

**Town of Chester
Conservation Commission
July 13, 2021
7:00 PM
Approved Minutes**

Members present:

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

Members absent:

Ted Broadwater

Guests present:

Bill Hesketh
Debra Severance
Residents of Lincoln Lane

I. Call to Order

Chair Chouinard called the meeting to order at 7:08 PM.

II. New Business

A. Lincoln Lane Fund

The residents of Lincoln Lane have been asked to spend \$3,000 of the fund originally set aside by the developer to maintain a footbridge. The attorneys have authorized the funds to be spent on another project, as the footbridge was not constructed on the easement but on a Class VI road.

Bill Hesketh described the project intended for the cul-de-sac, which will be a gathering place with benches. The center of the gathering area will be crushed stone surrounded by wall block.

Building Inspector Bunker said it is not in his jurisdiction to approve what appears to be a landscaping project and handed it to the Planning Board. He is concerned about drainage and said there are violations on the conservation easement that need to be addressed. The residents said the structures in the easement are temporary, such as swing sets.

Chairman Chouinard said the Commission is tasked with monitoring conservation easements and if any violations are found, they report them to Code Enforcement, which is Mr. Bunker.

Selectman Myette explained that builders gain additional densities if they go through the conservation easement process. Usually, homeowners do not understand what this means. He explained that the Planning Board will require a plan of any structures being erected as well as any setbacks, which are important to snow plowing. If the cul-de-sac was designed as a catch basin and this project will impact that, this could be a problem.

Chairman Chouinard said the Highway Department should approve the project as long as it does not impact drainage and snow plowing. The Commission can report what the conservation easement says and what state the easement is in; they do not enforce anything.

Mr. Hesketh said if they did not maintain the conservation easement, such as controlling poison ivy, it would negatively impact their properties. Selectman Myette clarified that poison ivy is not an invasive species and there can be no disturbance of easements except for safety reasons. The Commission has suggested adding managing invasive species with mutual agreement as an approved act to easements. Selectman Myette said easements are set as part of a deed when it is filed.

The residents of Lincoln Lane expressed their concern over the value of their property decreasing if they are not permitted to maintain the conservation easement.

Selectman Myette reviewed the regulations regarding monumentation, including the requirement for the size of signs and the distance between them. The developers are responsible for installing monumentation and should also be responsible for ensuring continued monitoring of the easement.

The Commission has ordered caps that can be installed on rebar by the residents to delineate the easement boundary, although it is not the Commission's responsibility to monument the open space.

B. NH F&G Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program Donation

The New Hampshire Fish & Game Nongame and Endangered Wildlife Program is soliciting a donation, as the Commission has donated in the past. Ms. Snyder said they do incredible work and most donations can be matched federally. Their turtle specialist is interested in doing a presentation. They also assess habitat as a service. Donors receive newsletters and updates as to the program's activities. Selectman Myette suggested working an annual donation into the budget.

86 *Ms. Neff Ragsdale moved to donate \$100 to the Fish & Game Nongame and*
87 *Endangered Wildlife Program. Ms. Snyder seconded the motion. A roll call vote was*
88 *taken. Chouinard – aye, Snyder – aye, Munson – aye, Ragsdale – aye, Sibley – aye,*
89 *Hume – aye, Myette – aye. The motion passed 7-0-0.*

90
91 **C. NH Stream Crossing Initiative**

92 There are hot spots in town, so Ms. Snyder is contacting presenters of culvert streamline
93 initiatives workshops to find out if there are going to be any in Chester. If they have not
94 yet visited Chester, she would like to know if they would be willing to. It might be
95 possible to address areas that are being clogged by beaver activity and turtle crossings,
96 and find available funding. Wildlife does not like to go through tubes; natural bottom
97 culverts are preferable.

98
99 Selectman Myette said they could work with the Planning Board and the Highway
100 Department, when they are replacing culverts in critical areas, to use wildlife culverts.
101 This could be put into the regulations going forward to prevent wildlife deaths.

102
103 **D. Town Fair**

104 The Commission will participate in the Town Fair on September 11, 2021. The entry fee
105 is \$30 for non-profit organizations. Ms. Snyder will check with Recreation Director
106 Reishus to ask if the fee can be waived for a Town entity. Fish & Game might have a
107 booth to educate about protecting livestock and bird feeders from wildlife.

108
109 Ms. Snyder would like the Commission to recommend to Chester Recreation that
110 balloons not be handed out at the Town Fair due to the danger to wildlife and the
111 ecosystem. Ms. Neff Ragsdale said people are not aware of the problems balloons cause
112 and sharing that information is a valuable exercise. Mr. Hume suggested coming up with
113 an environmentally friendly alternative to offer as a replacement to balloons.

114
115 The Commission agreed to state that this is an environmental concern. Ms. Snyder will
116 approach the Chester Recreation Commission and recommend that balloons not be
117 released in Town or distributed at Town events.

118
119 **E. Climate Change**

120 Selectman Myette said there are pinch points in the community that flood with less than
121 a 50-year flood. Many culverts are undersized. The Commission needs to examine
122 drainage regulations and calculations when subdivisions are planned, and require that
123 they are engineered to deal with the floods of the future.

