

**Town of Chester
Conservation Commission Meeting
Tuesday, August 9th, 2016
Municipal Complex
Approved Minutes**

Preliminaries

Chairman Myette called the meeting of the Chester Conservation Commission to order at 7:10pm on Tuesday, August 9, 2016.

Roll Call

Members Present:

Chuck Myette, Chairman
Deb Munson
Phil Cassista

Members Absent:

Baron Richardson
Jeff Geary

Members of the Public Present:

Ted Broadwater
Aaron D. Hume

New Business

1. Nothing to report.

Old Business

1. **Review of Minutes**

July 12, 2016 minutes are to be reviewed.

2. **Subcommittee Reports**

- A. Strategic Land Protection Committee – SLPC

The SLPC is working on two (?). One may be a simple lot line adjustment and might need a survey, which has not been done. The Planning Board should be consulted.

- B. Treasurer's Report (Chuck) BILLS

As former Treasurer Patrick Connelly is no longer on the Commission, Chairman Myette gave the Treasurer's Report.

The Town's Conservation Commission's Budget of \$750.00 is broken down as follows:

Admin Salaries	\$100.00
Printing	50.00
Dues/Seminars	300.00
Miscellaneous	100.00
Exeter River Watershed	150.00
Southeast Land Trust	50.00

He should be notified of any miscellaneous expenditures so that these expenses can be tracked.

Chairman Myette also reported on the three Conservation Commission accounts, as follows:

The Lincoln Lane account has a balance of \$3,013.55, of which \$13.55 is interest. The funds in this account were intended for bridge building, which never became the responsibility of the Conservation Commission. However, if the initiative for a trail ever becomes realized, the funds can be used there.

The Conservation Commission account has a balance of \$514,430.93 as of July 1st, of which \$124.30 is interest. This fund was created for anything to do with Conservation, including easement purchasing and monitoring.

The Forest Activities account has a balance of \$33,605.85 as of July 31st, of which \$4.13 is interest.

An invoice in the amount of \$49.15 is to be paid to the Registry of Deeds for recording McClain.

Mr. Cassista moved to accept the Treasurer's Report; Ms. Munson seconded the Motion. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative; so moved.

C. Planning Board

A couple of subdivisions will be coming forward in the future.

D. Trails

Nothing to report.

E. Spring Hill Farm

Chairman Myette reported that crops are going well. Hay is in, although rain is needed; the farm does have irrigation. Spring Hill Farm was not affected by the disaster declaration, as it is not a commercial grower, depending on crops for its livelihood.

The old siding at the Farmhouse has been stripped off in accordance with proper procedures for de-leading in preparation for new cedar siding. All trim work, fascia boards, and soffits will be scraped and sanded; any rotten or damaged trim, fascia boards, and/or soffits will be replaced. These plans are in accordance with the recommendations of the New Hampshire Preservation Alliance.

All work is to be done by a Lead-Safe Certified Contractor, and the building will be finished with lead-free paint as part of the Town Meeting Warrant Article.

There are still openings on the Spring Hill Farm Board of Trustees if anyone is interested in becoming a member.

As background, Spring Hill Farm is approximately 400 acres and includes farm equipment, outbuildings, a high-tunnel for agriculture, ponds, and trails that are open to the public for walking and riding through the hunting season. The tenants are now operating their own farm with animals, haying, and some crops; they also have a farm stand. The tenant bought two draft horses with a wagon and sleigh, and used them in pulling a wagon. This fall, there will be hayrides and sleigh rides. They lease the farmhouse from the Town in order to keep that at as small of a burden as possible.

The farm was featured on the cover of this year's Town Report.

F. Agricultural Commission

The Agriculture Commission is getting ready for the Town Fair to be held this year on Saturday, September 10th. As background, the Agricultural Commission was established to bring together local farms and farmers, to educate the community in agriculture, and to promote the business of farming and farm activities in Chester through education and training with the thought of creating a community market at some point.

G. Regulations

Nothing to report.

H. Grants – Trails Grant

Although there are miles of trails on conservation properties in Chester, trail mapping itself is minimal. Some Boy Scout projects have identified and mapped Wason Pond trails, and there is funding to create additional maps – the Library, in particular, has access to public-use web-based applications, can get software on a reduced or free basis, and might be able to work in conjunction with the Conservation Commission.

Mr. Hume would be interested in volunteering in this area. He spent the summer mapping trails from northeastern Massachusetts along the river to Long Island Sound, and could provide a copy of the trails brochure he worked on.

I. Wason Pond Conservation Area (Chuck)

As background, the Town purchased what is now the ~108 acre Wason Pond property 10 or 11 years ago for ~\$1.55M, put a conservation easement on it, and directed it to be for recreation and conservation use. The back 80 acres are for trails and hiking, and the front 30-40 acres including the pond are for recreational use. The property provides fields, a playground, a community center particularly popular with seniors, a barn, swimming, and recreation programs, lessons, and games. The property is used for the Recreation Department Summer program; there is the “Wason Pond Pounder” which is a 5k with over 20 obstacles that had over 1000 runners last year; it is popular for hiking, dog walking, and picnicking; and as a community project, there was the building of the covered bridge in conjunction with the Timber Framers Guild - Dick Lewis milled the lumber and brought in about 30 different timber framers and 100 volunteers. This is a true covered bridge with pins and what not.

