

NORWICH CONSERVATION COMMISSION ZOOM MEETING DRAFT MINUTES: 18 January 2022

Members Present: Craig Layne (chair), Lynnwood Andrews, Cheryl Asa, Suzanne Leiter, Norman Miller, Chris Rimmer and Cody Williams

Guests: Joanne Campisi, Angus Farmer, Mary Gorman, Stephen Gorman, Linda Gray, Robert Holley, Aaron Lamperti, Alice Werbel

Meeting convened at 7:10PM

Craig asked for any public comments on any topics not regarding the proposed solar array near Schmidt Bog, but there were none.

There was discussion on the proposal to install a solar array on about 10 of the 40-acres of the Schmidt Bog forest block. The area adjacent to Hawk Pine Rd is a mixed-age/mixed-species stand of trees along two ridgelines, straddling a drainage. There is a vernal pool as well as the bog within the site. There is a permit application before the Public Utilities Commission for Norwich Solar Technologies to develop the solar farm. The Norwich zoning office has granted Preferred Site status to the project. Neighbors and other interested parties have asked for more public discussion, including a request for input from the Conservation Commission. Several points and perspectives were presented and questions raised, including the potential importance of the forest for carbon sequestration and supporting wildlife, the relative value of that 10 acres of forest for energy conservation (i.e., solar energy generated that would replace fossil fuel burned vs amount of carbon sequestration if the forest was not cut), the importance of the wider area to those who use its walking trails, whether the Town Plan requires protection of that forest block, would the solar installation violate the Town Plan's stipulation about preserving ridgelines, if solar installation is blocked would the owner of the property conserve it in another way or allow development, would the solar company commit to conserving the rest of the property, and is this the best site within the town of Norwich for a solar array installation? Neighbors interested in challenging the proposal asked the NCC to present their objections to the Selectboard. Craig asked them to submit a letter to the NCC, which would be reviewed at our next meeting.

Cheryl confirmed that Kevin Tolan is scheduled to give a presentation on vernal pools, hosted on Zoom by the Norwich Library on March 8. He will also give a guided tour of a local vernal pool at a later date, after there are egg masses to be viewed in pools. If there is sufficient public interest, we will schedule additional guided tours to pools. Lynnwood will write an article for the next issue of the Norwich Times highlighting the new vernal pool in the Milt Frye Nature Area. We will also create a display on vernal pools for the Post Office to coincide with Kevin's presentation. Just before switching from the bear safety information currently displayed in the PO, we will post a recommendation to take down bird feeders before bears begin coming out of hibernation.

Lynnwood gave an update of work in the Milt Frye Nature Area. She's waiting for approval for invasive tree removal on the property as well as on the property of abutting landowners, all of whom have agreed to the work. This would involve removal of about 40 relatively small diameter buckthorn and Norway maple trees. She has placed the orders for native trees and plants for the spring. She is also looking into ways to protect those new plantings in light of the disappearance of the red osier dogwood stakes that MCS students put in last fall.

Discussion of Social Media Outreach was postponed because Charlotte, who has primary responsibility for that, couldn't be present.

Craig asked if NCC members would each accept responsibility for monitoring the agendas and minutes of other commissions, committees, boards and departments that might be involved in activities that we need to keep apprised of. A list is being created and members will sign up to monitor one or more.

Craig mentioned that the Conservation Fund budget is lower than it has been in many years, and recommended that we identify strategies for raising funds. There was discussion of strategies for raising funds for a general conservation account versus for a specific project. Norman suggested some possibilities that he will follow up on and present at the next meeting.

Lynnwood moved to approve the December 2021 minutes, Norman seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:55 PM

Minutes compiled by Cheryl Asa