More importantly, however, they said swallowwort is toxic to goats.

Helene Cahen, of 435 Martins Pond Road, said she had goats on her farm and asked if the Commission would consider hiring “local” goats. She thought the goats would instinctively stay away from swallowwort if there was enough non-toxic vegetation for them to eat, such as bittersweet and buckthorn.

7:35 p.m. – Public Meeting: RDA, Renovation of former Fire Station, 20 Station Avenue

Attorney Bob Collins and engineer Stan Dillis presented the Request for Determination of Applicability (RDA) on behalf of Dan and Lori McElroy. Mr. Collins said the McElroys have agreed to purchase the former Center Fire Station from the Town, pending a satisfactory outcome with the Commission. Approximately 1,800 square feet of the property behind the existing building is within the 200-foot Riverfront Area associated with James Brook. This area had been previously disturbed; most recently it was used for storage and contains a concrete utility pad. The renovation plan proposes to create a pervious parking area with room for four cars behind the building, with a rain garden to provide additional stormwater infiltration if needed. The parking area and rain garden would require alteration of 1,500 square feet of the previously disturbed Riverfront Area. Three mature trees would be removed under the plan. Stan Dillis said there is no treatment of stormwater in the existing condition; therefore the proposal would improve the site by adding rain gardens for infiltration.

S. Black asked if it would be possible to keep the big sugar maple tree behind the building in lieu of, or in addition to, the proposed rain garden. The tree helps the drainage situation by absorbing a significant amount of water. R. Swezey asked if the proposed landscaping in front of the building was required by the Planning Board. Mr. Collins said no, the landscaping was the applicants’ idea but the Planning Board liked the concept. M. Metzger asked for details on the landscaping plan. Mr. Collins said it includes a brick sidewalk along the road, plantings, a stone patio for outdoor seating in front of the building, and grass pavers with a bike rack next to the patio. M. Giguere asked about alteration within Riverfront Area. The applicants said the parking area would require approximately 900 square feet of alteration, while the rain garden would add another 600 square feet, for a total of 1,500 square feet. This represents about 83% of the total Riverfront Area on the property, but it is considered redevelopment. M. Giguere also asked about maintenance of the rain garden and pervious parking area. Mr. Dillis said it would be included in the Operations & Maintenance Plan to be submitted to the Planning Board. B. Easom asked if the proposal was consistent with the Groton Wetlands Bylaw. M. Giguere stated the Bylaw does not impose any additional restrictions within Riverfront Area.

Upon a motion by M. Giguere, seconded by P. Morrison, it was

VOTED: to issue a negative #3 Determination of Applicability for 20 Station Avenue, with the following conditions:

1. Copy of the Operations & Maintenance Plan to be provided to Commission; and
2. Designated snow storage areas to be located outside of Riverfront Area.

The vote was unanimous.

7:50 p.m. – Public Meeting: RDA, Pedestrian Trail, NESSP Temple, Boston Road

Ian Rubin, engineer with Markey & Rubin, presented a proposal to utilize the existing cart path to provide pedestrian access to the planned Hindu Temple. The Planning Board requested that the applicants come up with a pedestrian connection between Boston Road (Route 119) and the Temple. It would be for private use of the Temple, and would likely be used infrequently. Mr. Rubin explained that they took great care to design the driveway to stay out of the wetland/vernal pool Buffer Zone; the addition of a sidewalk along the driveway would require construction within the Buffer Zone. Instead they propose to use the existing cart path, with a “rest in place” boardwalk across the overflow path of Retention Pond 1. They would place gravel and wood chips on the trail to smooth the surface.

M. Giguere asked about the boardwalk design. Mr. Rubin said they would use pressure treated wood. It would rest on blocks at the ends and plastic pipes in the middle sections, if needed. M. Giguere also stated a preference for keeping the existing trail surface, rather than placing gravel and mulch on top. Mr. Rubin agreed that the existing surface would be easier to maintain with only seasonal mowing, as needed. B. Easom and S. Black also expressed a preference to keep the trail as is.

