



## **Groton Stewardship Committee Minutes**

**Present:** Lisa Murray, Chair; Eileen McHugh, Vice-Chair; Kimberly Kuliesis; Deborah Collum; Olin Lathrop; Ronald Hersch.

**Absent:** Anna Eliot; Bob Hanninen.

**Others Present:** Charlotte Steeves (Conservation Administrator); Phil Francisco (Sustainability Commission); Ray Lyons (Attorney).

**Location:** Virtual Meeting (Zoom)

**When:** November 29<sup>th</sup>, 2023

**6:30 PM L. Murray called to order**

### **Committee updates**

#### Discussion Pollinator Corridor with Sustainability Commission

L. Murray said that F. Francisco and R. Lyons were present in the meeting to talk about the pollinator corridor project on behalf of the Sustainability Commission.

E. McHugh said that Allison Peterson talked with the Conservation Commission yesterday evening before the start of the Conservation Commission meeting regarding the pollinator habitat, and she gave some members a copy of a handout outlining the project. She asked if C. Steeves had received a copy of this yet.

C. Steeves said she did not get that yet.

L. Murray noted that R. Hersch joined the zoom meeting.

O. Lathrop shared his screen showing the Groton Senior Center.

R. Hersch said that he had another meeting at 7:00 PM.

L. Murray invited P. Francisco and R. Lyons to present on the pollinator corridor project. She clarified that she was not sure if P. Francisco and R. Lyons were on the call together to present on the pollinator habitat.

R. Lyons said he could give the Committee an update on the Groton Lakes Association.

E. McHugh said the meeting would start with hearing the presentation on the pollinator corridor.

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P. Francisco said the Sustainability Commission had submitted a preliminary CPC grant proposal for two projects, the first being to start work for the pollinator habitat. The other project was for a carbon sequestration analysis for the town. On the first piece, the Commission is requesting funds to help pay for the first of several pollinator extensions, coming off of the Ice Trail at the Groton Center. This would make a linkage from the Ice Trail, connecting the pollinator garden to the trail. They are still in the process of determining costs, but do not project it will be a major expense. He said they would be researching if they also want to request CPC funds to match any grants to help build the larger pollinator corridor. The pollinator extension off of the Ice Trail would be a test project. He said he is seeking a letter of support to the CPC for this project from the Stewardship Committee.

E. McHugh said the project seems like a great idea to help connect the Ice Trail and existing pollinator garden with the pollinator extension. She said she would be willing to support this project.

O. Lathrop said he would be willing to support the project.

D. Collum asked if the larger pollinator corridor is something the Commission is also working on.

P. Francisco said that yes, the extension would be a test project. He also has a goal to build a coalition with other groups in town to start planning where the larger corridor would go. He said he would like to work with Conservation to figure out which parcels would be candidates for the larger corridor.

R. Hersch said this would be a wonderful project and he would wholeheartedly support it.

K. Kuliesis said she is excited about the project and is happy to help support the project.

L. Murray asked what the CPC funds would be for.

P. Francisco said there would be some site preparation involved, as the soil is of poor quality and has a lot of clay and sand. He said some soil preparation would likely be involved, but they do not yet know the extent. He said another cost would be to buy the native plants. He said there is an overlap in members between the Sustainability Commission and the Garden Club which will be very helpful. He said there are not many plants that need to be removed, and it is mostly just crab grass and weeds in the proposed space. He said Paul Funch cut a 6- 7' wide slice that connects from the Ice Trail the proposed area of the pollinator extension.

C. Steeves said she is excited about the pollinator extension project. She asked if they would be looking for any volunteers.

P. Francisco said yes, they would be looking for volunteers.

L. Murray asked if the Sustainability Commission would be looking for letters of support from Stewardship.

P. Francisco said that yes, the Commission would welcome a letter of support from Stewardship.

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E. McHugh said the Stewardship Committee could authorize the Conservation Commission to send the letter of support.

