

5/21/24 Norwich Conservation Commission (NCC) Meeting Minutes

Present: Craig Layne, Michael Loots, Lynnwood Andrews, Chris Rimmer, Alex Gottlieb

Member of the Public: Doug Hardy

Quorum established

Craig MOVED- Mike Loots will be the new scribe

Chris SECONDED

PASSED- unanimous

Celebrating 50 years of Conservation in Norwich- Craig dug a little bit on history of state statute with help from Sarah Reeves and Peter Silverfarb

Historical Society requested a series of nature walks to familiarize folks with Town of Norwich (TON) natural areas.

Lynwood and Lindsay had 2 folks at their walk through Milton Frye Natural Area (MFNA)

Craig had no attendees to his walk- likely due to it being mother's day!

More walks needed/ desired.

Craig can follow up with NCC members on email format for hosting.

Walks should be on publicly accessible TON land, ideally, and focused on conservation.

Mike and his wife (a certified MTB coach) will lead a Parcel 5 ride/ learn.

Painting of mural panels starts in July.

Emerald Ash Borer

CHRIS/ Doug Hardy- leading current "task force" on Emerald Ash Borer (EAB), which has been positively identified in TON

Chris will talk to CODY about updating NCC website with EAB information, especially as resources are made available pertinent to TON.

Timely action needed- draft an EAB plan for TON and to recommend the appropriation of funding as needed.

Craig will speak to this issue at Select Board (SB) meeting 5/22; Chris will attend

Considering "Task Force," independent of NCC- which is likely the preferable avenue.

Urban Forester (State of Vermont) Adam McCullough made a site visit with Chris and Doug on

May 2; they looked at ash trees on: Norwich Green, Elm Street, Church Street, etc. A very unhealthy ash at 17 Elm Street is almost certainly EAB-infected and very close to the large,

healthy specimens on the Green.

There is concern with how the very time sensitive issue of addressing EAB in Norwich may be slowed down by the bureaucratic process of committees and Select Board communication, etc.

A strong feeling is that a group concerned with EAB be an independent committee or task force within the Select Board instead of a NCC subcommittee.

An additional concern is that it is imperative to begin to communicate with the people of Norwich about the very pressing issue of EAB.

There appear to be some funds available (TON and NCC) to address the issue: 1st on TON right of way, especially where specific trees pose a risk to public safety, however it is unclear how Department of Public Works will move forward with action on those trees or if an outside contractor will be required.

Similarly, it is not yet understood by members of the NCC what the best management recommendations ought to be for treatment of EAB: costly chemical inoculation, removal of infected trees, or removal of relatively healthy trees which still have value as a timber source. The most likely recommendation will be a combination of these 3 strategies.

Doug notes that there is a pool of State of Vermont funds and staff available specifically for gathering spatial data.

Some legitimacy of the EAB working group will likely be necessary to qualify for any grant funding, whether that group is under the Select board or NCC. The Tree Warden is the community member most appropriate for potential involvement in this working group.

There are many good examples of other VT communities with EAB management plans, some many years old at this point. Norwich is now in a position of having to be reactive, rather than proactive.

One relevant example is that of Jericho, VT, who included a representative from their Conservation Commission, Department of Public Works, Tree Warden and Select Board. Clear communication to citizens of Norwich is very much needed and whatever working group emerges from the 5/22 SB meeting will likely generate much of that communication. Doug notes that "We are not in this alone, and we can look at what other communities are doing.

Chris will likely post to Norwich listserve on Friday 5/24 with a community notice and relevant links to EAB resources on the NCC web site.

Mike will communicate to Cody to update NCC website with relevant links as they become available.

A speaker series or similar public outreach event will be scheduled for late summer to help educate and equip Norwich citizens on EAB.

Lynnwood will look into publishing a special, two page story on EAB in Norwich Times, which can then (hopefully) be displayed at library and post office.

DEER- Lynnwood is presenting 5/22 @ Howe Library about the Biodiversity project at MFNA. Lynnwood found great resource on Northeastern biodiversity and deer populations. "Overabundant Deer and Invasive Plants Drive Widespread Regeneration Debt in eastern United States National Parks" <https://esajournals.onlinelibrary.wiley.com/doi/10.1002/eap.2837> - Found that Marsh Billings is in "Probable forest failure" in terms of forest regeneration and St. Gaudens is "insecure". Bob Holly and Andrew Torkelson are separately collaborating on TON deer related initiatives.

TRAILS- NCC

Craig MOVED to reimburse Upper Valley Trails Alliance approx \$1,800 for equipment rental for rehabilitation of Bradley Hill Trail, using first the remaining funds in the Trails line item, with any additional cost coming from the Restoration Projects line item.

Chris SECONDED

PASSED- Unanimous

Craig MOVED to fix tower step treads in Woody Adams Conservation Forest using, in part, remaining current fiscal year funds from the Restoration Projects line item, if materials are purchased in time and the Trails Subcommittee grant application for the project is unsuccessful. Chris SECONDED

PASSED- Unanimous

Craig MOVED if remaining current fiscal year Restoration Projects line item funds are not appropriated for fixing tower step treads, they will be allocated to fixing a rotting hemlock bridge in Woody Adams Conservation Forest.

Lynnwood SECONDED

PASSED- Unanimous

OTHER BUSINESS:

The Norwich Conservation Commission thanks Cheri Asa for her service to her community through the NCC. In addition to her interesting research following wolves out West, and her writing, Cheri helped steer out community's conservation goals: serving as a secretary for the Conservation Commission, putting together speakers and experts for NCC events, arranging interesting NCC displays for the post office and generally carrying out the role of a concerned, expert citizen in our town. Thank you for your service Cheri! Your research continues to inspire us all to understand the natural communities around us a little more deeply!"

Craig MOVED April Minutes Approved Not sure I am the one who moved the minutes?

Mike SECONDED

PASSED- Unanimous

Current projections of FY24 remaining funds (approx.):

\$750 in MFNA Budget

\$1000 in Inventory (potential pool for EAB Survey Data)

\$1,200 in Speakers and Public Outreach. EAB, Deer, and Forest health likely topics of consideration

Craig will continue to forward DRB updates for large parcels to NCC

The NCC is currently seeking an additional member

Broadwing Hawks are nesting in TON, and are of interest to VINS researchers. A snowy owl decoy is being used to net trap one of those nesting hawks, to tag and assist in migration studies.

Minutes submitted by Michael Loots This is important to include