

NORWICH CONSERVATION COMMISSION ZOOM MEETING DRAFT MINUTES: 16 March 2021

Members Present: Craig Layne (chair), Lynnwood Andrews, Cheryl Asa, David Hubbard, Sage McGinley-Smith, Chris Rimmer, Cody Williams

Guests: Linda Gray, Rod and Pat Thomas, Eric Miller, Brie Swenson

Meeting convened at 7:03 PM

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

Lynnwood and Linda Gray proposed that the Norwich Energy Committee and the Conservation Commission organize a joint webinar on the conservation benefits of using electric lawncare equipment and of reducing the size of lawns that need mowing, replacing lawn with more natural plantings that support native wildlife, such as pollinators, butterflies, and birds. Steve Wisbaum, owner of Eco-Equipment Supply and Champlain Valley Compost, would present information on e-equipment. Lynnwood and Chris offered to prepare the portion of the program on conservation measures. NCC members agreed that the topic would provide useful information to the community and would be a good project for collaboration between the two groups.

Craig gave an update on the Woody Adams Conservation Forest project. The recent fund-raising effort reached its target, and the property will be acquired by the town of Norwich in June. Contributions that surpass the target will reduce the amount that would need to be provided from the Conservation Trust Fund.

Craig provided the current draft of the interim management plan for the property for discussion. The NCC will need to complete and submit the interim plan by end of April. Forester Tii McLane is working on baseline documentation that we may be able to include in the management plan. There will be no trail construction. The proposed back-country Nordic ski route would not require any construction or alteration of the landscape, although trees that fall across the route could be removed. Informational kiosks will be installed at access points, and the route itself will be indicated only by tree and post markers. No signage along Turnpike Rd is proposed, and it isn't anticipated that very many back-country skiers will use the route. Still undecided is whether to provide alternative parking to the Gile parcel parking lot on the Adams parcel for skiers and snowshoers. The decision about the minimal parking will influence the ski access point and kiosk locations. One possible parking and access point is the old log landing along Turnpike Road, south of the Gile parcel.

Craig met with residents along north Turnpike Rd to get their input on plans for the new property. They are primarily concerned about increased traffic and need for parking. One of those neighbors, Rod Thomas, who was present, asked for details about the plan for managing any increased use of the property. He was especially concerned about another potential access point currently used by some as a parking site. It is a small spot further south along Turnpike and across the road from his residence. It was agreed that spot wouldn't be adequate for parking, since the turn-off isn't obvious, is roadside, and doesn't have much space. Either the log landing or the Gile lot seem more reasonable options.

Cody suggested that the interim plan make it clearer what use, if any, will be made of the old logging road. Gates will be installed to prevent vehicular use of the area, other than maintenance or emergency vehicles.

VELCO (Vermont Electric Company) has contacted Craig about access to the power line corridor within the property, proposing entry further north than the point their vehicles now enter, so they don't have to cross the brook. Rearranging their access to a new permanent location would be up to the UVLT until town ownership when it would then be up to the Town Manager and Select Board.

David suggested asking Lindsay Putnam, environmental education instructor and neighboring property owner, for input on the plan, and all agreed. Craig will put the draft of the management plan on the Google Drive (<https://drive.google.com/drive/u/2/folders/1xJTqOmzkzqYWEkO6etcaXmwYcv5ss4Wx>) for further edits.

Claudette Brochu, on behalf of the Select Board, asked Craig for NCC ash tree survey data to use in budgetary planning for the next fiscal year, to be earmarked to combat the emerald ash borer. Brie will ask former NCC member David Hobson, who likely has the full dataset. David Hubbard will present the summary data to the Select Board.

Cody gave a report for the Trails Committee. Sean Ogle from the Upper Valley Trails Alliance attended the last meeting to present an update on activities. Winter trail use was the lowest they've recorded, while last summer's numbers were up by 10%. They will move the counter closer to the beginning of the trails for better accuracy, since the low winter count may be inaccurate. Budget balances have been authorized to cover the Brown Schoolhouse Road project, a scoping study of Gile Mountain parking lot expansion, and improvement of the Lower Ballard Trail. The Winter Hikes Zoom webinar for the Norwich Historical Society's Discover Norwich series was very successful, with 87 registrants and 78 attendees. They continue to work on posted information standards. The "living document" contains sections on kiosks, signage, trail markers, etc., using standard formats. Brie Swenson reported on the winter snowshoeing and Nordic skiing events. The novice snowshoeing events attracted more participants, perhaps because descriptions of intermediate and advanced events made them sound too difficult. They will reconsider the descriptions for next year. Vehicles parked at the Happy Hills trailhead parking area have been receiving warnings but not citations, perhaps due to misunderstandings about winter restrictions to provide space for snowplow turnaround. There have been two donors for installation of a bench near the Brown Schoolhouse bridge, and more donations are being sought to make the project possible.

Lynnwood moved to accept the February meeting minutes, Cody seconded, and the motion pass unanimously.

The meeting adjourned at 8:25PM.
Minutes compiled by Cheryl Asa