

Town of Chester
Conservation Commission – Business Meeting
June 13, 2023
6:00 PM
Approved Minutes

Broadcast on Channel 20 and streamed on Government (cablecast.tv) – click “Watch Now”

Members present:

Chairman Victor Chouinard
Kristina Snyder
Kathleen Neff Ragsdale
Rick Sibley
Deb Munson
Ted Broadwater (left at 7:00 p.m.)
Nick Tranquillo
Eric McGowan, Alternate
Selectwoman Dana Theokas

Members absent:

Mikael Cejtin

Guests present:

Conor Madison, GZA
Stephanie Gardner, Eversource Energy
Jordan Young, Atlantic Civil Engineering
Paul & Sue Foskitt
Chester PACT

I. Call to Order

Chair Chouinard called the meeting to order at 6:02 PM.

II. New Business/Updates

A. Eversource - Conor Madison, CUP 2023_391

Conor Madison presented the Conditional Use Permit for a temporary wetland impact. This project will be to replace a wood pole with a steel pole on the 373/391 transmission line corridor. They have applied to the state for the appropriate permits; the state is bogged down reviewing permits, so they are still pending. They are working with the New Hampshire Fish & Game Department and Natural Heritage Bureau for protected species.

There are six wood poles remaining in Chester. There is an existing road to the structure that needs no improvements. They will apply timber matting to the work area and then remove it at the end of the project.

Mr. Chouinard said he visited the area near Wells Village Road and examined some of the replacement structures that have been installed. He was extremely impressed with the care that had gone into minimizing the impact of the work. Mr. Madison appreciated that the work being put into this was noticed.

Mr. Chouinard will send a letter to the Planning Board regarding the Commission's approval of this project.

B. Atlantic Civil Engineering - Jordan Young, Pomp Road Culvert

Mr. Jordan Young presented a plan to upgrade Pomp Road to driveway standards (widen to 12 feet). The Town maintains the road, although it is a Class VI road. It was recommended that they use 100-year flood calculations, so will use a 30-inch culvert. Jeff Adler of DuBois & King has approved the plan. They are applying for a wetland permit. There is a stream currently passing over the road, as the current culvert is undersized and crushed.

Chairman Chouinard agreed the current culvert is not functional and this appears to be an improvement. He asked Selectman Steve Couture (also a DES employee) to review the project, and he found no issues. The Commission noted they had no concerns about this project impacting wildlife impact and that it will be an improvement to this section of the road. Mr. Foskitt said they hope the work will be done this summer.

C. Lincoln Lane Account

Chairman Chouinard said the Lincoln Lane account is being closed. A final receipt was received for \$207.04, which leaves approximately \$183.33 in the account. This will be returned to the Conservation Commission General Fund.

Mr. Broadwater moved to return the remaining balance of approximately \$183.33 from the Lincoln Lane account to the Conservation Commission General Fund. Mr. Tranquillo seconded the motion. A vote was taken, all were in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

D. Ownership Conflict Update: 008-016 / 005-097

Chairman Chouinard updated the Commission on the status of this situation. At the last meeting, he requested authorization to pay for legal advice. The law firm responsible for the Commission's deed in 2017 was also responsible for a quiet decree on the title in 2002. So, as they are on both sides of the issue, he believed it was prudent to obtain independent legal advice. He consulted Soule, Leslie, Kidder, Sayward & Loughman, PLLC of Salem, NH. This situation is still in a discovery phase.

Chairman Chouinard recognized and thanked Nancy Hoijer for the work she has done on this issue. She is leading the attempt to understand the Town's position on the matter.

E. South Woods Survey Update

Chairman Chouinard has not received the survey, so there is no update.

F. M/L 003-023 Survey Proposals

Chairman Chouinard reported he and Mr. Tranquillo have been discussing parcels that need surveys. The Currier parcel is 30 acres, some of which is under power lines. It was purchased with Conservation funds, but there is no easement on it. The bounds are not marked. They have realized how important it is to have plans registered with Rockingham. They have solicited survey proposals and received two. The Commission discussed the proposals and the two companies that submitted them.

Mr. Tranquillo noted that this is the only parcel under the Commission's purview that they do not have a plan for.

Chairman Chouinard noted this parcel would be ideal as a solar site, due to the exposure and presence of power lines.