O. Lathrop said he would not want the letter to take up much time in front of the Conservation Commission, and said it wouldn't hurt if the Stewardship Committee sent the letter. He made the motion to authorize the Chair to send a letter of support endorsing the Sustainability Commission's CPC application for the pollinator extension at the Groton Center.

C. Steeves asked for a deadline for the letter.

P. Francisco said the deadline was January 11<sup>th</sup>, 2024.

C. Steeves asked if she would be writing the letter on behalf of Stewardship or Conservation.

E. McHugh said the letter would be written on behalf of Stewardship and not Conservation.

Upon a motion by O. Lathrop, seconded by K. Kuliesis:  
**The motion passed by a roll call vote (Yes: OL, EM, KK, DC, RH, LM).**

Discussion Enforcement Issues

R. Lyons said he joined the meeting because he thought there would be a discussion on enforcement issues and he was invited to join the meeting. He said if the Committee ever has to deal with a difficult issue, they can contact him.

L. Murray said she was not sure who invited R. Lyons or which issues he was referring to, but she invited him to give an overview on the enforcement issues.

R. Lyons said he has dealt with enforcement and stewardship issues across New England. He said he was told he would be on the agenda and invited to join the meeting.

D. Collum asked if this discussion was centered around motorized bikes.

L. Murray said the motorized bike issue was on the agenda.

R. Lyons said dogs and motorized bikes cause a lot of issues. He said these are difficult topics.

L. Murray asked where the enforcement responsibility lies.

R. Lyons said there is no general state code. He said most people respect regulations when there is a set area where motorized vehicles are allowed. He said involving a specific club like a snow mobile club involved, they usually enforce the regulations.

O. Lathrop asked about entering a private property when the Commission suspects there is an ongoing violation on that property that cannot be verified without trespassing.

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R. Lyons said Conservation Commission members are part of the Government and they must respect private property and no trespassing laws. He said the situation is different when it is a land trust holding a conservation restriction on a property. In this case, there is usually a clause allowing the holder of the conservation restriction to investigate the property.

O. Lathrop asked about a case where the Conservation Commission has a reasonable suspicion about a violation on private property.

R. Lyons suggested in this case that Town Council be involved and get a judge to issue a warrant. He said the MACC handbook likely has a paragraph on this situation.

L. Murray questioned if drone footage would be considered trespassing.

O. Lathrop speculated that it is likely a drone would also be considered trespassing, but the use of satellite imagery from open sources, it would probably be fine.

#### Vacancy Updates

D. Collum said she thought someone was being recruited.

K. Kuliesis said she has not been able to schedule getting the new recruit in for the meeting.

#### Brown Loaf Land Discussion

E. McHugh said Paul Funch has a discussion on the Brown Loaf land at the end of a previous meeting. He said, during the meeting, that the Brown Loaf land is managed by the Town of Groton rather than the Conservation Commission. He also questioned why the Town is managing this land rather than Conservation. E. McHugh invited him to present this discussion during the present Stewardship meeting. However, he had a conflict and is available for the next meeting on December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023. She suggested it would be better to wait for P. Funch to lead the discussion. She said inviting horseback riders and dirt bikers to use the land would be part of the Brown Loaf discussion.

#### Committee Updates

L. Murray said the Garden Club won a New England Regional Award for the native garden at Town Hall.

E. McHugh said she joined the Native Peoples Recognition group. She said this group initiated the proposal of naming 'Redskin Trail' to Nipmuc Trail in the Lost Lake Area. She said the area was re-named to Mountain Lakes Trail after pushback from residents in that area. The NPR group still wanted to honor the Nipmuc people. She said they invited a member of the Nipmuc Tribe to come out and walk a site that the NPR group felt might be a good candidate to re-name in honor of the Nipmuc people. She said in her opinion, the re-naming might be seen as not enough. She said the Nipmuc people might be looking for a cultural easement, which would give them freedom to manage the property. She said there was a lot of pushback on the cultural easement. It was decided

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the first step should be to re-name the property. She shared a letter from Becky Pine asking the Commission to re-name the property on Baddacook Pond to Nipmuc Meadows. She said the land currently does not have a particular name. There was nothing in the deed requiring that the Commission provide a name for the land after acquisition.

