

NORWICH CONSERVATION COMMISSION ZOOM MEETING DRAFT MINUTES: 18 May 2021

Members Present: Craig Layne (chair), Lynnwood Andrews, Cheryl Asa, David Hubbard, Norman Miller, Sage McGinley-Smith, Cody Williams

Guests: Jeff Lubell, Brie Swenson

Meeting convened at 7:04 PM

There were no non-agenda item comments from the public.

Jeff Lubell, representing the Norwich Affordable Housing sub-committee, asked for any further information on potential locations for constructing affordable housing on town-owned land. However, the parcels are either under conservation easement or unsuitable for development because of wet conditions and/or risk of flooding due to proximity to brooks.

Sage has created an Instagram account for the NCC, which is more likely to reach younger Norwich residents and encourage their participation in local conservation activities. She has started to add material and recruit followers, for example, members of the high school environmental club.

Brie presented a request from Willing Hands (the local non-profit organization that provides fresh food to area social service organizations) to create a garden on the Melendy parcel along Rt. 5. NCC members agreed that this was a very good use of the property and voted to approve the request. Cheryl moved for approval, Craig seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Craig opened discussion of possible next steps for dealing with the threat from the emerald ash borer, which has been documented in the Hartland area and in other regions of Vermont but not yet in Norwich. Possibilities include expanding the survey of ash trees along major second class roads this summer or identifying large trees that might be proactively removed. Also, we might consider trying to save specific trees, such as on the Norwich Green, by using insecticide. Craig has submitted the NCC report summarizing prior surveys to the Select Board but has not received feedback yet with any questions or requests that might guide next actions. He will check with the SB, and meanwhile NCC will plan for surveys along Bragg Hill and Beaver Meadow Roads this summer.

The potential site for a vernal pool in the Milt Frye Nature Area has been moved a little further from the forest edge into the upper meadow. An excavator operator has volunteered to dig the pool at no cost. Funding from the grant Brie received will be used for a buffer zone of native plants around the pool. Lynnwood reported that fifth graders from Marion Cross School (MCS) planted 100 plants along the edge of the meadow as an Earth Day activity.

Brie asked for input on a proposal to create a trail within the Milt Frye Nature Area that would be accessible by a student using a walker. It was agreed that paving would be inappropriate, but members aren't sufficiently familiar with ADA standards as they might apply to trails to make further recommendations. Cody suggested checking with the Trails Committee, since they're looking into creating an ADA-accessible trail for a portion of the Ballard Trail.

Craig asked for a vote to dispense funds to the LEEEP (Learning about the Environment through Experiential Education Projects) program for MCS, which had been approved in the annual NCC budget. Cody moved to approve, David seconded, and the vote was unanimous to approve dispensing the funds.

Cody gave an update on the last Trails Committee meeting. Dates for summer trail work have been set, starting with the Upper Loveland and Upper Ballard trails. Two grants have been submitted to the Norwich Women's Club for trail work, one by David Hubbard for work on the Lower Ballard trail, including bridge replacement, and one by Cody Williams to cover production of signs for kiosks and along trails. They are still in discussions about parking problems and options at the Happy Hills and Gile Mountain trailheads. Cement blocks have been replaced by boulders at the entrance to the new Brown Schoolhouse Bridge. Planning is underway for construction of a kids' pedestrian bridge across the brook between the American Legion Hall and Huntley Meadow.

Cheryl reported that Forrest Hammond, Vermont bear biologist, brought educational brochures on avoiding conflict with bears to her and Chris. The materials will be used to create a display in the Post Office and perhaps also the Library and MCS. They will also prepare a related article for the summer/fall issue of the Norwich Times.

Norman suggested that the NCC consider sponsoring a local Civilian Climate Corp group as part of the initiative that the Biden administration has proposed. Further action isn't possible at this time, though, since details on possible implementation have not yet been released.

David moved to approve the April draft minutes, Lynnwood seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:29 PM.
Minutes compiled by Cheryl Asa