

**Town of Chester
Conservation Commission Meeting
March 12, 2024
6:00 p.m.
Approved Minutes**

Broadcast on Channel 6 and streamed on Government (cablecast.tv) – click “Watch Now”

Members present:

Chair Victor Chouinard
Kristina Snyder
Deb Munson
Kathleen Neff Ragsdale
Rick Sibley
Ted Broadwater
Nick Tranquillo
Eric McGowan, Alternate
Mikael Cejtin, Alternate
Selectwoman Dana Theokas, Liaison (joined at 6:21 p.m. but left, then rejoined at 6:43 p.m.)

Guests present:

Chester PACT

I. Call to Order

Chair Chouinard called the meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

II. New Business/Updates

A. Chuck Crowe, BestWay Wildlife Control

Chair Chouinard introduced Chuck Crowe of BestWay Wildlife Control. He has presented information to the Selectboard and the Highway Department regarding inspecting beaver impoundments in an effort to prevent incidents like the washout of Lane Road.

Mr. Crowe discussed temporary and permanent solutions to beaver issues and the rationale behind each. He described the pros and cons of trapping, and the benefits and drawbacks of installing pond levelers (beaver deceivers). He has been told there are 18 impoundments in Town and discussed the ability to monitor them. He noted the need to find out if there are other dams and assess their condition. He advised determining what effect each dam could have if it breaks, and creating a monitoring program.

The Commission agreed the first step is to obtain the list of 18 impoundments and refine it, based on their knowledge of the area. Mr. Crowe said Road Agent Piper has identified

two impoundments that he considers a priority. An assessment of the list of impoundments would need to be done. They discussed the cost of this. Inspections are usually done in June and November.

The Commission discussed whether they would serve as the interface and manage the project, and provide the funding. They questioned whether the Commission should be funding projects on Town-owned land that will protect Town infrastructure. Chair Chouinard will speak with counsel regarding this.

Mr. Broadwater moved to approve the funding of up to ten inspections at two hours each at approximately \$3,000. Ms. Neff Ragsdale seconded the motion. A vote was taken. All were in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

B. Spring Hill Farm Study: Final Payment Approval and Final Report Approval

Ms. Munson moved to approve the final invoice payment for Moosewood Ecological LLC for the Spring Hill Farm ecological study for \$613.75. Mr. Broadwater seconded the motion. A vote was taken. All were in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

Chair Chouinard thanked Mr. Tranquillo for reviewing the draft documents and collecting edits. The final draft was distributed to the Commission members, and other edits have been made. The final report will be distributed to the Commission within a day or two. They will ask Moosewood for their recommendations and then post the study for the public.

The Commission commended Moosewood for the quality of the work they have done.

C. Penacook Survey: Status and Payment Approval

Chair Chouinard reported the Penacook survey is complete. He noted that a baseline was needed on the conservation easement, but the area was never pinned. The Commission will set placards inside the easement this week to delineate the boundary that has been flagged. Mr. Tranquillo noted he notified the Rockingham County Conservation District (RCCD) so that they can conduct the baseline.

Mr. Broadwater moved to approve payment of \$2,150.00 to Promised Land Survey for the contract work done on Penacook. Mr. Tranquillo seconded the motion. A vote was taken. All were in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

D. North Woods Survey Work: Update and Payment Approval

Chair Chouinard reported Eric Mitchell has been contracted to do survey work on both sides of Ledge Road and has started doing recon work. He submitted an invoice for work done on the East Ledge Road side.

Ms. Neff Ragsdale moved to approve payment to Eric C. Mitchell & Associates of \$3,220.00 for North Woods survey work. Ms. Snyder seconded the motion. A vote was taken. All were in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

E. NRI, North Woods Ecological Survey and Open Space Master Plan: Update, Status of Permission Requests, and Outreach Event

Chair Chouinard said two rounds of letters have been sent out regarding the NRI. Responses are being returned, although slowly. Moosewood is pleased with the number of responses. Mr. Cejtin said he connected with Steven Lamonde regarding incorporating road crossings and examining wildlife connectivity, including the broader regional context. Mr. Lamonde was interested in the idea and would welcome help with the survey work. Mr. Cejtin also mentioned the "Connect the Coast" study done by the Nature Conservancy to Mr. Lamonde, which identifies the intersections of roads with the primary and secondary wildlife corridors.

