

**Minutes for the Regular Meeting of the
Walpole Conservation Commission
November 2, 2020**

Members Present: Alicia Flammia, John Peska, Laura Hayes, Lew Shelley, France Menk, Steven Dumont, Cheryl Mayberry, Selectboard Representative, Peggy Pschirrer, Selectboard member, Jean Kobeski, Recording Secretary

Members Absent: Jackie Kensen

Alternates Present: None

Visitor: Mike Kowalczyk, Michael Nerrie, Marsha Galloway

Call to Order: Alicia called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m. at Walpole Town Hall.

Review and Approval of Minutes: Alicia was asked by Holly Gowdy to amend the October 5 minutes to state that the field at Walker Road is not good for agriculture *in its current state*. With this addition, Laura moved; John seconded, and all approved acceptance of the October 5 minutes.

Correspondence: Alicia presented an invoice for \$12.99 for materials for the Gateway to be paid from the Walker Road account. John moved; Laura seconded, and all approved payment.

Treasury: Forestry Account - \$30,818.84
Conservation Account - \$142,745.52
Walker Road Account -\$3,363.72

New Business

MRRTC Presentation: Mike Kowalczyk of the Monadnock Regional Rail Trail Collaborative (MRRTC) made a presentation about this organization, whose mission is to restore and maintain the Cheshire, Ashuelot, and Fort Hill rail trails throughout the Monadnock region. He explained the benefits of maintaining these trails are numerous: provides economic activity in the towns where they are located, increases tourism, provides bike trails, increases healthy activities, preserves ecosystems, and reduces air pollution.

Mike provided a brief history of the Rail Trail, which is administered by the NH Bureau of Trails. He outlined which are improved, unimproved, and under restoration and showed detailed maps of each trail. The Cheshire Rail Trail plan includes restoration and maintenance from the NH/MA state line near Winchendon to the state line near Bellows Falls. Trail length is 43 miles. The Ashuelot Rail Trail plan includes trail restoration from Emerald Street in Keene, NH, to Hinsdale, NH, the trail's end. Trail length is 21.75 miles. The Fort Hill Trail is unplanned at this time.

Mike explained that restoration means the trails are being made suitable for recreational snowmobiling. Trails need to have working drainage ditches, culverts, a 14' wide crushed stone surface, and gates at road crossings. Maintenance includes removing trees and brush from trails, keeping culverts working, unclogging ditches, and repairing trail surfaces.

Mike outlined nine pieces of the project: 1. make plans, 2. secure funding, 3. gain municipality commitment, 4. resolve private encroachment, 5. gain federal and state commitment, 6. create maintenance plans, 7. put together working teams (volunteers), 8. create a cost estimate spreadsheet, and 9. find matching funds.

France asked if there is some way the MRRTC communicates needs. See their website at monadnockrailtrails.org. She asked if there is a policy of hanging signs on the trails. Mike said they put signs on a 4x4 post off to the side of the trail so maintenance equipment can pass. They do not hang signs on trees. France thanked him for the work that has been done in Walpole.

Marsha Galloway explained that snowmobile clubs are taking care of railroad beds for the winter. Mike stated volunteers are needed to run maintenance equipment in the summer and snowmobile clubs will do winter maintenance. She asked Mike if there are any ideas how to cross the Cold River, making a connection with Bellows Falls. Mike answered not yet.

Steven asked when the gates will open. Mike explained the DOT follows Bureau of Trails mandates.

ROW - Michael Nerrie: Michael, John, Peter, and others met with National Grid to discuss ROW. Michael stated he has a grant from NSCS to do a wildlife plan for his entire property. He believes a natural resource inventory should be done in order to decide where energies should be put in managing the wildlife. Michael said he will contact Antioch students to do a survey and they can help manage the ROW with mowing and herbicides. They all can work with National Grid and tell National Grid how they would like it managed.

