

NORWICH CONSERVATION COMMISSION ZOOM MEETING DRAFT MINUTES: 19 January 2021

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

Guest: Brie Swenson

Meeting convened at 7:04 PM

Craig asked for comments from the public, but there were none.

Lynnwood asked for suggestions for a topic for the next issue of the Norwich Times. Suggestions included the proposed Milt Frye Conservation Area mowing schedule; how to deal with invasive plants, such as buckthorn and knotweed; winter insects; species at risk from a mismatch, caused by climate change, between the timing of returning migrants and spring appearance of their food sources; measures and management considerations for establishing wildlife migration corridors; and native plant alternatives to common landscape exotics and invasives. The topic of winter insects was chosen for the next issue, to be published in late winter (March).

Lynnwood reported on ongoing work in the Milt Frye Conservation Area. A tree is down in a corner of the property, but it isn't clear whether it's on the adjoining private property. Brie suggested asking Lindsay Putnam, who is familiar with the MFCA boundaries. Lynnwood would like to add plantings to that area, which now contains buckthorn and euonymus. It is being mowed, which keeps those invasive plants from growing and spreading, but does not eliminate them. A discussion followed about methods and costs for managing versus eliminating the invasives, but more information will be sought before a recommendation is made. The same approach might be applied around the proposed vernal pool.

A question was raised about whether the MFNA is considered as a potential site for the new septic system for the Marion Cross School. It has been mentioned in those discussions, but the likelihood is uncertain at this point.

Lynnwood submitted a proposal for mowing the MFNA meadow only once yearly, in October, to provide adequate control of invasive plants while allowing time for grasses and flowers to provide the nectar, pollen and seed resources necessary to sustain wildlife. David moved to approve the proposed mowing schedule that Lynnwood had submitted, Cheryl seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously.

Chris reported that the fund-raising target for conserving the Arnold property has been reached and even exceeded, thanks to contributions that came primarily from neighbors in the area. Vermont Land Trust will now complete the arrangements.

Norman gave an update on his efforts to conserve the McClain property at the intersection of Turnpike and New Boston Roads as a nature area, including a proposal to name it the Old Turnpike Meeting House and Nature Center. The property has many features that make it appropriate for conservation, including American chestnuts experimentally bred to be blight resistant, interesting geology, possible Abenaki history, and proximity to the town to make it accessible for recreation. If he raises sufficient funds for purchase, he hopes to have an area non-profit administer it for at least the first year.

Cody presented an update for the Trails Subcommittee. A new inventory (e.g., kiosks and bridges) has been posted on their website. Budget plans include designing some new kiosks, to be built by

volunteers, that would contain information such as maps and guidelines for trail usage. They are also discussing standardization of signage and trail-marking methods. Other plans include improvements in wet areas of the upper and lower Ballard trail, coordinating with Brie for access to the Betty Booth trail from the former J. Pepper property, and potentially adopting the informal trail from Cossingham to the edge of the Appalachian Trail to form a loop with the Heyl Trail that could be accessed from the top of Elm Street. Following discussion of safety concerns for hikers during the hunting season, it was agreed that trails should not be closed, but that the kiosks at trailheads should include warnings and safety information.

Craig shared a draft of the letter that will be sent to Norwich residents offering an opportunity to contribute to the final fundraising phase of the project to establish the Woody Adams Conservation Forest, which will bring the 186-acre Woody Adams property, that lies between the Town Forest and Gile Mountain, into Town ownership and conserve the combined 290 acres to benefit forest contiguity, water quality, flood prevention, wildlife habitats, carbon sequestration, and assured public access.

Chris moved to accept the December 2020 minutes, David seconded, and the motion was approved unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:35PM.

Minutes compiled by Cheryl Asa