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by M. Giguere, it was

VOTED: to issue a negative #3 Determination of Applicability for the NESSP Temple pedestrian trail, with the following conditions:

1. The surface of the trail to be kept as natural as possible.
2. The trail may be mowed as needed.
3. No concrete or asphalt shall be used on the trail.

The vote was unanimous.

8:05 p.m. – Public Meeting: RDA, 331 Boston Road (Enforcement Order)

Keith Allard presented an RDA submitted as a requirement of the Enforcement Order issued on his property at 331 Boston Road for unauthorized work within Buffer Zone. Mr. Allard explained that he has cleared and graded a portion of his lawn to create a gravel driveway to the barn that is to be constructed behind the existing house. The barn will be used primarily to store a vehicle. The new gravel driveway is approximately five feet off the eastern property line, and there is a Bordering Vegetated Wetland (BVW) on the abutting property. Per the Order, Mr. Allard installed straw wattles between the driveway and property line, to prevent erosion and sedimentation to the BVW.

M. Metzger said she wanted assurance that the new driveway would remain unpaved, and that the use of fertilizers be limited to organic and low nitrogen content products. B. Easom said he would like to see the driveway re-routed to the other side of the lot. P. Morrison emphasized that the Commission never had a chance to consider alternatives because the work was already done.

Mr. Allard responded that the location of the septic system on the other side of the house would have made it impractical to put the driveway there. J. Smigelski said he would like to see the disturbed area next to the gravel driveway stabilized. Mr. Allard pointed out that he already placed large rocks along the side of the driveway, and the vegetation is growing in nicely. He felt the disturbed areas were very stable.

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by R. Swezey, it was

VOTED: to issue a negative #3 Determination of Applicability for 331 Boston Road, subject to the following special conditions:

1. All disturbed areas need to be completely stabilized to prevent erosion.
2. The driveway is to remain gravel (not paved).
3. Fertilizers utilized for landscaping and lawn care shall be organic and of low-nitrogen content, and shall be used in moderation.

Members Smigelski, Morrison, Black, Swezey, and Metzger voted in the affirmative. Members Easom and Giguere were opposed.

8:10 p.m. – Discussion: Proposed Trails, Groton Trails Committee

Chairman Paul Funch and member Wendy Good of the Trails Committee presented two proposed trails that would interconnect existing trails and expand/enhance the trail network in the vicinity of Chicopee Row and Reedy Meadow Road. The first trail discussed would connect McLain's Woods Conservation Area to Watson Way Conservation Area, from the existing trail off McLains Woods Road to the recently created trail off Brown Lane. The middle portion of this proposed trail passes through the northern part of Walker-Cox Conservation Area.

The second trail up for discussion is a proposed loop on Walker-Cox Conservation Area that would start across Chicopee Row from the Williams Barn. The actual trailhead location and trail route could depend on other considerations such as access for emergency vehicles. One option for access is to restore an existing cart path that has been overgrown by invasive shrubs.

Mary asked about the schedule for blazing the new trails. The Trails Committee would like to do the work this fall. B. Easom said the management plan should be consulted to ensure the proposed trails are consistent with management goals; he also thought it would be good to notify the Groton Conservation Trust (GCT) as they hold the CR on the property.

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by B. Easom, it was

VOTED: to approve the proposed trails and to notify the GCT of the Trails Committee's intent to create the trails.

The vote was unanimous.

On the topic of Land Management – Surrenden Farm (West), Wendy Good of the Old North Bridge Hounds, Inc. informed the Commission that they plan to conduct their annual fall mock

fox hunt on Tuesday, October 7th (rain date Oct. 8th) at Surrenden Farm West. The mock hunt would involve up to 20 riders on the existing marked trails, with hounds “hunting” off-trail. B. Easom asked if this was in conflict with a leash requirement on the property. Ms. Good said the mock fox hunts are considered exempt. B. Easom also asked that any temporary signage be removed the day of the hunt.

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by B. Easom, it was

VOTED: to approve the Old North Bridge Hounds – Mock Fox Hunt.

The vote was unanimous.