124
125 Ms. Neff Ragsdale suggested holding an interdepartmental meeting to discuss extreme
126 weather events. Chairman Chouinard will add this item to next month's agenda for
127 further discussion. Mr. Sibley suggested having a community meeting and doing a
128 presentation to discuss climate change.

F. Nuisance Wildlife

Ms. Neff Ragsdale said the Commission was tasked with discussing nuisance wildlife after the beaver incident. For any immediate hazard, the Animal Control office would be contacted. Anything that would have an environmental concern would fall to the Commission to handle. Neither the New Hampshire Conservation Commission nor the Extension Service has guidelines to deal with nuisance wildlife issue.

She recommended that the Commission not establish a guideline on dealing with nuisance wildlife. Instead, they should come up with a statement of purpose that they want to balance and respect the interests of homeowners and wildlife and the environment, and will deal with these issues on a case-by-case basis and refer people to existing resources. She suggested posting on the Town website that help is available if they have a nuisance issue and provide links to websites. If they have questions, they can reach out to the Commission, who will help as they can.

Selectman Myette said problems on Town lands should be addressed on a case-by-case basis to determine if it is a nuisance issue or a health and safety issue for an individual or for the Town. He said there needs to be a point of contact to do triage and decide if an issue should be delegated to Animal Control or to the Commission. Calls come to the Road Agent or to the police at this point. If the Commission wants nuisance animals to be handled in a specific way, a clear procedure and policy needs to be established.

RSAs exist that protect animals that have seasons, where requirements must be met before an animal is destroyed. A link should be posted to these RSAs on the Commission webpage to educate people. Chairman Chouinard said if the issue occurs on conservation land, the Commission should be notified. Otherwise, they should not be involved.

Ms. Neff Ragsdale will contact the Road Agent, the police department, the fire department, and Town Administrator Doda to discuss creating a procedure to deal with these complaints.

H. South Woods

Chairman Chouinard said they are still working on the final wording on the easement.

III. Old Business

A. Review Minutes – June

A name was omitted from the minutes and Chairman Chouinard supplied it.

Ms. Snyder moved to approved the minutes from the June 8, 2021 meeting as amended. Ms. Neff Ragsdale seconded the motion. A vote was taken, all were in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

B. Subcommittee reports

1. Strategic Land Protection Committee - SLPC

Chairman Chouinard said there is no update.

In the past, the Town has been absorbing the legal costs the Commission incurs for doing deed research, et cetera, on property purchased by the Town. Town Administrator Doda has asked that they approve paying these bills out of the Conservation fund.

2. Treasurer's Report

Savings account (includes jumbo CD):

\$ 468,703.28 starting balance

39.81 interest

\$ 468,743.09 Ending balance

Forestry account:

\$ 41,250.04 starting balance

3.51 interest

\$ 41,253.55 ending balance

Lincoln Lane account:

\$ 3,093.10 starting balance

0.26 interest

\$ 3,093.36 ending balance

Emerson Conservation Easement:

\$ 10,230.86 starting balance

0.87 interest

\$ 10,231.73 ending balance

Regular account:

\$ 1,200.00 starting balance

00.00 expenditures

\$ 1,200.00 ending balance

The \$259.81 remaining at the end of the fiscal year was returned to the Town. Selectman Myette said for future reference, the Commission can request that those funds be rolled over.

Ms. Munson moved to approve the Treasurer's Report as presented. Ms. Snyder seconded the motion. A vote was taken, all were in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

3. Spring Hill Farm

Ms. Snyder reported that 400 bales of hay were cut and stored on the farm. Seven cows are on the property. Manure has been spread on the fields.

The AARP has not announced the results of the grant applications.

Derry Trail Riders are planning a benefit trail ride headed by Julia Webb that is tentatively scheduled for September 26th. Two trailers will camp in the lower field at Lane Road the night before the ride. The trail will be marked with clothespins and surveyors tape. Registration will begin at 8 AM and the first riders will go out at 9 AM. All participants will sign a waiver of liability. There were 54 riders at the last trail ride. The registration fee is \$35, which includes two meals and snacks. There will not be spectators.

Milkweed Monarch butterfly update: They planted seedlings but the majority of them have been dug up by wildlife. Ms. Snyder has not been out since the heavy rain to see if the seedlings survived. The bee balm is doing well.

Maintenance used a bush hog to mow an area to the pond and down one of the offshoot trails, but stopped before the pollinator area. They do this annually to make room for horses. Many invasive plants were destroyed but also some habitat and milkweed plants. The Rockingham County Conservation District (RCCD) needs to be informed of this type of activity, as well as activities like the pollinator project. Chairman Chouinard contacted Maintenance Director Cavanaugh regarding improving communication as to mowing in the future, and will discuss the need to coordinate any activity on the Farm with the RCCD.

Ms. Munson contacted Greg Jordan about the mowing. September 15th is the earliest time to mow and generally later is better.