O. Lathrop shared his screen showing the parcel in question and Martin's Pond.

E. McHugh said the only deed restriction is to keep the area open. She said they have been controlling invasives in the area. She said there are several trails along Baddacook. She said the Conservation Commission voted during their meeting the previous night to authorize the re-naming of the parcel to Nipmuc Meadows. She said the NPR group will be looking to raise awareness on the history of the land.

K. Kuliesis asked if the Stewardship Commission would be responsible for creating the signage.

O. Lathrop said the Conservation motion from the night before included adding the signage.

E. McHugh said there was a discussion on metal vs plastic signs with P. Funch. It was decided to continue with the semi-wooden signs. On occasion they might use a metal sign when appropriate.

O. Lathrop shared his screen showing the Casella property, recently acquired by the Conservation Commission. He said he mapped all of the trails. He said he would like to make several changes to the trails. He asked how much Stewardship would want to be involved in these changes. He said several areas could be closed, fixed, or are redundant.

L. Murray asked what would be involved in this work.

O. Lathrop said it would involve getting the Trails Committee involved. areas would be marked off by placing sticks and brush in the trail. He would also want to put up signs.

K. Kuliesis said if volunteer work is needed, they can bring it up at a future Stewardship meeting.

Approve Next Meeting Date

L. Murray stated the next meeting date would be December 20<sup>th</sup>, 2023 at 6:30 PM.

Approve Meeting Minutes

Several changes were made to the meeting minutes from October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023, live during the meeting.

L. Murray said the only thing that needed to be fixed in the minutes was to add the word 'meadow' after Reedy Road.

E. McHugh made the motion to approve the minutes from October 18<sup>th</sup>, 2023, as amended and it was seconded by L. Murray:

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**The motion passed by a roll call vote (Yes: DC, KK, EM, LM); (Abstained: OL).**  
**\*Note RH had to leave early before this vote was taken and did not participate in the vote.**

Additional Updates

E. McHugh said she would like each member to come to the meetings with something they are interested in pursuing.

D. Collum asked if there were any new turtle habitat projects currently being considered.

O. Lathrop said there are several existing ones. He said the one off Nate Nutting Road is being constructed now.

D. Collum said she drafted a letter for Hayes Woods Maple Avenue. She said if there are any upcoming projects with turtle habitat requirements, she would like to be involved.

E. McHugh said the Commission did not want to be responsible for the turtle habitat off Nate Nutting Rd.

O. Lathrop said, if he recalls correctly, Conservation is holding the money for this project but another entity is responsible for the work.

E. McHugh asked if Fish and Wildlife was the entity doing the work and maintenance.

O. Lathrop said Fish and Wildlife approved it but Audubon is doing the work.

E. McHugh asked if C. Steeves could look into this project, contact Bob Collins, and determine what is going on at the site. She would like to know who is responsible for the work. She said B. Collins is representing the developer. She said the developer has to build the turtle nesting habitat and the Commission holds a Conservation Restriction on the land. She said this would be a good site visit for C. Steeves to make sure everything is being done correctly. The Commission was concerned about soil being brought in with invasive plant species.

O. Lathrop mentioned monitoring on the properties for encroachment. He mentioned this would be a great job for Stewardship. He said members can go to properties where CRs are held and walk the boundaries to determine if there are any unpermitted activities going on.

D. Collum agreed this would be a great idea.

O. Lathrop suggested adding a schedule for site monitoring priority areas at the next meeting.

Adjourn

**E. McHugh made the motion to adjourn and it was seconded by D.C.**  
**(Yes: KK, OL, EM, DC)**

**Minutes Approved:** January 17th 2024