8:25 p.m. – Discussion: Agricultural License for Pacer Way (Eliades Conservation Area)

Roy MacGregor of Maple Shade Farm was present to discuss renewal of his license to hay the field on Pacer Way (part of Eliades Conservation Area). He followed the trails discussions with a question about the mowing of trails around, and through the middle of, the hayfield on Pacer Way. Mr. MacGregor stated that the abutters are encroaching on the hayfield by mowing a path up to 8 feet wide around the perimeter, as well as a substantial path through the field. The Commission said it would notify the abutters to remind them to stick to the original trail width and respect the agricultural use of the property, and possibly conduct a public site walk with abutters. B. Easom said the path through the middle of the field is intended to provide alternative fire access, but he was unsure whose responsibility it is to do maintain the path. He also said there have been problems with ATV use in the past.

On the issue of the Mr. MacGregor’s Agricultural License to hay the Pacer Way field, B. Easom said he preferred to check with the Town Manager or Town Counsel about whether the license needs to be re-advertised through a Request For Proposals. Chairman Smigelski said he would talk to the Town Manager about this.

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by M. Giguere, it was

VOTED: to renew Roy MacGregor’s Agricultural License for the Pacer Way field, subject to approval by Town Manager.

The vote was unanimous.

Moving on to Land Management – Property Inventory, M. Metzger presented her reports on the following conservation areas:

- Balcom Estates – This 1.39-acre parcel was acquired as part of the special permit for Balcom Estates subdivision (Spencer Circle). The parcel contains part of the old railroad bed and creates a trail connection between Maple Avenue and the Senior Center. It also abuts the 28-acre wooded parcel owned by the estate of Mary Allen that has frontage on West Main Street and Spencer Circle.

- Issues: Trash (tires, carpets, etc.). B. Easom volunteered to bring his pickup truck to haul the trash to the transfer station.
- Bertozzi – The Peter E. Bertozzi Conservation Area consists of 40 acres located between the Squannacook River and Townsend Road. It abuts the state’s Bertozzi Wildlife Management Area. There is a popular swimming/camping area (camping and fire permit required). There are two fire rings.
 - Issues: Some erosion of riverbank in the swimming area. T. Tada said a group of Scouts might be interested in establishing additional fire rings. Commissioners said they would be willing to consider a proposal for more fire rings.
- Crosswinds – This 49-acre parcel was formerly an airstrip and is maintained as open grassland habitat. From 2005 through 2012, the field management was funded by a Wildlife Habitat Incentives Program (WHIP) grant from USDA-NRCS. The poor quality sandy soils do not favor alternative uses of the field.
 - Issues: It is due to be mowed again this fall. P. Morrison said there was an issue in 2012 when an abutter complained about the mowing causing tree damage on private property. The issue was resolved when B. Easom met with the abutter and planted a pine tree. Any person mowing the field should be aware of the property boundaries.
- Farmers & Mechanics Club Site – This 19.3-acre wooded parcel was logged in 2012. M. Metzger noted that white pine seedlings and native plants are growing in skid roads, and the landing area had lots of bird activity. It might be good to mow the landing area annually to maintain meadow habitat for birds.

Upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by B. Easom, it was

VOTED: to authorize expenditure of up to \$500.00 from the land management account for mowing of Crosswinds field.

The motion was approved unanimously.

Moving on to Open Session, T. Tada informed the group that Elio Sgrosso, owner of the property at 6 Wyman Road (DEP #169-1067) was planning to submit a revised plan for his proposed single-family home. The approved plan calls for a shared driveway via an easement on the neighboring parcel (4 Wyman Road). Mr. Sgrosso would like to have his own driveway, but it would slightly increase the amount of alteration of Riverfront Area. He is hoping the proposed change would be considered insignificant.

There being no further business, upon a motion by P. Morrison, seconded by S. Black, it was

VOTED: to adjourn the meeting at 9:05 p.m.

The vote was unanimous.

Notes taken by

Takashi Tada
Conservation Administrator

Exhibits on file at Conservation Commission Office:

1. NOI, 96 Mill Street, DEP #169-1113
2. RDA, 20 Station Avenue
3. RDA, NESSP Temple – Pedestrian Trail
4. RDA, 331 Boston Road
5. Agricultural License, Pacer Way (Eliades Conservation Area)
6. Property Inventory Reports

Approved 9/23/2014