Chair Chouinard said letters were also sent to landowners in the North Woods, asking for their participation in the detailed ecological survey. A couple of responses have been received. Mr. Tranquillo noted this could be viewed as a first step toward outreach, by informing residents of the work the Commission does.

Mr. Tranquillo suggested that the Commission call the owners of priority parcels identified by Moosewood who do not respond to the letters, asking for their participation.

Ms. Snyder sent materials from Moosewood to the Commission, to determine if this is a workable idea for the outreach event. She noted the flyer is finalized, which will be distributed. The Commission discussed how to publicize the event and the logistics.

F. Vital Records Expense Reimbursement

Chair Chouinard has been conducting records research as part of the recent title-clearing activities. He had two certificates pulled at a cost of \$15 each.

Ms. Munson moved to reimburse Victor Chouinard \$30 for vital records expense. Mr. Tranquillo seconded the motion. A vote was taken. All were in favor except Chair Chouinard, who abstained. The motion passed 6-0-1.

G. Banner - Finalize Design

Chair Chouinard has requested business cards be ordered. Mr. Tranquillo shared the latest design for the banner and the Commission members chose their favorite.

Mr. Broadwater moved that the Commission do a conditional approval up to \$200 to produce a banner for Conservation Commission tabling events. Ms. Snyder seconded the motion. A vote was taken. All were in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

H. Easement Language Update Workshop - Reschedule

Chair Chouinard rescheduled the easement language update workshop from March 20th to April 30th.

III. Regular Business

A. Minutes Approval

January 8 and January 25, 2024

Mr. Broadwater moved to approve the minutes of the January 8 and January 25, 2024, meetings as written. Mr. Tranquillo seconded the motion. A vote was taken. All were in favor except Mr. Sibley and Ms. Neff Ragsdale, who abstained. The motion passed 5-0-2.

February 13, 2024

On line 146, change (980-1) to (9-80-1).

Mr. Tranquillo moved to approve the minutes of the February 13, 2024, meeting as amended. Mr. Broadwater seconded the motion. A vote was taken. All were in favor except Mr. Sibley and Ms. Neff Ragsdale, who abstained. The motion passed 5-0-2.

B. Treasurer's Report

Ms. Neff Ragsdale presented the Treasurer's Report for February:

Savings account:

\$ 9,752.07
45,000.00 November current use
26.46 interest
\$ 54,778.53 closing balance

Conservation Forestry account:

\$ 1,524.55 starting balance
4.14 interest
\$ 1,528.69 ending balance

Emerson Conservation Easement:

\$ 296.09 starting balance
00.81 interest
\$ 296.90 ending balance

Conservation Forestry CD: (5.35%)

\$ 42,260.03 starting balance

167.43 interest
\$ 42,427.46 ending balance

Emerson Conservation Easement CD: (5.35%)

\$ 10,565.01 starting balance
41.85 interest
\$ 10,606.86 ending balance

Regular Conservation account CD: (5.35%)

\$ 559,670.93 starting balance
2,217.28 interest
\$ 561,888.21 ending balance

Conservation account CD:

\$ 182,367.90 starting balance
723.94 interest
\$ 183,091.84 ending balance

Mr. Broadwater moved to accept the February Treasurer's Report as presented. Mr. Tranquillo seconded the motion. A vote was taken. All were in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

C. Spring Hill Farm

Ms. Snyder reported they have not had an official meeting due to quorum issues for two months. At the last working meeting, they discussed the Winter Festival. Members are eager to review the Spring Hill Farm ecological survey. She and Chair Chouinard installed the "dogs must be on leash" signs near the High Tunnel and Shepard Home Road.

