

**Lancaster Conservation Commission (LCC) Meeting Minutes
Town Hall Second Floor – December 12, 2022**

LCC Members present: Kathy-Jean Lavoie, Kim Votta, Vickie Gibbs, Sam Mayne, Troy Merner, Nancy Southworth

LCC Members Absent: Racheal Stuart

Others present: Julie Evans, Shane Beattie, Heidi Chester

Initial Business: Lavoie called the meeting to order at 5:41pm and announced a slight modification of meeting agenda: Town Forest ecological inventory presentation first, after which minutes approval & Workplan Topics updates would occur, with exception of 2022 Easement Monitoring Update which will be pushed to next meeting (Jan 2023).

LCC Workplan Topics:

**A Rapid Ecological Assessment of Town Forest Presentation
by Matt Peters, Consulting Ecologist/Botanist (via Zoom)**

Peters summarized his rapid Town Forest assessment, which was based on two days of fieldwork in Aug 2022. He found much of the land to be common upland forest (3-4 community types) & recently harvested, so he concentrated on the wetlands which yielded eight community types, three of which were found to be rare/uncommon. He shared maps which locate & identify community types. Peters explained that collectively, these three wetland types form a peat swamp system of high conservation value. These areas tend to have minerally-enriched nutrients which are supportive of rare plant species. Peters found 12 rare/uncommon plants and noted 5 invasive species to be monitored. He referred commission members to his full document for research/inventory details & his recommendations, then opened to questions.

Lavoie asked Peters to discuss trail status within town forest; Peters stated existing trails post-logging are walkable once frozen (little if any trailwork needed) but the Heritage Trail is non-existent due to deadfall, lack of maintenance & markings, thus requiring considerable work for trail recovery. Peters said an approach for vehicles might be the bigger concern, due to areas of low clearance, slash, rutting & standing water.

Beattie asked for guidance regarding snowmobile trail improvements, in order to avoid disturbance to rare/uncommon wetland community areas & plants. He & Stuart plan to walk the trails together on Thurs Dec 15. Evans & Gibbs suggested the AMC site visit report (Oct 2022) as a good resource for guidance; it was suggested that Stuart/Beattie bring a copy on their walk, for reference as needed. Gibbs, Mayne & Peters discussed the sharing of cross-platform GIS mapping to ensure accurate location of wetland community borders. Evans will locate & send AMC GIS tracks.

Approval of minutes:

Gibbs made a motion to approve the November 14, 2022 minutes as written. Mayne seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Town Forest Stewardship Roles & Responsibilities

Members referred to chart created by Stuart which has since been approved by the Select Board. Gibbs asked for clarity regarding trail responsibility. Beattie noted that state aid & grants can assist with trail construction/maintenance. Votta emphasized the LCC's role in stewardship & monitoring, which would encourage collaboration not direct performance of trail-related work (contractors, trail-

focused organizations, etc). When LCC members agreed to move forward with stewardship planning, Evans asked if the plan will be developed internally or externally; Votta indicated internally to start.

Smith Forestry Management/Agricultural Reclamation Plan (Votta/Mayne)

Mayne walked the planned cutting area to identify water features since water protection is a primary concern of the easement; he shared photos of areas to be cut or left uncut & maps of streams on the property. He noted that the easement specifically allows agricultural use. Mayne said the plan indicates clearing for pasturing of cows & as hay meadows. According to the plan, there is intent to have livestock access natural water supply, but only below the town's water supply access; areas above the town's water access will remain uncut & therefore inaccessible. Votta read directly from the plan, confirming cutting site location which appears to be below town water supply. Mayne expressed need for clarity regarding perennial vs. intermittent streams which feed into Garland Brook. Erosion & other issues notwithstanding, Mayne felt the greater concern was potential water resource damage from livestock access. He cited landowner's current practice involves no fencing, with dense forest being the only deterrent; he said the cows do enter boggy areas & the beaver dams are deteriorating; hence the beaver ponds will decline. While acknowledging the plan's cutting as very reasonable, he stated that cows in wetlands is not "best management practice" as cited in the easement & fencing to prevent livestock access to certain water features seems key to water protection. He also thought written clarification on the maximum number of pastured cows would be helpful.

Votta thanked Mayne for his professional work, asking if landowner gave a timeline. Mayne believes she intended to start this winter, but may have decided to postpone (uncertain). Votta said the easement monitoring team will clarify LCC questions/concerns for the landowner. Several members noted the landowner's potential costs for fencing, with discussion of NRCS as possible funding source. Southworth stressed the importance of approaching landowners with easements in a positive not punitive way. Evans suggested consulting the Cooperative Extension for advice on negotiation.

CT River Riparian Restoration Project (Mayne)

Mayne presented a detailed contract & timeline from Windenwater for the assessment required for ARM fund application totaling \$3,500. He reminded members that the ARM fund would provide \$128,000 toward the project, if/once granted; the application would be fully submitted in Aug 2023, but pre-application work would begin in the spring (Apr 2023). Lavoie confirmed that funding from 2022 budget remains available.

Gibbs made a motion to encumber funds toward this expense; Southworth seconded. Motion carried unanimously.

Treasurer's Update on 2023 LCC Budget (Lavoie)

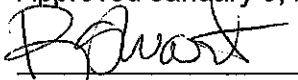
Lavoie stated that a 2023 LCC Budget (level funding) has been presented to the Select Board by Town Manager Ben Gaetjens-Oleson. The budget will go to public vote in March.


Other business: Lavoie opened the floor to other business. Gibbs announced that Heritage Trail letters/maps have been mailed to landowners.

Gibbs moved to adjourn; Mayne seconded. The motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 7:21pm.

Respectfully submitted, Heidi Chester

Approved January 9, 2023


Rachael Stuart, Chair


Kim Votta, Vice Chair