

Groton Invasive Species Committee Meeting Minutes

19Oct2020

Via Zoom

Committee Members Present:

Olin Lathrop
Brian Bettencourt
Ron Strohsahl
Richard Hewitt
Jonathan Basch

Also attending:

Lisa Murray
Priscilla Williams
Rick Muehlke

Agenda:

- 1) Review of minutes from September meeting
- 2) Invited guest, Lisa Murray (Garden Club): Upcoming lecture and invasive species disposal project
- 3) Upcoming event with Webelos Scouts
- 4) Follow-up on Japanese Knotweed treatment: Country Club, Hayden Rd., Nod Rd., Martins Pond Rd.
- 5) Brochure print run - status
- 6) Phragmites by Trimper driveway, and report on Phragmites biocontrol efforts
- 7) Management Plan for hilltop in Priest Conservation Area

The meeting was called to order at 7:02 PM.

The first order of business was review of minutes from the last meeting.

- The minutes were reviewed live on screen.
- Minor changes were made to the draft minutes.
- Olin Lathrop moved to accept the minutes
 - Richard Hewitt seconded.
 - The motion passed via unanimous roll call.

The second order of business was a presentation by Lisa Murray of the Garden Club on two projects: An upcoming lecture and an invasive species disposal project.

- Lisa Murray described Priscilla Williams as the chair for the annual public lecture committee. She sets up the speaker and logistics.
 - The lecture is usually January/February
 - The topic is invasive species this year.
 - Title: Natural Control of Pesky Invasive Plants

- Priscilla Williams said that in general, the Club always gets a lot of questions about invasive plants, especially identification or how to get rid of them.
 - Folks often have a problem with them in their landscape.
 - The invited speaker: A colleague named Michael Nadeau who helped her write the official organic lawn care standards.
 - He works on large and small properties, mainly in CT.
 - He doesn't like to use chemicals. He has lots of good information, a nice approachable manner, and is a good speaker. He's signed up.
 - There will be Q/A with the public.
 - She has primed Nadeau with some of the more persistent invasives in our area.
 - He'll have a lot of good before/after slides, aimed at the homeowner.
- Brian Bettencourt asked: When is the lecture?
 - Priscilla Williams replied: Saturday Feb. 13th.
 - Via Zoom.
 - The speaker's honorarium paid by Commissioners of Trust Funds.
 - Lisa Murray said that advertising and promoting will be key.
 - Priscilla Williams said: Typically 100-125 would attend. She was not sure how this will go this year --- there could be more!
 - Brian Bettencourt said: if there are indeed that many attendees, make sure your Zoom is set up to handle that volume.
- Priscilla Williams mentioned that the Garden Club had the Invasive Species Committee brochures at last year's talk (by Toby Wolf). They were very popular.
 - Brian Bettencourt said: The Committee now has more – 7 in total now.
 - If the lecture is conducted via Zoom ... The Committee could just provide the links to the brochures on some bumper slides.
 - Lisa Murray agreed, and said the Garden Club could roll through them as a slideshow!
 - Brian Bettencourt added: Olin Lathrop has material from his library lectures.
 - Olin Lathrop and Brian Bettencourt took an Action Item to collate material from the brochures and library lectures into a simple slideshow for preview before the lecture.
- The Committee and Garden Club attendees had a brief discussion regarding the use of herbicides and the Committee's role therein.
- Lisa Murray said: Generally the Club does a flyer that is sent out to area businesses.
 - Priscilla Williams said: We will do a flyer again this year.
 - Brian Bettencourt added: The Committee can send out to their contacts too.
 - Lisa Murray mentioned that the Club may very well get other people from other towns.
 - A general discussion was then had regarding other towns' invasive species committees and efforts.
 - Olin Lathrop said: Groton was ahead of the game.
- Brian Bettencourt said: The committee will do anything we can to help out.
- Lisa Murray asked: Would you like to be listed a co-sponsor?
 - The Committee said Yes, unanimously.
 - Lisa Murray replied that this is a very appropriate activity for both groups.

