

Conservation Commission meeting minutes 8/10/26

People in attendance:

Conservation Commission members: Jason Bean, Andrea Otto, Neil Monteith, Carol Fox, Marilyn Magnus(briefly attended on zoom)

Other community members: Alfred Dedam, Tim McKay, Alex Connizzo

- 1. Andrea called the meeting to order at 6:40pm.**
- 2. No additions to the agenda**
- 3. Introductions of board members and community members present at the meeting**
 - a. As part of Neil's introduction, he mentioned a desire to explore the possibility of the commission hosting activities: speakers, educational presentations.
 - a. Jason expressed role/priorities as stewardship
 - b. Alfred expressed desire for the commission to prioritize work on access to the town forest.
 - c. Carol also expressed a responsibility to stewardship/care of the town's natural resources.
 - d. Tim shared about his past role serving on the commission, and his desire to provide some information about past projects and trail work in the town forest.
 - e. Alex is attending on behalf of the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions (AVCC). Decided to attend the meeting since the commission hadn't met in a long time. And wanted to be present to offer resources and information.
- 4. Assigning board duties, no action taken on assigning a chair or secretary.**
 - a. Neil provided some background of the commission, a couple of previous members did some tasks like tree pruning/working with the tree board, a couple of meetings took place but there are no minutes.
 - b. Tim referenced the state's statutory requirements for CC's, linked here: <https://legislature.vermont.gov/statutes/fullchapter/24/118>. The requirements are very broad, and give commissions flexibility on what projects they want to accomplish/prioritize. Tim also provided a list of projects the commission worked on while he was a member during a 10 year span from 1989-1998: included the following: shoreline protection, farm tax abatement, easement on Willard property, tree inventory and planting, YCC on trail projects at Devil's Hill, Established fund for easements, wrote conservation section of town plan, forestry workshop, mapped natural areas in farmland, educational workshops on ponds and wetlands, collaborated with Peacham school.
 - c. Neil expounded on potential workshop ideas: tree pruning, emerald ash borer/parks and rec
- 5. Town Forest/easement and accessibility**
 - a. Accessibility to the town forest. Surrounded by private property.

- b. Alfred gave a little historical context about the town forest. The town took ownership of the forest in 1954, and the town road leading to the forest was given up in 1956. Town access is ambiguous now, since the forest is landlocked by private land. The town had hired a survey, and the project stalled since the point person was a previous selectboard member who has since resigned.
- c. Tim suggested that a goal for the commission could be to work on figuring out establishing a legal trail with deeded access to the town forest.
- d. The group looked at some printed tax maps for reference while discussing the various access points. Tim mentioned that the Schoenfeld and Smith families have been accommodating of people crossing their properties in the past to access the forest, and might be amenable to working with the town to establish a more formal access point.
- e. Tim mentioned that there is a good parking spot on the top of Slack Street. The challenge of parking there is that it's a 2-mile walk to the forest from the parking area.
- f. Andrea asked the group how to take the conversation and move it into some clear action items. Carol expressed that it seemed that the question was about establishing a town road, or a trail, and where would it go for the best access. Jason asked Tim if there was any potential for the landowners on the Cow Hill Rd side to allow for town access. Tim thought it was possible for a trail easement. Carol wondered about maintaining the road, since a portion of the road(Penny Street) is private, and not a town road. Carol deemed it worth exploring with landowners.

Andrea asked about the cost and work involved in establishing a new trail, but Jason said the vast trail has already done substantial work in establishing trails.

Carol asked if the town could build a class 4 road, but Alfred said the town's road policy states that any new town roads being built must be at least class 3 standards.

6. Other town properties

- a. Carol mentioned town picnics that used to take place in the fire district #1 forest. Tim brought up another town property that the commission could utilize. 10 acres that adjoins the Devil's Hill trail parking lot. Tim said it's an easily accessible hardwood forest that could be utilized for trails/community use, like a connecting trail to the Devil's Hill trail. Neil mentioned that there could be a possible expansion of the parking lot.
- b. Carol mentioned that she owns 27 acres that she would like to have utilized more. The school uses the property for outdoor recreation. Could the commission serve in an advisory role to property owners on how to maintain property with diverse eco systems, like wetland, fields, and tree care.

7. Projects and Collaboration

- a. Andrea asked if it made sense if the tree board should collaborate more with the CC. Jason talked about the work of the tree board, and Neil also talked about the tree inventory, and ash tree identification and removal. The tree board was formed to focus on the tree care, removal, and planting. Maintaining the cemetery trees, and hiring arborists. Tim felt it made sense to leave the trees to the tree board, and that the CC focus more on maintaining and improving trails. Expanding trail opportunities for mountain biking and nordic skiing.
- b. Carol asked for clarification on the tree board's responsibilities in regard to tree work in the cemeteries. Alfred said that a tree management plan is in the works,

actively working on setting up a meeting with the cemetery committee, tree board, and selectboard, and hiring a consulting arborist.

8. Forest Management Plan

- a. Tim referenced a forest management plan that he had emailed to the group. It's in draft form, and Tim asked if the CC would look over the plan, make edits, and once approved, brought before the selectboard for adoption. The plan includes recommendations including managing and removing invasive species, select cutting, boundary line management. Southern Caledonia County Forester AJ Follensbee created the draft for the town. Andrea asked what the responsibility of the CC would be in implementing the forest management plan. Tim suggested the CC could monitor for invasives, improving trails, and planting trees. Neil suggested the CC could utilize state foresters for guidance and help.

9. Other project and workshop ideas

- a. Tim said the CC in Danville is hosting a workshop in their town forest about managing invasive species. Jason said he attends quite a few forestry and logging workshops. Finds them valuable, and anyone can participate.
- b. Carol asked about other forms of conservation efforts that could tie into the CC. workshops on pollinators, collaborating with the Peacham Agrarian Society and Elly Blachly. She suggested we look at offerings at the Fairbanks Museum, and connect with the Peacham Rec Committee on reimagining underused spaces like the town's ball field.
- c. Andrea mentioned workshops and learning opportunities for residents to learn about preserving water, preventing erosion, making the town more resilient to climate change and severe weather.
- d. Carol asked if the CC wants to prioritize education. Andrea mentioned practical hands-on workshops rather than lectures, like making pollinator friendly seed bomb making workshops. Carol mentioned the health benefits of being in nature.

10. Springs and Waterways

- a. Andrea mentioned Michelle Morton had expressed a desire to talk about the CC role in conserving springs and waterways, but was not present at the meeting. Carol mentioned education about water eco systems and vernal pools.

11. Action items for next meeting:

- a. Neil suggested we invite the forester who drafted the town's forest management plan to attend the CC's next meeting to go over the plan with the CC.
- b. Neil suggested another meeting item is to discuss expanding the Devil's Hill parking lot.
- c. Alex asked to make a comment. Alex encouraged the CC to read the CC handbook, available here: <https://vtconservation.org/>. There is also a listserve the CC can join, and connect with other CC's in Vermont. There are small grants the CC can use for projects and workshops. The grants will be available in the spring. Andrea gave Alex her email so information can be shared with the CC.
- d. Andrea suggested adding the State's CC handbook as an action item for members to look at before the first meeting.
- e. Carol asked if anyone knew the landowners near the town forest, who could start some conversations. Tim said he would speak with the Schoenfelds.

Andrea made a motion to adjourn the meeting.

Jason seconded the motion.

All were in favor.

Meeting adjourned at 8:10pm