

NORWICH CONSERVATION COMMISSION ZOOM MEETING DRAFT MINUTES: 17 August 2021

Members Present: Craig Layne (chair), Lynnwood Andrews, Cheryl Asa, David Hubbard, Norman Miller, Chris Rimmer, Charlotte Tagupa, Cody Williams

Guests: Suzanne Leiter, Jack Cushman

Meeting convened at 7:05PM

Craig asked for any public comments. Jack Cushman, chair of the Article 36 Task Force, explained the charge of the Task Force, which is to create a comprehensive workplan toward elimination of fossil fuel use by the Town of Norwich, in support of the objectives of Article 36 to phase out fossil fuels. He is consulting with Norwich commissions and town officials to get their input. As part of that effort, he asked the Conservation Commission to identify activities that involve the use of fossil fuel, such as recommendations for mowing. There was a brief discussion about possibilities, then Craig suggested that members bring ideas and be ready for further discussion at our September meeting.

David gave a synopsis of the Conservation Commission budget and asked if any changes are anticipated for the 2023 fiscal year. In general, the same amounts are expected to be appropriate, although spending in the past year was down due to COVID restrictions. There was some confusion about costs relating to mowing the Milt Frye Nature Area meadow that David and Lynnwood will follow up on. Our recommendations for renaming and combining some line items last year are not reflected in the current version from the Finance Office. David will follow up on that.

Lynnwood reported on activities in the Milt Frye Nature Area. David Merker, a local volunteer ornithologist working with VINS, builds kestrel boxes for a research project aimed at stabilizing the population. He bands the nestlings if a box is successful. Lynnwood moved that we buy one for \$60 to mount in the Milt Frye area, Craig seconded, and the motion passed unanimously. David suggested buying a bat box also, but he needs to find out the cost.

Lynnwood also reported that weeding to remove Invasive plants continues and is making progress from the edge of the field back into the forest and halfway up to the wagon. Wood chips haven't been acquired yet, so the weeded area is still covered with black plastic. Various suggestions included checking with DPW to see if free wood chips might be available. Lynnwood also plans to look into prices for wildflower seed mix before our next meeting.

Cody gave an update on the Trails Committee. They had a workday last weekend, and more workdays are upcoming. They continue discussions about building and installing kiosks along Norwich trails, especially what information and maps to include and where they will each be placed. There is no update on negotiations with the U.S. Forest Service about which existing cross-trails will be allowed within the Norwich section of the Appalachian Trail Corridor. The trails committee contacted Doug Hardy, as a representative of the petitioners to the USFS AT corridor proposal, to ask if he would like to build consensus within the petitioners to reengage with the USFS.

A proposal to the Selectboard for Burton Woods trail conversion from class 4 road status to a trail has been drafted and was reviewed by the Trails Committee at their last meeting. Reclassification would enable management of erosion. After submission to the Selectboard, there will be opportunity for public comment.

Cody also indicated a need to amend our July minutes to delete the statement that there were representatives from the Forest Service at the July Trails Committee meeting.

Norman reported on progress communicating with DPW about their schedule and costs for roadside mowing. The Conservation Commission is interested in working with DPW on a schedule that better addresses control of invasive plants. However, recommendations must consider DPW staffing and budgetary constraints. Norman has spoken with the Town Manager, who approved contacting DPW directly. They will get back to him with answers.

Norman asked about using the Conservation Commission's display case in the Post Office to post material created by local children in a conservation program run by his family. However, because that display case is used to highlight Conservation Commission activities and usually pairs with articles in The Norwich Times, an alternative location was suggested.

Cheryl gave an update on progress on disseminating information on living safely with bears, our partnership with the Vermont Dept. of Fish & Wildlife. She has submitted an article on the topic to The Norwich Times for their next issue and has made arrangements with Lindsay Putnam for MCS classes to create 3-dimensional bear safety-related material for the Library display case. She will work with Chris on creating something for our Post Office display case. Although we had hoped to invite Forrest Hammond, the Vermont bear biologist, to give a presentation in Norwich in the fall, he recently retired and his replacement has not been named. We will tentatively continue to plan for a presentation, either with the new bear biologist or another regional bear specialist. Charlotte suggested also considering a presentation that focuses on bear safety when hiking and camping, which might be more interesting to a younger audience. We will consider that for spring.

David moved to approve the amended July minutes, Norman seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

Chris reported that Redstart Natural Resource Management has submitted a proposal to him for phragmites removal along the Ompompanoosuc River. The work, paid for by Connecticut River Conservancy, will be done in September.

There was a discussion of officers for next year. Current officers offered to remain in those positions. Incoming members, if approved by the Selectboard, will be asked to serve in the remaining positions.

The meeting adjourned at 8:58 PM.

Minutes compiled by Cheryl Asa