

**Town of Chester
Conservation Commission
January 12, 2021
7:00 PM
Approved Minutes**

Present (Remotely):

Chairman Victor Chouinard
Deb Munson
Kristina Snyder
Kathleen Neff Ragsdale
Rick Sibley
Aaron Hume, Alternate (for Ted Broadwater)
Selectman Chuck Myette, Liaison

Guest:

Brenda Goudreau

I. Call to Order

Chair Chouinard called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

II. New Business

1. Brenda Goudreau

Ms. Goudreau reported on her research regarding the wooly adelgid problem. Many states have had success introducing the tsugae beetle into the woods. Its food of choice is the wooly adelgid. The beetles must be introduced to trees while the wooly adelgid is active. She has spoken with people in other states and they haven't found that they've become an invasive species. They don't fly to another tree unless their food source is gone. She'll find out what the cost would be. Maybe the impending polar vortex might drop temperatures long enough to take care of the problem. She can forward information on studies that have been done regarding the safety of using the beetles.

Ms. Neff Ragsdale suggested consulting forester Greg Jordan to find out if he thinks this might be a remedy. She asked if they had to get permission from the state. Ms. Munson knows of a woman who teaches courses on the wooly adelgid. Jennifer Weimer, forest health specialist, New Hampshire Division of Forest and Lands.
Jennifer.Weimer@dncr.nh.gov. 603-419-0079 cell phone.

Ms. Goudreau was referred to Kyle Lombard, the forest health program coordinator with the New Hampshire Division of Forest and Lands.

Chair Chouinard is reluctant to introduce anything into the ecosystem. He would defer such a decision to state- and county-level foresters though on the large scale, foresters have almost given up on eradicating the wooly adelgid. Selectman Myette said the problem has spread more than halfway across Chester. He agreed it would be worth following up with state officials, the forestry service being the place to start, or the UNH Cooperative Extension.

Ms. Goudreau will continue to research and send information to Chair Chouinard. Chair Chouinard thanked Ms. Goudreau for her efforts.

2. Annual Report

Chair Chouinard said the Commission needs to submit their annual report for the town's annual report. He sent out a list of topics, each with the name of the member who might volunteer to write a few sentences on it. Members can bow out if they would rather not do it. The report is due January 22nd. Ms. Munson volunteered to compose the writeups with Ms. Neff Ragsdale's help. Members should send their writeups to Ms. Munson by Sunday.

Ms. Neff Ragsdale said they should highlight programs to make people aware of the Commission and what it does. Selectman Myette suggested complementing the text with four or five pictures, and adding trail systems information and maps. Mr. Hume is working on a new set of trail maps, and plans to have that out by the end of the week.

III. Standard Business

1. Review minutes – December 8, 2020

Ms. Neff Ragsdale said in line 62, "Mr. Goudreau" should be "Mr. Jordan." Under the treasurer's report, she tries not to move for approval of her own report, so she doesn't believe it was her.

Ms. Snyder said line 79 should be "bronze birch borer." Line 85, add the word "that" between "example" and "do well." Line 296-7 should read "prime sponsor is someone who has a constituent who has an easement." Line 299-300, "if the bill comes up for hearing to approve it, he is willing to go and represent the Conservation Commission's stance on the bill."

Selectman Myette said in line 123, he meant the North Pond Kiosk built by Greg Lowell and his son. The Commission needs to have a program in place to maintain

Boy Scout projects since the builders often grow up and leave the area. The Commission needs to have discuss the maintenance of these projects with the Boy Scouts. Or, when projects are accepted, the Commission understands they are accepting the long-term maintenance of them, as well.

Ms. Neff Ragsdale moved to accept the minutes as amended. Ms. Munson seconded. By roll call, agree to accept minutes as amended by discussion and approve them. Chouinard – aye, Snyder – aye, Munson – aye, Sibley – aye, Ragsdale – aye, Myette – aye, Hume (for Ted Broadwater) – aye. With all in favor, the motion passed 7-0-0.

2. Subcommittee Reports

a. Treasurer's Report – Ms. Neff Ragsdale

Regular account:

\$ 1,200.00	starting balance
229.98	dues and subscriptions
\$ 919.99	ending balance (roughly 76% of budget)

Savings account (includes jumbo CD):

\$ 404,493.15	Starting balance
\$ 44,304.67	October current use
\$ 448,797.82	Ending balance

Forestry account:

\$ 41,222.21	starting balance
5.35	interest
\$ 41,227.56	ending balance

Lincoln Lane account

\$ 3,091.01	starting balance
0.40	interest
\$ 3,091.41	ending balance

Emerson Conservation Easement:

\$ 10,223.96	starting balance
1.33	interest

\$ 10,225.29 ending balance

Ms. Snyder moved to approve the Treasurer's Report. Mr. Hume seconded. By roll call, agree to accept Treasurer's Report as submitted. Chouinard – aye, Snyder – aye, Munson – aye, Sibley – aye, Ragsdale – aye, Myette – aye, Hume (for Ted Broadwater) – aye. With all in favor, the motion passed 7-0-0.

b. Springhill Farm

There was no meeting in December. The Trust is working on a \$10,000 grant for foundation and sill work on the barn with the 1772 Foundation that will be matched by the town. The town is not eligible for this type of grant. Since the Trust is a 501(c)3, it is eligible. It's due to the Foundation by February 12th. It is sponsored by the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance, which conducted the barn assessment two years ago, so they are following up on the assessment with their recommendations.

