

NORWICH CONSERVATION COMMISSION ZOOM MEETING DRAFT MINUTES: 21 September 2021

Members Present: Craig Layne (chair), Lynnwood Andrews, Cheryl Asa, David Hubbard (via Zoom), Suzanne Leiter, Norman Miller, Charlotte Tagupa, Cody Williams (via Zoom)

Guests: None

Meeting convened at 7:08 PM

Craig asked for any public comments, but no members of the public were present so there were none.

Article 36

A discussion of possible NCC actions in support of Article 36 included:

- Electric equipment could be used for mowing the Milt Frye Nature Area meadow.
- NCC could consider purchasing electric weed-whacker(s) for DPW to use.
- An electric shovel could be used to kill invasive plants.
- Motion-detection devices on outdoor lighting would reduce power used as well as reduce light pollution which affects nocturnal animals.
- Electric chain saws could replace gas-powered ones for most trail maintenance.

Fiscal Year 2022-2023 Budget

Budget discussion included whether any changes were needed in the amount allocated to each line item or to change any of the budget categories. The decision was that changes are not needed, either to the dollar amounts or the categories. After discussion of whether the cost of the NCC articles in the Norwich Times is warranted, the decision was that the articles are an important part of our education and outreach efforts. A question was raised about whether the NCC funding for LEEEP (Learning about the Environment through Experiential Education Projects) was spent during the past fiscal year, since COVID restrictions may have required the programs to be cancelled.

Milt Frye Nature Area update

Lynnwood reported that only one small area has invasive euonymus and buckthorn that need to be removed. Stumps that can't be removed have been covered with black plastic to prevent regrowth. A large sheet of plastic has been placed in an area above the wagon to suppress grass there, to be replaced with native wildflowers. However, that hasn't been successful at killing the grass underneath. One suggestion was for a ground cloth that allows water to penetrate but kills grass underneath might be substituted. Lynnwood contacted Prairie Moon about ordering native wildflower seeds. The mix recommended by the Univ of New Hampshire for this region costs \$88 to seed about 1000sq ft.

Lynnwood talked to Linda Cook, DPW and the Norwich fire chief about the Nature Area mowing schedule for the 4th of July fireworks display, which is needed to reduce the risk of fire. NCC recommends mowing only once per year in fall, since mowing in summer has a negative effect on native plants and pollinators. The fire chief asked whether another site in Norwich might be better for the fireworks. David moved that the NCC propose to the Town Manager that another site would be more appropriate for fireworks, Craig seconded and offered to talk to the acting Town Manager about it. The motion passed unanimously.

Lynnwood bought a kestrel nesting box and is working with Chris to identify a location for mounting it in an appropriate place in the Nature Area.

Trailhead Parking at Happy Hill Trailhead

Current parking signage is ambiguous. The intention is only that parked vehicles not block driveways, the turnaround for public vehicles, or the trailhead, but cars have been ticketed for parking anywhere in that area. The Trails Committee has asked the NCC to recommend new signage to the Selectboard that points specifically to where parking is not allowed, with the understanding that, otherwise, parking is allowed. The Trails Committee has prepared a memorandum that carefully distinguishes between the locations where parking should be prohibited and where it should be permitted. Cody motioned that Craig, as NCC chair, submit the memorandum to the Selectboard, Lynnwood seconded, and the motion carried unanimously.

Bears and People Outreach

Cheryl has heard from the Vermont Fish & Wildlife Dept that the new state bear biologist has been hired and will start on October 1, so she will find out if they want to continue the collaboration that Forrest Hammond, the previous bear biologist started. To date, our efforts have included an article in the Norwich Times and a display in the Post Office, both focusing on living safely in an area where bears are present. Brochures on the topic, which were provided by VT Fish & Wildlife, are available in a holder next to the P.O. display. Lynnwood will ask the Post Master about adding a second holder by the NCC display box, so that we can provide brochures related to other NCC activities as well. MCS third-graders are working on models about Vermont bears that will be displayed in the Norwich Library.

Charlotte suggested a high school program on bear safety in the spring before camping and hiking season. There are several options, including student “circles” that could focus on bears, as well as Environmental club activities.

Next Norwich Times article

The group discussed possible topics for upcoming articles. Possible topics included kestrels as part of meadow conservation, creating a “full service station” for birds in your backyard, nighttime light pollution, eco-sustainable holiday options, and opossums. It was agreed that the next article should be the “full service station” idea.

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

The meeting adjourned at 8:39 PM.

Minutes compiled by Cheryl Asa