The Wason Pond Commission, which oversees the operation of the property, is comprised of two representatives from the Conservation Commission (one additional is currently needed), two representatives from the Recreation Commission, one Selectman, members representing the public at large, and Chris Hadik on Budget Committee. More members are needed.

Unfortunately, sometimes the “fun gets out of hand” and recently there has been much more police activity. There are social issues, loud vulgarity, smoking, drugs, alcohol abuse, occasionally large groups (mostly older teens, and coming from different communities), the rope swing, dog problems, some arrests (5-6 this year) disorderly conduct, etc. In response to these issues, and as the Police Department resources were being tapped, the Town hired a private security firm on some weekday evenings from 4pm to 7-8pm after the summer program is over and another 8-10 hours on the weekend, midday to early evening, to monitor the property. No complaints have been received since this began. There is signage for hours (open dawn to dusk) and prohibited activities, such as no alcohol or smoking, clean up after your leashed dog, etc. There has also been discussion about installing fencing and gates to prohibit after-hours activities; the gates do not have to be elaborate.

Ms. Munson mentioned that one after hour activity with great success was the well-attended library astronomy/telescope event; Wason Pond is a great location, as there are not a lot of lights to obstruct visibility. Chairman Myette agreed that after hours activities were flexible, unless disorderly. Lake Massabesic, for example, has barrier gates with just enough room to walk, but not drive, into the area.

Chairman Myette added that Town Counsel recommended no changes be made at this point in time. He referenced the “rope swing lawsuit”, in which one young visitor using the rope swing landed on another in the water, and the family of the latter visitor brought suit against the Town for not controlling the rope swing. The Town was able to defend itself as there is a law in New Hampshire that indemnifies public lands that are open for recreational use. It is essential not to lose this indemnity.

There are a number of solutions – trim tree branches in the deep water area, post signs reading “no jumping” or “no construction of rope swings”. The property does not have a caretaker, and the Town does not want to prohibit enjoyment. It was noted that there is a resident in the Cottage who has been known to report incidents, open and close the gate at the bridge, pick up trash on his own, etc. but that he is under no obligation to perform any of these duties.

J. Easements, Monitoring and Stewardship

One of the Town’s 30 or so easements is a 150 acre parcel off of Route 121A with back acres contiguous to hundreds of other acres. Ms. Munson mentioned an unresolved violation and inquired about the Conservation Commission’s enforcement ability and process. Chairman Myette stated that the Conservation Commission is advisory, not for enforcement. It can look at violations, (such as timbering) and determine whether or not there is an enforcement issue. Contact would then be made with the Building Inspector, who is the enforcer of any violations of codes. If the issue is at a state level, such as a state wetland violation, then the Commission can contact NH DES for action. If escalation proves necessary, the Commission could go to the police, and the Selectmen can issue a cease and desist. He reiterated that the role of the Commission is monitoring and reporting, not enforcement.

With reference to the unresolved violation mentioned by Ms. Munson, Mr. Connelly hadn’t seen a true violation but didn’t go far onto the property, as there were “no trespassing” signs. The property was part of the Dolloff easement, purchased at public auction by a Richard Smith. 20 acres were clear cut, which draws attention; however, it has apparently been stumped and planted since. The question is whether or not it was too close to wetlands, but nothing has been heard back from the inspector. Chairman Myette asked if anyone had time to go down and look. It is unclear what is to be looked for, but according to Mr. Cassista, there is written documentation.

Chairman Myette added that Janet Boyden could be asked to pull the report, and that it wouldn’t hurt to contact the landowner, who should have a copy of the report already. Mr. Broadwater and Ms. Munson will coordinate.

Plan Reviews

1. Nothing to report.

Miscellaneous Business

1. Harantis Lake Easement

Nothing to report.

2. Chester turnpike Easement

Nothing to report.

3. Web Page update

Chairman Myette asked Mr. Hume if he was a web page designer, by any chance?

4. Other

Chairman Myette went through the remaining mail. There was a letter from NH DES for a property at Shaker Heights that had a failed septic, but this has been corrected and is no longer an issue.

Southern New Hampshire Planning Commission is having a banquet at the Yard on Friday, August 26th, 2016 at \$25/person. Ms. Munson will most likely attend.

The Conservation Commission does need other members. Charlotte Lister was emailed, but there has been no response as of yet. There are two or three vacancies, as it is unclear if Mr. Geary will continue on the Commission. Mr. Broadwater needs to be sworn in; BOS Administrative Assistant Tymoniewicz will put him on the Board of Selectmen's agenda and notify him of the date and time.

Adjournment

Ms. Munson motioned to adjourn the meeting; Mr. Cassista seconded the motion. The vote was unanimous in the affirmative; so moved.

The meeting of the Chester Conservation Commission was adjourned at 8:07 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Nancy J. Hoijer
Recording Secretary

*Minutes edited by
Patricia Tymoniewicz & Debra H. Doda*