There is currently no chair or vice chair of the Spring Hill Farm Advisory Committee. They might consider adjusting the membership, as there is no longer an Ag Committee, yet there is a slot for a representative.

Ms. Snyder noted the budget needs to be finalized and presented to the Selectboard. She said there are recommendations from the Selectboard to cut the budget and the Committee would like to have input on these suggested cuts, so need to have an official meeting. Ms. Theokas said the budget is being given to the Budget Committee on Friday. She noted the Selectboard is looking at partnerships to fund SHFAC funding requests.

Ms. Snyder reported the plastic has come off of the High Tunnel as a result of the recent storms.

D. Wason Pond Conservation Area

Ms. Snyder said the Committee discussed the second round of treatment of invasives and is supportive of it. Mr. Tranquillo reported RCCD quoted the second round of treatment at \$3,025. The Commission agreed that the original proposal was for two treatments and the process should be completed. Members voiced their concerns regarding chemical treatment of invasives. Chair Chouinard noted his desire is to use mechanical removal going forward.

Ms. Theokas asked if the Commission would be willing to fund eight hours/week of groundskeeping staff to do manual removal of invasives, with oversight. Chair Chouinard pointed out removing the seed-producing plants will help avoid the spread of invasives. Ms. Munson suggested reaching out to other towns to see how they are dealing with invasives. Chair Chouinard pointed out other towns have community involvement, and suggested any member of the Commission can remove invasives as time permits. He suggested paying the Spring Hill Farm Trust for run time on the tractor to pull invasives at Wason Pond.

Mr. Broadwater said per RCCD, there might be grant money available for invasive control. He will follow up on this.

Mr. Tranquillo moved to approve payment of \$3,025 for the second application of chemicals for the treatment of the invasive plants at Wason Pond. Ms. Snyder seconded the motion. A vote was taken. All were in favor except Ms. Neff Ragsdale, who opposed the motion. The motion passed 6-1-0.

E. Easements, Monitoring, and Stewardship

Mr. Tranquillo presented two proposals for a baseline at Pomp Road (\$2,094) and annual monitoring of a parcel near Villager Road (\$359). Chair Chouinard said detailed baselines are needed, so the Commission can take on monitoring in the future. The Commission discussed what a monitoring report needs to contain and how these could be completed moving forward. Mr. Tranquillo will compile a list of properties that need to be monitored.

Ms. Theokas suggested educating landowners on monitoring their properties. She will pursue the Commission being notified when a Town-owned property with a conservation easement is purchased, including developments. She noted she is working with Building Inspector Bunker to send out notices to property owners in developments every five years and when a property changes hands regarding maintaining the no-cut buffer on their property. She suggested recording a Community Access Public Television segment to explain the benefits to landowners and abutters. Chair Chouinard noted enforcement on private easements is problematic and a Town-wide approach to enforcement is needed.

Mr. Broadwater moved to approve payment to RCCD of \$2,094 to produce a baseline for the Pomp Road parcel. Mr. Tranquillo seconded the motion. A vote was taken. All were in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

F. Strategic Land Protection

Chair Chouinard had no news, so a non-public meeting was not needed. He said things are moving forward on parcels that have been discussed at recent non-public meetings.

Ms. Theokas asked if this was the same as the Strategic Land Protection Committee, and Chair Chouinard noted that group never got off the ground. He explained this is for conservation land purchased with Conservation funds. Ms. Theokas said the cemetery groups have reported they will be out of land for plots in ten years and as a result, the Selectboard is considering re-forming the Strategic Land Protection Committee.

IV. Plan Reviews

None

V. Miscellaneous Business

Vehicular use on Class VI roads was clarified.

VI. Adjourn

Ms. Neff Ragsdale moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Broadwater seconded the motion. A vote was taken. All were in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,
Beth Hanggeli, Recording Secretary