

NORWICH CONSERVATION COMMISSION ZOOM MEETING DRAFT MINUTES: 18 AUGUST 2020

Members present: Craig Layne (chair), Lynnwood Andrews, Cheryl Asa, Courtney Dragiff, David Hubbard, Sage McGinley-Smith, Normal Miller, Chris Rimmer, Cody Williams

Guests: Jack Cushman, Brie Swenson

Meeting convened at 7:05 pm

Jack Cushman presented a resolution in support of the Global Warming Solutions Act for the Commission to consider recommending to the Norwich Select Board for endorsement. (Lynnwood, as Jack's wife, recused herself from the discussion and vote). Because the State of Vermont is not on track to meet its statutory and aspirational targets for reducing statewide greenhouse gases, the resolution urges the Vermont state Legislature to continue to support the Global Warming Solutions Act and appropriations for its implementation and calls on the Governor of Vermont to sign this important legislation. After discussion Chris moved that the Commission support the resolution, David seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

In an update on the Milt Frye Nature Area project, Craig reported that arrangements have been made for an excavator to create an extensive test pit for the vernal pool. He also said the Commission has been asked to update the plan for mowing the meadow in the Nature Area, which will include consulting with the head of the Department of Public Works. Some discussion ensued about the best practice for mowing that enhances conservation, for example, frequency and time of year in relation to use by wildlife for nesting and overwintering. A question was raised about whether it's appropriate for Fourth of July fireworks to be shot from the meadow, but it was unclear whether the location for the fireworks was on Nature Center or nearby private property. Brie reported that MCS plans to hold outdoor classes in the Nature Area as part of their arrangements for in-person learning during COVID. Tents will be erected to hold class supplies and children's belonging; tent sites have been recommended by Lindsay Putnam.

David reported on a grant opportunity through the Vermont Urban and Community Forestry Program to mitigate emerald ash borer infestation. Discussion included possible approaches, such as proactively removing ash trees and replacing them with other tree species, or applying insecticide to ash trees along village streets, although that would likely need be done annually. It was decided that we should consult with the town's tree warden and complete our roadside and village ash tree inventory this winter before formulating a plan and preparing a grant proposal.

Cody presented an update on the website he has created for the Commission. He continues to add relevant material and requests input from members. Sage suggested more material on projects, such as invasive plant removal (phragmites), and Cheryl suggested using graphics from the Post Office displays and including more maps, such as those on forest blocks that are part of the Town Plan. Craig will check with Rod Francis about using Town Plan maps.

Cody, who attended the last Trails Committee meeting, reported on completion of their work on the bog bridge on the Ballard Trail. and mentioned a work session this weekend to extend that bridge. Work is beginning on a replacement bridge along the Brown Schoolhouse Road across the Charles Brown Brook. During its construction, a temporary crossing will be provided downstream. Bridge renovation is being funded by a \$10,000 donation from the Byrne Foundation, in addition to a \$2000 award by the Norwich Women's Club and \$3400 in donations from local citizens.

Craig met with the Norwich Planning Commission about Conservation Commission Action Items in the Town Plan. We will schedule discussion of those Action Items for upcoming meetings, including for example, how to protect forest blocks, increasing non-motorized commuting connectivity, and effectively advocating for private landowners to consider enrolling in the Current Use program for working landscapes. Inter-commission groups will be formed for each Action Item. Courtney suggested getting a list of landowners already enrolled in Current Use, which Craig will request from Rod Francis. It was also suggested that we invite the county forester and a representative from UVLT to one of our meetings to talk with us about Current Use and UVLT's conservation easements.

Lynnwood asked for suggestions for updating the Post Office display. Cheryl recalled that last month one suggestion had been for a display on the value of large connected forest blocks, highlighting animals that need large ranges to thrive. That would also provide background support for our anticipated fund-raising for the Woody Adams and Arnold tracts.

Norman mentioned a neighbor's property with potential conservation value that recently came on the market, since it contains some young chestnut trees that were selectively bred by the previous owner to resist chestnut blight. However, there is no information on whether they are indeed resistant.

Craig mentioned that the citizens who present comprehensive management plan ideas for the Woody Adams Conservation Forest to the NCC are not a subcommittee of the Commission. Craig moved to eliminate the previously moved subcommittee formulation, David seconded, and the motion passed unanimously.

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

Meeting adjourned at 8:50 pm.
Minutes compiled by Cheryl Asa