- Brian Bettencourt said that this lecture and outreach is complementary to the Committee's mission: A focus on "what you can do in your backyard".
- Lisa Murray added that the Club wanted to get as broad an audience as possible.
- Brian Bettencourt guided the discussion on to the next item --- disposal of invasive plant material at the Transfer Station.
- Lisa Murray described the history: The Garden Club was working at one of the municipal gardens.
 - Someone was asking about an invasive plant that was there.
 - Normally, the Club would put the material in the trash, not into compost, so as not to spread.
 - A discussion was held at that time – what if there was a local disposal mechanism specifically for invasive plants?
 - i.e. for folks' yards, for municipal gardens, and from the Highway Dept.
 - The Club asked Tom Delaney (Highway Dept.).
 - Tom Delaney said: The Highway Dept. normally puts things into the brush pile.
 - Thinking it would compost on its own
 - Lisa Murray asked: What are the Committee's thoughts on that practice?
 - Brian Bettencourt replied: That is very risky business.
 - Jonathan Basch said: In theory, composting could generate enough heat to kill the invasive plants.
 - Brian Bettencourt and Richard Hewitt replied: It's an open pile, not a real composting setup.
- Lisa Murray asked: So, what should be done with this material?
 - Olin Lathrop replied: Incinerate it, or contain it and burn *in situ*.
 - If the material is not covered, that's a problem --- for example, black swallowwort seeds would be blown all around and be a real problem.
 - So, any disposal area should be covered and surrounded such that it could be burned periodically.
 - Sounds like another job for the Transfer Station employees.
- Lisa Murray asked: Could it be put in regular orange bags?
 - Olin Lathrop replied: Normally, the trash was going to an incinerator plant, not sure if that is still happening.
 - Brian Bettencourt added: Yes, it could go into regular trash ... But, the bags cost money.
 - Richard Hewitt asked: What about a chipper?
 - Brian Bettencourt replied: That's a really bad idea - some plants are okay for that, others not (*e.g.* Japanese knotweed) ... we can't expect people to sort by species.
- Lisa Murray said that we need a separate area, minimally. So it's the step after that that is key.
- Lisa Murray added: This relates to the town contract with a composting company. They're collecting food scraps at the Transfer Station, and making compost for residents and Garden Club.
 - If people go to the Transfer Station, they would have a compost material receptacle there for no charge.

- Or, the material could be picked up at residences for a charge.
- Brian Bettencourt said: The big challenge is woody materials in invasives – it doesn't break down quickly.
- Olin Lathrop added: Also, transporting the material all around town is a bad idea.
 - For example, driving around town in the back of a pickup truck, spreading seeds in the wind.
 - Lisa Murray replied: The Club agrees, that's why we're trying to figure out the right solution here.
- Brian Bettencourt said: We can't really expect people to bag it up.
 - Richard Hewitt agreed.
 - Ron Strohsahl added: It's asking a lot for people to sort things out on their own.
 - Lisa Murray said: That's why this process starts with education.
 - Could invasive plant brochures and materials be placed at the Transfer Station?
 - Brian Bettencourt asked: What about a Volunteer pickup patrol?
 - Olin Lathrop said: There is no easy solution.
- Olin Lathrop said he would like to hear directly from the Transfer Station people (not just Tom Delaney).
 - Ron Strohsahl said: We can't expect them to learn to ID every plant.
 - Lisa Murray added: The Transfer Station folks will be involved with the composting project. It's more work for them --- they'll be monitoring the process.
 - Lisa Murray also said that maybe the right approach is just to start with an educational component and see if a viable project could be made. It might not be the Transfer Station employees running things necessarily.
 - Brian Bettencourt added: Regarding education --- The Committee always stresses disposal methods.
 - Olin Lathrop discussed a recent example of black swallowwort seed disposal at Shattuck Homestead.
- Priscilla Williams read from the official organic gardening standards.
 - The standards specifically mention transport.
 - Brian Bettencourt described an example he saw up at the Mad River in VT --- disposal piles of Japanese Knotweed and spread from there.
- All Committee members took an Action Item to explore whether/how community-based disposal of invasive plants would be a viable option.
 - This includes researching whether MA state laws allow movement of materials.
 - Ron Strohsahl can find out about what happens at his professional office (Oxbow Associates).
 - Ron Strohsahl added: Typically, in professional situations, someone sprays the material.
 - He's not sure what happens after that. It's often a condition in meetings with owners and developers.
- Lisa Murray asked: What does the Committee typically tell people that ask?
 - Brian Bettencourt replied: It depends on the plant.
 - Lisa Murray said: Maybe we're over-thinking this.

- Brian Bettencourt said: Maybe the answer is a big poster(s) at the Transfer Station showing common invasive plants and what to do with them.
 - Ron Strohsahl said: Yes, like the milfoil posters placed near boat launches.
- The Committee took an Action Item to keep the invasives disposal project on the Agenda, discuss the findings at the next meeting, and invite Lisa, Priscilla *et al.*

The third order of business was an upcoming event with the Webelos Scouts.

- Brian Bettencourt said: On Sunday Oct. 25th at 1 PM, he would be leading a hike with the Webelos 2 scouts at Williams Barn. Olin Lathrop suggested the trail.
 - Olin Lathrop said: Look carefully past the open field. The trail goes off to the left, then look on the right - a cut ash tree has visible Emerald Ash Borer tracks.
- Brian Bettencourt said he would lecture to the Scouts about civic duty in general as part of this project (the Scouts asked, it meets a requirement).
- Brian Bettencourt said he would also head out afterward for a Groton Conservation Trust monitoring visit of Fitch Woods.
- Brian Bettencourt asked: Is there anything I should or should not tell them?
 - The Committee replied: No.

The fourth order of business was a follow-up on Japanese Knotweed treatment at the Country Club, Hayden Rd., Nod Rd., and Martins Pond Rd.