Mr. Broadwater moved to proceed with the survey and choose Company B. Ms. Neff Ragsdale seconded the motion. A vote was taken. All were in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

Mr. Tranquillo amended the motion for the survey of the Currier parcel to include a \$2,000 retainer to Company B. A vote was taken. All were in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

G. Conservation Easement Approvals

Mr. Tranquillo explained in 1999, the Town purchased a private easement for the Dolloff property. The Rockingham County Conservation District (RCCD) monitored this easement and suggested that the easement be separated into two, as the parcels are now owned by two separate landowners.

Mr. Broadwater asked if the landowners would have to sign these easements, as the easement goes with the deed. He asked if each deed needed to have two easements recorded and the Commission did not know.

Chairman Chouinard noted all easements must be reviewed by legal counsel before being brought to the Selectmen. He suggested conditionally approving splitting the easement, after it is reviewed by legal counsel.

136 *Ms. Neff Ragsdale moved to accept the two easements, the Smith Trust Easement*
137 *Dolloff and Maple Forest Farm easement, so they can be moved onto legal for review.*
138 *Mr. Broadwater seconded the motion. A vote was taken. All were in favor. The motion*
139 *passed unanimously.*

140 **H. Proposed June 28 or 29 Meeting**

142 Chairman Chouinard suggested another meeting will be needed this month to review
143 Town-wide NRI proposals and conduct any other business. The last NRI was done in
144 Chester in 2007.

146 Mr. Tranquillo noted last month, the Commission agreed to conduct a Town-wide NRI
147 and creating an Open Space Master Plan. One company has submitted a proposal, in
148 which they estimated it would take a year to produce these documents. He expects two
149 more proposals will be received by the end of the month. He said Steve Couture has
150 volunteered to review the proposals.

152 The Commission agreed to meet on June 28th at 6:00 p.m.

154 **I. Shared Conservation Documents**

156 Mr. Tranquillo noted the Commission has a lot of documents to track and suggested
157 creating a central location to organize information more efficiently for Commission
158 members to access. It is all public record. The Commission discussed who would have
159 access to the folder and where it would be located, and agreed this was a good idea. Mr.
160 Tranquillo and Chairman Chouinard will research possible locations (Microsoft 365,
161 Google, etc.) and report their findings at the next meeting.

164 Chairman Chouinard suggested creating a Gmail address/account for the Conservation
165 Commission and will discuss this with Town Administrator Doda.

166 **J. Reimbursements**

168 *Ms. Neff Ragsdale moved to reimburse Ms. Snyder \$30 for Town Fair tabling activity*
169 *and Chairman Chouinard \$50 for two requests for NHB surveys on the Conservation*
170 *Commission's behalf. Mr. Tranquillo seconded the motion. A vote was taken, all were*
171 *in favor except Ms. Snyder and Chairman Chouinard, who abstained. The motion*
172 *passed 6-0-2.*

174 **III. Regular Business**

176 **A. Review Minutes – May 17, 2023**

178 The Commission agreed they found no errors in the minutes.

180 **B. Subcommittee reports**

1. Treasurer's Report

Ms. Neff Ragsdale offered the Treasurer's Report for May:

Regular Conservation account:

\$ 1,001.00 starting balance

0.00 expenses

\$ 1,001.00 ending balance

Savings account:

\$ 90,027.23 starting balance

15,520.38 total credits (including current use)

\$105,547.61 ending balance

Conservation Forestry account:

\$ 1,489.02 starting balance

3.61 interest

\$ 1,492.63 ending balance

Lincoln Lane account:

\$ 391.32 starting balance

0.95 interest

\$ 392.27 ending balance

(this was before the expenditure discussed earlier)

Emerson Conservation Easement:

\$ 289.19 starting balance

00.70 interest

\$ 289.89 ending balance

All three jumbo CDs will be maturing this month.

Conservation Forestry CD: (jumbo CD earning 4.1%)

\$ 40,716.23 starting balance

139.13 interest

\$ 40,855.36 ending balance

Regular Conservation account CD: (jumbo CD earning 4.1%)

\$ 559,848.18 starting balance

1,913.00 interest

\$ 561,761.18 ending balance

Emerson Conservation Easement CD: (CD earning 4.1%)

\$ 10,179.08 starting balance

34.78 interest

228 \$ 10,213.84 ending balance

230 *Ms. Snyder moved to approve the Treasurer's Report as presented by Ms. Neff*
232 *Ragsdale. Mr. Tranquillo seconded the motion. A vote was taken, all were in favor.*
 The motion passed unanimously.