Chairman Chouinard said the RCCD wants to be notified when anything is done on their easement. Ms. Snyder will contact the RCCD about the pollinator project. They plan to plant seeds in the fall and over-winter with a layer of soil, if they get approval. The pollinator area signs were removed, but were found near the Chester Rod & Gun Club. The milkweed plant could be listed as a species of concern, if the Monarch Butterfly is listed as an endangered species.

Turtles are nesting on the property, including Blanding's turtles, which is a state endangered turtle. This increases the need to protect the habitat. Ms. Snyder has asked the turtle specialist from Fish & Game to visit the site and offer advice. Having a property as both a conservation area and a recreation area can create conflict, as the amount of pedestrian traffic needs to be limited to protect the turtles.

The barn roof is leaking. Selectman Myette reported that bids were obtained and Town Maintenance will do the repairs using the residuals from the budget.

254 The Fall Festival is scheduled for September 25th. Volunteers will be needed. Cindy
LeBlanc is assisting Ms. Reishus with planning. Selectman Myette suggested setting
256 up a Conservation Commission booth to help educate the public about projects
happening on the farm.

258 There are debris piles on the property that have become dump sites. There is broken
glass and barbed wire, so it has become a safety concern.

4. Wason Pond Conservation area

260 Ms. Neff Ragsdale reported that they discussed horses and dogs in the beach area.
They decided neither would be allowed in the water between Memorial Day and
262 Labor Day and signs will be posted to that effect. There is a rule, but no ordinance,
requiring dogs to be leashed, so citations cannot be made. They will refer this to the
264 Board of Selectmen to see if they will consider establishing an ordinance that can be
enforced.

266 There is a thriving milkweed colony growing on the property. It will be used as an
268 educational opportunity about the importance of these plants to the Monarch
butterfly.

270 The design for the pavilion has been received.

272 The monofilament recycling project was included in the Fish & Game Wildlife
274 Journal. Ms. Snyder suggested the Commission subscribe to this publication.

276 A structural engineer will be assessing the footbridge, which has been closed due to
the damage caused during the heavy rains, and come up with recommendations. The
278 Commission discussed installing a temporary bridge to keep access open, including
for emergency vehicles. Ms. Snyder will research possible funding sources to fund
280 the repair and replacement process. The Commission also discussed how to prevent
the beavers from rebuilding the dam.

5. Easements, Monitoring and Stewardship

284 *Ms. Munson moved to pay Mr. Hume's timesheet of \$521 for easement*
286 *monitoring. Ms. Snyder seconded the motion. A vote was taken, all were in favor*
except Mr. Hume, who abstained. The motion passed 6-0-1.

288 The Commission will pay for the renewal of the GIS license at \$100 that Mr. Hume
290 is using for the work he is doing.

292 *Chairman Chouinard amended the motion to include the GIS license and \$500-*
294 *\$600 for the cost of the work Mr. Hume is doing on the Loranger property. A vote*
was taken, all were in favor except Mr. Hume, who abstained. The motion passed
296 *6-0-1.*

Chairman Chouinard commended Mr. Hume on the quality of work he is doing on the easements.

Mr. Hume shared an example of an AxisGIS interactive map with parcel data, the old conservation layer, and the new conservation layer, as well as trails. It can be used as a data storage device as well as a decision-making tool. It is the best way for the Commission to look at the data he has been collecting.

He said the Commission should get a conservation easement on North Pond and the Loranger property. Chairman Chouinard said there are protection considerations that need to be addressed on the Loranger property – the Exeter River shoreline needs to be protected.

Mr. Hume reported that he has been working with James Vayo of the Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission to collect 360-degree trail imagery. The first trail tested worked well, so he will cover Forsaith Forest, Wason Pond, and Spring Hill trails next. The end goal is to produce something akin to a Google Street View.

IV. Plan Reviews

There are no plan reviews.

V. Miscellaneous Business

A. Presentations, Legislation

Ms. Snyder reported that she sent gift cards to the winners of the Dandelion Contest and the Commission received a thank-you note from one of the participants. Some of the winning pictures will be hung in the Town offices.

Now that the Commission is meeting in person again, presentations could be done on the Monarch butterfly and the milkweed plants. The turtle specialist could do a presentation. It would be good for the Town to know more about what the Commission does.

Ms. Munson said an application needs to be submitted to participate in the Wildlife Action Plan Committee. Selectman Myette, Ms. Munson, Ms. Snyder, and Ms. Neff Ragsdale will participate.

Ms. Snyder attended the Fish & Game Commission meeting and spoke with the furbearer biologist, who is seeing animals dying from rodenticide. It is having impacts on the furbearer population and prey animals. They are doing studies to determine how this is impacting animal reproductive rates. She said the Commission should consider this as an education issue.

UNH is putting out trail and game cameras in the Rockingham County wildlife management area to count fox, bobcat, coyote and fisher. They are trying to find a

means of measuring the furbearer populations. Ms. Snyder will contact them and
volunteer to have cameras installed on Town-owned property.

Ms. Neff Ragsdale made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Ms. Snyder seconded the motion. A vote was taken, all were in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 10:00 PM.

***Respectfully submitted,
Beth Hanggeli, Recording Secretary***