Michael stated he read the WCC 2006 Plan and asked if WCC could initiate action for wildlife on the plan. Alicia asked how the WCC can take action on the plan and it was suggested that they talk first with Peter Palmiotto, who was at the National Grid meeting. It was decided at that meeting first step would be the natural resource inventory.

Bellam Farm - Christmas Trees: Alicia received an email from Holly Gowdy, who owns property near a well site. She asked if they should keep mowing. They have a conservation easement and she wonders if they can grow Christmas trees. Alicia wants to know how close the area is to the well field and if this requires herbicides, pesticides, and/or fertilizers.

Lew said it would be an effective way to use the property. Though it would take at least 7 years to harvest the first trees, this would be a lucrative opportunity for them.

Alicia stated Holly would like to attend a WCC meeting to discuss this.

WCC Meeting Time: Alicia said she heard members talking about changing the start time of the WCC monthly meetings. Laura and France suggested 7:00. John reminded the group that other town organizations start their meetings at 7:00. Steven moved; France seconded, and all voted in favor of starting WCC monthly meetings at 7:00 p.m. beginning in December.

Public Forum: Alicia referenced her email to the group about her meeting with the professional facilitator. The facilitator suggested putting comment boxes around town with specific framed questions about camping, Walker Road, etc. Surveys could be put up at the kiosk. Then gather the comments and sift them into themes to discuss at the public forum.

Alicia asked how the WCC could connect with the community before the forum. She asked the group to think of questions to ask and locations for comment boxes for next month's meeting.

Alicia said she is meeting this Wednesday with a facilitator who can help frame some questions, decide where to put the boxes, collate the comments, and lead the meeting.

Alicia asked if they should hire a facilitator for the forum. Lew stated they have the funds; Alicia said this person would be objective. France said it would be good to hire a facilitator so they can do it right. Alicia said she would get more information. Lew suggested having a small group work with her, so they have a tentative plan to present at the December meeting. Alicia said she would send out an email after her meeting and set that up.

Old Business

Trail Committee: Steven said he had seven responses to his article in the Clarion asking for community members to join the Trail Committee.

Trail Maps: Alicia said the SW Regional Planning Commission will take the map files and make up the maps. Just decide on the desired format and intent of the map. They will do it at a cost of \$50/hour for members. Alicia said turnaround time is quick.

Laura said Antioch can do it less expensively, but since SW Regional Planning was so quick to respond, they might be a good choice. John stated they have discussed this so often, go with SW Regional Planning and get it done quickly. There are other maps; maybe they could ask Antioch to do those later.

Alicia suggested having individual trail maps done now and larger maps showing all trails later. France suggested having an individual trail map on one side and a small version of the region on the back.

Lew volunteered to help Alicia with maps.

Dates for Blazing Trails: Steven said all trails need to be marked. Lew said the Conservancy has maps that would be helpful and said they may have already marked some of the property. Laura, Steven, Alicia, Kara, France, and Lew volunteered to help. Steven said he would send an email with guidelines for marking. Lew suggested painting 3x5 inch rectangles.

Tree marking will take place Sunday, November 8. Meet at Town Hall at 10:00 a.m. Steven will get the latex enamel exterior paint and brushes.

Reservoir Dam: Fuss and O'Neill sent a letter to the town and Houghton with concerns about the new engineer. John said they have done everything in the letter of efficiency. The new engineer has put the dam in a higher hazard category than earlier assessed. There will be a meeting on Friday to figure out how to proceed.

John said he would send a copy of the F & O letter to the membership.

Other Business

Trail Maintenance: Steven is putting the Trail Committee together, including those who volunteered in response to his article. Lew has tools and will give them to Steven. Lew cautioned that they maintain existing trails before creating new ones.

Adjournment: John moved; France seconded, and all voted to adjourn the meeting at 9:10 p.m.

The next meeting will be December 7 at 7:00 p.m.* Note new starting time.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jean Kobeski, Recording Secretary

*** These minutes are in draft form until approved by the Commission in December.