

Lancaster Conservation Commission (LCC) Meeting Minutes
Town Hall Second Floor – February 13, 2023

LCC Members present: Racheal Stuart, Kathy-Jean Lavoie, Nancy Southworth, Kim Votta, Sam Mayne

LCC Members Absent: Vickie Gibbs, Troy Merner

Others present: Robin Irving, Heidi Chester

Initial Business: Stuart called the meeting to order at 5:30 pm. Introductions were waived as no members of the public were in attendance.

Approval of minutes:

Lavoie made a motion to approve the January 9, 2023 minutes as written. Southworth seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Appointment(s) and Public Hearing(s): Stuart presented an updated draft of the Town Forest Stewardship Plan. She requested feedback & final discussion from LCC members. Southworth asked for clarification of the attached map; Stuart reviewed the existing trails, locations of ecologically sensitive areas & any proposed actions. The group agreed that reducing overlaid text & updating the legend, would improve the map's clarity. Mayne offered to do this. Irving asked who officially sanctions the proposed snowmobile trail route as indicated; Stuart stated she will get clarification on this from Snowdrifters Club member Shane Beattie.

Southworth noted that "non-motorized recreation" wording does not clarify which specific uses are allowed. Lavoie & Irving agreed that more definitive wording would make allowed/disallowed uses unmistakably clear. Mayne suggested that directly negating any specific use in the plan could cause loss of support from groups who might otherwise be supportive. Votta cited words in the plan which offered clear intent ("pedestrian traffic"), reminding members that recent assessments all indicate the Town Forest is a sensitive ecosystem. She advocated for signage at access points to encourage only intended uses, as needed.

Lavoie asked for clarification of funding for proposed action items; Stuart stated a Northern Forest Center grant would apply to access point improvements, which is currently the main issue. This grant would also apply to Town Forest work, Heritage Trail & Israel's River Trail work.

Lavoie made a motion to approve the Town Forest Stewardship Plan (with changes to map as discussed, but with plan itself as currently written). Mayne seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Lavoie made a motion to forward the LCC-approved Town Forest Stewardship Plan to the Town Selectboard. Mayne seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

New Business: Mayne announced that he & Stuart sent a letter of support for the Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust (ACT). The ACT is working to create a position for a person dedicated to assisting private landowners who wish to establish conservation easements.

LCC Workplan Topics:

Finalization of 2022 Easement Monitoring Reports (Votta)

Votta stated the remaining three easements (Smith, Southworth-Scobie, Southworth-Haslanger) were each in compliance at the time of monitoring (Oct 2022). Letters reporting this are ready to be sent to the town (& LCIP, if applicable) pending LCC approval. Votta confirmed a separate letter was sent mid-January to Smith, in response to her Forestry Management / Agricultural Reclamation Plan. The letter contained recommendations as discussed & approved by the LCC at Jan 2023 meeting. Irving reported DES grant money can only apply to fencing located on town-owned land. Mayne stated some other fence funding sources have been identified. Lavoie suggested these be explored in partnership with landowner, once landowner's reply to letter is received.

Lavoie made a motion to approve submission of 2022 Smith easement monitoring documentation; seconded by Mayne. Motion carried unanimously.

Votta reviewed topics noted on Southworth-Scobie monitoring report. LCC members felt it was outside their scope of duties to clarify the purpose of the shed, noting that the landowner had received approvals for specific purposes from the appropriate Town boards. Lavoie & Mayne suggested the monitoring letter be specific when addressing the landowner's concern about shed completion ("finish the walls"). Stuart noted that while the inholding boundaries are currently unclear, they were originally set when the survey plan was completed. Compliance with in-holding boundaries is with the Landowner, should a future issue arise. Votta said the landowner reported informal observations to look for bird strikes on windows with no impact noted.

Lavoie made a motion to approve submission of 2022 Southworth-Scobie easement monitoring documentation with changes noted above; seconded by Mayne. Votta, Lavoie & Mayne voted in favor, with Stuart abstaining & Southworth recusing. Motion carried.

Votta reviewed topics noted on Southworth-Haslanger monitoring report. She said landowner limits mowing to once annually (protection of wildlife habitat) & suggested removing reference to baseline conditions water testing, as LCC has not pursued this due to precedence of expense.

Mayne made a motion to approve submission of 2022 Southworth-Haslanger easement monitoring documentation with changes noted above; seconded by Lavoie. Stuart, Votta, Lavoie & Mayne voted in favor, with Southworth recusing. Motion carried.

ARM Fund Riparian Restoration Project Update (Mayne)

Mayne stated that a full acre of excavation will exceed the potential ARM Fund contribution. He announced the Connecticut River Conservancy and US Fish & Wildlife have both agreed to contribute financially, allowing the project to continue at its currently proposed size & scope.

Other Business:

Treasurer's Update on 2023 LCC Budget (Lavoie)

Lavoie reported the operating budget's public hearing took place last week; level funding request went through without question or comment. She noted the next step for 2023 LCC Budget approval

will be at town meeting in March. She reported a current total of \$19,905 in the Town's Conservation Fund, a non-operating fund created through land use change taxes.

Irving inquired about any other properties under conservation easement with the town, aside of the six having been monitored in 2022. LCC members were unaware of any additional properties under easement in Lancaster at this time. Stuart will send Irving a list of all easements held by the Town and the Society for the Protection of NH Forests.

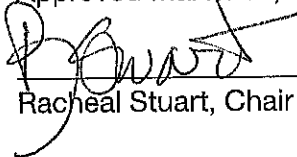
Votta announced she will be stepping back from her prior involvement with the Master Planning Committee; Southworth will continue representing the LCC at these meetings.

Stuart announced that she will be taking a break from the LCC, effective March 31, 2023; she has submitted her letter of resignation to Town Manager Ben Gaetjens-Oleson.

Mayne moved to adjourn; Lavoie seconded. The motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 7:23 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Heidi Chester

Approved March 13, 2023


Racheal Stuart, Chair


Kim Votta, Vice Chair