234 **C. Spring Hill Farm**

236 Ms. Snyder reported the discussion at the meeting was not conservation related, focusing
238 instead on repairing the buildings and trying to raise funds for the property. The Boy
240 Scout kiosk has been delivered but no materials are being displayed yet. She will include
 something about keeping dogs on a leash and asked for other information to display.
242 Chairman Chouinard said the Eagle Scout candidate did an amazing job on the kiosk.
 Ms. Snyder reported that the survey is underway and read an update.

Ms. Neff Ragsdale approved payment of an invoice for \$3,002.50 to Moosewood
244 *Ecological LLC for survey work. Ms. Munson seconded the motion. A vote was taken,*
246 *all were in favor. The motion passed unanimously.*

248 **D. Wason Pond Conservation Area**

250 Ms. Neff Ragsdale reported invasive control will occur the week of June 12th. The
252 Fishing Derby was a success. Summer programs will run June 29 through August 4.
254 Ranger Wright reported there is poison ivy on the backside of the playground but they
256 are not willing to spray due to the proximity to the playground. The Town will deliver
 the sand recently purchased to enhance the beach. The trails have been cleared of fallen
 trees. There was no update on the bridge. Ms. Munson reported the pollinator garden is
 doing well and she will be planting more seeds. She will ask if any seniors are willing to
 help her.

258 Ms. Snyder noted that dogs are required to be on a leash at Wason Pond and Ranger
260 Wright said most people are respectful. He said that people are recommending that
262 people take their dogs to Spring Hill Farm to let them off-leash, which is concerning.
264 There was an incident at SHF with a dog off-leash that spooked a horse. She is hoping
 no further measures will need to be taken at SHF. It is recommended, but not a
 requirement, that dogs are on a leash at SHF. The Commission discussed the need for a
 dog park. Ms. Theokas will bring this up at the next Board of Selectmen meeting.

266 **E. Easements, Monitoring, and Stewardship**

268 Mr. Tranquillo presented a draft of a partial list of the private and Town-owned
270 properties that the Commission steward. It includes the baseline status of the properties.
272 He stated there are 22 parcels that still need baselines. RCCD has suspended all
 monitoring and baseline work until the fall and winter, which is their typical practice.

He noted that all parcels have been brought up to date. Moving forward, the Commission needs to determine if they will continue to hire RCCD to monitor the parcels or if a Commission member will learn how to monitor property based on the baseline and produce the reports in-house. The Commission discussed this issue.

F. Strategic Land Protection

Chairman Chouinard had no update and nothing to report.

G. PTA Presentation, August 3rd, 6:00 p.m.

Ms. Snyder noted she has been in touch with the naturalist from the Harris Conservation Center who will be doing the presentation. This is being done in association with the library. Promotion will begin soon.

H. Town Fair, September 9

Ms. Snyder said the Commission will have a table at the Town Fair.

I. Photo Contest

Ms. Snyder would like to have another photo contest. She would like to engage more with the community and asked for suggestions.

J. Conservation Curriculum at Chester Academy

Mr. Tranquillo mentioned that children today are disconnected from nature and the environment. He asked if it was possible to create a curriculum across every grade (one- or two-week program) that introduces Chester Academy students to conservation and Chester wildlife. Selectwoman Theokas said the state has rigid curriculum guidelines that the school is already trying to meet. They could consider how to supplement the guidelines with Chester-specific information. She noted students do nature walks and science tests at locations around town. Ms. Snyder noted once the Spring Hill Farm farmhouse is open, they have discussed holding classes for children.

Selectwoman Theokas suggested contacting Dr. Maio, Chester Academy curriculum coordinator, and Rebecca Bergeron, enrichment teacher. Ms. Snyder suggested reaching out to the Chesterbrook School of Natural Learning. Selectwoman Theokas suggested grants are available for outdoor education. Ms. Munson mentioned her brother is an educator in Maine who has built a greenhouse and garden, where the school gets vegetables and students learn science.

VII. Next meeting: June 28, 2023

VII. Adjourn

320 *Ms. Neff Ragsdale moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Tranquillo seconded the motion.*
 A vote was taken and all were in favor. The motion passed unanimously.

322 The meeting was adjourned at 7:59 p.m.

324 Respectfully submitted,
 Beth Hanggeli, Recording Secretary