c. Wason Pond Conservation Area

Ms. Snyder reported the Wason Pond Committee is updating signs, which will include no hunting and no discharge of firearms, to be posted at all entrances and trailways. The scavenger hunt has been very successful; it will be going on until Martin Luther King Jr. Day. There might be a wedding in May involving the covered bridge and the property, depending on COVID restrictions. Ms. Snyder is working on an informational sign for the beaver lodge. The beaver pipes are still clear, and the lodge is still there. Ms. Neff Ragsdale said the committee discussed their annual report, which focused on the impact of the pandemic on closings: the playground is closed, meetings being held on Zoom, a lot of sporting activities were curtailed.

d. Easements, Monitoring, and Stewardship

Chair Chouinard recognized Mr. Hume for the good work he's been doing. The Commission agreed to pay him in lieu of hiring an outside source. Chair Chouinard has received an invoice based on the agreed prices. They will pay the Rockingham Conservation Commission District rates. Chair Chouinard emailed zip files of the information from Mr. Hume. Two baselines totaling 67 acres of monitoring, expense \$1,258.89. Selectman Myette said the reports were well done, and it will be easy for the next generation to continue to do these reports. Mr. Hume said he now has a system in place, so he can do them faster in the future.

Chair Chouinard will submit a payment request from the jumbo conservation fund. The 1099 has already been taken care of.

Agree to pay Mr. Hume for two baselines and one monitor report, which came to total of 1,258.89. By roll call, agree to pay invoice as submitted. Chouinard – aye, Snyder – aye, Munson – aye, Sibley – aye, Ragsdale – aye, Myette – aye, Hume – abstain. The motion passed 6-0-1.

IV. Miscellaneous Business

1. Presentations

Squam Lakes Natural Science Center Presentation

Ms. Snyder contacted Audrey at the Squam Lakes Science Center. She has a presentation scheduled Saturday, February 6th at 6 PM, "Animals in Winter." It will include an animal that migrates and one that hibernates; neither were in the last presentation. As soon as Ms. Snyder has the information, she'll create a post and send an email. She isn't concerned about overbooking because they've discovered that on the day of the presentation, even though people sign up, they don't attend. She can advertise the presentation outside of Chester, if the Commission agrees.

Easement Bill

Ms. Snyder reported on a bill that will allow the amendment of conservation easements. She sent an email to the members with the text of the bill. She spoke with the prime sponsor of the bill to obtain background information. The bill was initiated as the result of difficulties the South Windemere Farm in Westmoreland is having regarding allowing antique cars to drive and park on their property, like a cruise night. The state is saying there are easement violations.

The easement was originally drafted in the mid '80s, and the farm owners say it was poorly worded, and is unfair. The only way to change the wording is through legislation, but easements are not supposed to be changeable. A court case in the mid '90s changed the definition of agriculture of all easements, but before that, different language was used.

The bill sponsor is willing to work to get better language in the bill. He has contacted the charitable trust of the AG office to discuss finding better language. He can change the language of the bill to only be pertinent to easements before 1995. The area in question is a five-acre parcel. If they could swap it for a different five acres, everything would be okay.

Ms. Snyder's goal was to bring information to the Commission for discussion. As the bill stands, she doesn't think it would be a favorable thing because it's too broad and would open up any easement to be changed. Her stance could change if the language of the bill

is changed. Many conservation commissions and lawmakers are interested in this bill.
She suggested the Commission monitor the bill.

Ms. Neff Ragsdale asked why this issue needed to be dealt with at the state and not the local level. Selectman Myette said they are legal documents that go beyond the local town. The attorney general is the one that makes decisions on easements. Because it's drafted and put into the deed, it's beyond local control. This has been challenged before. The issue of swapping land is interesting. How do you define a fair and equitable swap?

Ms. Munson said it relates to how much benefit the property owners have received in tax write-offs over X years for having the easement. The town gives away an opportunity for making money off one type of land versus another. They've gained a benefit over X years. It seems as though they would sell back the easement to gain access to a commercial benefit.

Chair Chouinard has an issue with the timeframe. If an easement is donated, you can't go back into the past and ask the person if they would like to amend that easement. He would like to see the final bill. He would hate to see what it will do to people donating or selling easements if they thought it could be altered 30, 40 years later.

Selectman Myette would like to see a copy of the easement to see how it compares to ours today; maybe lessons could be learned. Maybe it's just the opinion of the owner who wants it changed that it's poorly worded.

Ms. Snyder will continue to monitor the bill's progress.

V. Strategic Land Protection Committee - SLPC

Chair Chouinard suggested moving into non-public session per RSA 91-A3, 2 paragraph D.

Selectman Myette moved to enter into non-public session on lands acquisition. They will seal the minutes in public, then come out of the non-public session, seal the minutes again in public, and adjourn. Ms. Snyder seconded the motion. By roll call. Chouinard – aye, Snyder – aye, Munson – aye, Sibley – aye, Ragsdale – aye, Myette – aye, Hume – aye. The motion passed 7-0-0.

The recording was turned off at 8:03 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Beth Hanggeli

Recording Secretary