- Olin Lathrop showed pictures of knotweed live on screen.
- Olin Lathrop described the Lovers Lane site, approaching the parking lot, on right.
 - It drops down very steeply into a wetland. The picture showed the grade.
 - It would be tough to work there, but he had already filed an RDA for discussion at the next Conservation Commission meeting (a week from Tuesday).
 - He talked to the manager of the golf course, who is fine with the control effort.
- Brian Bettencourt asked: There are wetlands there ... what additional steps are needed when using herbicides?
 - Olin Lathrop said: Not much additional work is needed. The plants aren't actually in the wetland, and the Committee would use cut and drip application, not spraying.
- Jonathan Basch asked: Should the Committee scout for other stands of knotweed around the country club?
 - Olin Lathrop said he had only really looked at that one spot.
 - Brian Bettencourt said: When treating, the Committee should poke around for other infestations there.
- Olin Lathrop next showed pictures of the treated Hayden Road knotweed stand. The plants looked "pretty satisfyingly dead". He felt this was a good achievement in the 1st year.
- Olin Lathrop next showed the Shattuck homestead stand. Again, most plants were dead, with only a few stragglers visible.
- Brian Bettencourt added: The Nod Rd. situation has not changed.

The fifth order of business was the status of the recent brochures print run.

- Richard Hewitt said there had been some trouble.

- “Tricolor” got translated into “trifold”. The printing company wants an extra \$300.
 - He negotiated this down to \$150 extra.
 - He has a letter in to the Trustees (Commission for Trust Funds) for the extra \$150; not sure when the next meeting is; not sure if formal meetings are needed for this level of expenditure.
- Richard Hewitt said he will get this taken care of, pending formal approval for increased costs.
- Brian Bettencourt said he had printed out 10 or 20 of each brochure for the Webelos event.
 - Olin Lathrop said he had leftovers too, of the original six.
- Olin Lathrop asked: Rick Muehlke, do you need any brochures (Trails Committee distribution)?
 - Rick Muehlke replied: Not yet, he still had some left over. They are going, but not quite like hotcakes.

The sixth order of business was Phragmites by the Trimper driveway and other Phragmites control efforts.

- Olin Lathrop showed a picture live on screen: Looking down the driveway towards Martins Pond Rd.
 - This land was recently acquired by the Conservation Commission.
 - There is one contained stand of Phragmites along the driveway.
 - He would like the Committee to deal with this stand next fall.
 - If Committee approves, he would file an RDA.
- Richard Hewitt said: This is a good idea - catch it early.
- Richard Hewitt Moved to have the Committee approve Olin Lathrop to apply to the Conservation Commission for an RDA to treat Phragmites along the Trimper driveway.
 - Jonathan Basch Seconded.
 - Discussion:
 - Olin Lathrop said he had already unofficially floated the idea with the Conservation Commission - they were positive.
 - The Motion passed by unanimous roll call.
 - Olin Lathrop took an Action Item to apply for an RDA to treat Phragmites at Trimper Driveway.

The seventh order of business was a management plan for the hilltop in the Priest Conservation Area.

- Brian Bettencourt asked: This is the Asian bittersweet-infested Christmas trees?
- Olin Lathrop said: The area was once an apple orchard. It used to be private. The Conservation Commission acquired it recently and added trail access.
 - The Committee viewed pictures live on screen.
 - There were huge amounts of bittersweet visible, including large mounds where spruces are completely overcome.
 - The grassy area is still grassy (mowed) ... but also contained massive amounts of bittersweet.
 - The Committee discussed whether this task might be too big for to handle.
- Jonathan Basch asked: How big is this area?

- Olin Lathrop replied: Several acres. The infested trees are in middle, and also all along the edges.
 - Brian Bettencourt this would require aerial spraying, or lots of manpower to chop it all down and treat the stumps.
 - Richard Hewitt asked: What about a controlled burn?
- Olin Lathrop showed the map on screen.
- Olin Lathrop said he was afraid the Committee can't handle this size of infestation, and that its role should be to just make recommendations.
- Olin Lathrop said he would recommend cutting down all the trees in the field.
 - Brian Bettencourt agreed, but added that this doesn't address the edges.
- Jonathan Basch asked: Is this worth a Committee field trip?
 - Olin Lathrop said yes.
- Ron Strohsahl asked: Are these separate bittersweet plants, or just one giant plant?
 - Olin Lathrop said: It's probably many separate plants.
- Ron Strohsahl asked: Even if you cut the trees ... how would you mow? What about seeds?
- Brian Bettencourt said: you'd likely have to burn it.
 - Olin Lathrop said: Actually, the Fire Dept. chief recently came to the Conservation Commission talking about places for controlled burns.
- Rick Muehlke made a comment in the Zoom chat --- he felt the Committee should consult with a professional contractor, such as Jeff Taylor out of Athol. Taylor is very knowledgeable about herbicides.
 - Olin Lathrop said: Herbicide might not be applicable at this site.
- Olin Lathrop said: The Committee should send this back to the Conservation Commission --- if they want to do a site walk, the Committee would like to attend and discuss options.
 - Brian Bettencourt said: It's likely that no one control method will be sufficient.
 - Olin Lathrop took an Action Item to ask the Conservation Commission if a joint site walk of the Trimper land would be an option.

Olin Lathrop moved to adjourn the meeting.

Jonathan Basch seconded.

The meeting adjourned at 8:10 PM.