

DRAFT MINUTES

Conservation Commission Meeting- 7/15/2014 4:00pm

Present: Chrystal Cleary, Seth Bigelow, Priscilla Grayson

Public: Owene Weber, Alice Peterson, Don Bolognese, Michael Morfit, Frances Mills, James Mills, Leslie Kimball, Thad Crapster, Nick Weber, Christine Morfit, Louise Martin

Seth called the meeting to order at 4:00pm

- Move to suspend other agenda topics in order to address Comfort Forest, since so many people are here for that item. Motion approved unanimously.
- Request was made to read the previous meeting's minutes with regard to Comfort Forest. Chrystal read those minutes.
- Discussion of Comfort Forest with public
 - a. By way of intro, Seth explained that the Conservation Commission is not a deciding body, but a researching and recommending body that has been asked by the Selectboard to study the 3 Town Forests. "Management is an implicit responsibility of ownership"
 - b. The CC has conducted a walkthrough with Bennington County Forester Kyle Mason in the Comfort Forest to locate boundary markers and the well site, ID tree species, soil types and find target trees to encourage (release from competition/preserve) in any forest management activity. The details are found in Kyles report.
 - c. Chrystal assessed for wildlife use and found feeding sign of moose, black bear and deer. The forest is composed primarily of same age trees and has little understory brush, which is worth mention because that is needed for shelter, food and nesting for birds, a possible goal for the Forest.

The question was asked what IS the goal for this forest? The answer is that a goal has not been determined, only an inventory taken, results to be reported to the Selectboard at the next meeting July 24 6pm. Goals will vary for each of the Town Forests, as they are all different in composition as well as in the restrictions of the gift.

General goals for Forest Management that the CC looks at:

- encourage bird and wildlife habitat
 - restore historic species & forest structure
 - recruit large trees
 - determine extent of public access
 - reduce stand density
 - create canopy openings for understory development
 - cover costs via sale of timber that has reached maturity/peak value
- d. Deed restrictions must be adhered to- the Comfort deed was read and states that the forest is "to be preserved in its natural state" some disagreement as to what Natural State means- does it mean no change? Does it include restoration to a previous diverse state if that is healthier? Or "gardening" the forest to cope with changing climate (removing /resisting disease, encouraging species that will thrive in the future)? Does a trail fit in with the deed? Many feel it does not. (Three letters were also

received from Jane Comfort, John Comfort and Robert Lawrie- all stating the point of leaving the parcel in its natural state, and all unhappy with the idea of trails or public use -hiking, hunting birdwatching specifically mentioned.)

- e. The Forest is landlocked, making access difficult, but the Town is deeded a right of way.
- f. Michael asked for discussion to return to core topics and to move away from technical terminology- What is the process? Where are we in the process? People in the neighborhood, and whose property is directly affected need to be included before this goes to the Selectmen. A walkthrough with the Forester should be planned for the property owners. Requests that a formal committee of abutters/neighbors be involved. "It is accidental that all these people are here today. We need better communication."
- g. It was suggested that a Needs Assessment be done and a Protocol determined by "that which has been done with properties in other small towns."
- h. Concern about vehicles, damage, logging roads, protection of watershed (the property contains water rights for two of the neighbors). Chrystal explained that if/when a contractor is selected for whatever work is to be done, that part of that bidding process is to list exactly what vehicles the contractor proposes using (make model, etc) so that when the time comes that is a point that can be specified. Mr Bolognese told of the time he and Barbara Comfort had logging done on their properties and hired a logger to use draft horses to haul the timber, as an example of how creatively the terms of work could be specified out.
- i. It was agreed that the presentation to the Selectboard should be the findings of Kyle, and the matter that a lot of people really care about this forest and what happens here and really desire to be involved.

(Chrystal had to leave the meeting, Priscilla took over minutes)

- Motion was made to postpone all other agenda items, and passed.
- Use of the Town website to carry information, citing the new Open Meeting law. Can Kyle's report be posted? Or other examples of forest management? It will take time to generate support.
- Mr. Bolognese asked who has responsibility for Leurich Field?
- Louise Martin asked for more information about Pitcher Forest.
- The Next Meeting will be held August 12th at 4PM

Meeting Adjourned 5:15pm

Respectfully submitted, Chrystal Cleary and Priscilla Grayson)