

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
Boscawen Municipal Complex
December 19, 2023
Final Minutes

Present: Alan Hardy, Chair, Jeff Abbe, Aurel Mihai, Norman LaPierre, Mark Kaplan, Betsey McNaughten, Matt Burdick and Charlie Niebling, Town Forester.

Alternate Members Present: none.

Excused: Lyman Cousens.

Staff Present: Rose Fife, Recording Secretary, Kearsten O'Brien, Deputy Director, Planning and Community Development

Consent Agenda:

- Open by Chair at 6:32 pm
- Roll call by recording secretary
- Accountant's Report
 - Review 11/21/23 Minutes – Ms. McNaughten brought attention to line 68. In the Minutes there was mention of maps that Rich Cook handed out. She would like clarification as to what maps were handed out. Mr. Mihai explained that it was a regarding an unclarified project that is coming up. A **motion** to accept the Consent Agenda was made by Mr. LaPierre, seconded by Mr. Mihai and passed by a unanimous vote with Ms. McNaughten abstaining.

Old Business:

- Turtle Crossing Signs – Ms. McNaughten will speak with Josh Megysey, the 'Turtle Guy' at Fish and Game to schedule the presentation on turtles in January or February. Mr. Mihai asked if they should put it out to the public to see if they would like to attend this presentation.

- Town Forest Update/Discussion – Mr. Abbe presented. A while ago Matt St.Onge had come before them regarding the Weir Farmstead and removing some trees within the barn foundation. He also suggested possibly putting top soil in the foundation etc. The Weir Farmstead is looking great right now. There has been some work in the back corner of the farm so it will make it easier for brush hogging. They have also burned brush. Mr. St.Onge had some ideas regarding ground covers within the foundation and removing trees in the barn foundation. There is a lot of small dead ash out there. The wall needs to be supported as well. Dagody Hill has been walked.

Mr. Hardy explained that Mr. St.Onge is not a member of the Commission, but is a volunteer who likes to work in the town forest. Mr. Hardy asked if Mr. Abbe would give Mr. St.Onge direction on projects that come up. Mr. Abbe is willing to take that on. Forester Niebling would have some concern about the Weir Farm cellar area looking too landscaped vs. the historic look it has now, as it is a historical property. Mr. Abbe asked how Forester Niebling felt about putting weed barrier

in the house foundation only. Forester Niebling agreed to that. Ms. McNaughten asked about the cutting of dead trees. Mr. Abbe thought it would make it easier for John Fife to mow in there.

- Swearing in of Cousens-Burdick/Easler – As Mr. Cousens was not at this month’s meeting, this item is held over until next month.

New Business:

- Review Appointment Application and Interview – Gary Tillman January 16th – Mr. Hardy reported that Mr. Tillman was not able to come this month but will come to the meeting next month. It was requested to have this placed on next month’s agenda.

- 2024-2025 Proposed Meeting Dates – A **motion** to accept the proposed Meeting Dates for 2024-2025 was made by Mr. Mihai, seconded by Ms. McNaughten, and passed by a unanimous vote.

- Matt St. Onge – see discussion in Town Forest Update/Discussion.

- Town Forest Proceeds – Ms. O’Brien handed out information packets regarding the harvesting. Forester Niebling gave an update. The sale is complete and closed out. The landings are put to bed. The larger landing has been blocked off by remaining logs to impede any ATV’s etc. The revenue generated was \$66,909.25, more than estimated. The percentage of pine sold as grade to Durgan and Crowell was higher than anticipated. The proceeds to the town are all received. He still needs to file a report of the cut with the town. He is waiting on the tonnage of chips, which he received today. He felt it was a success. He met with the abutter who allowed access and the abutter (Eric) felt no repairs needed to be made to the road. Forester Niebling submitted a summary of the volumes and the gross receipts and fees he charged from March through Monday. The net to the town is \$64,262. No other expenses were incurred. Mr. Niebling would like to do a note of thanks for the good work sent to Adam Mock and John Fife. He is willing to draft the letter under Alan’s signature.

Discussion regarding the future. The Village Forest was handled the way the statute was originally set up. The proposal they put in front of the Select board regarding the Walker Pond property follows the Village Forest layout. The Commission needs to be prepared to justify why they need to keep the funds to the Select Board.

The removal of the building at Walker Pond will be an expense.

Mr. Hardy would like to convince the Select board to leave the money in the town forest until town meeting; at which time the Select board may or may not approve the Walker Pond Town Forest.

Mr. Hardy noted that these cuts are not something that is likely to happen again in a short amount of time. The Weir Road Town Forest Management Plan shows there is another one scheduled in 5-10 years. The Walker Pond Management Plan shows the southern block was cut heavily in 2011 and the northern block is recommended to be left alone. The Boscawen Town Forest will be 15-20 years before it is cut again. Mr. Hardy explained that if they were not successful in leaving the funds in the forestry account, the ability to put funds back in there would be limited. Ms.

McNaughten asked if the statute says that the proceeds of the sale go into the account for future maintenance.

Mr. Kaplan reviewed that the Commission has 3 decisions to make over the next few months; LUCT, Walker Pond Designation and where the funds go. The value in the Forest Fund from the cuts they have done is to take care of the Town Forest. Walker Pond 'Town Forest' would require more funding in the short term due to projects that they would like to do. Mr. Hardy agreed. Walker Pond's asset as a recreational area could get over used. Thursday night they are just discussing with the Select Board this cut and the funds that came from it. Mr. Abbe asked if they see any issues with Walker Pond not being a Town Forest yet but they would like to apply some of this money to take down that building. Mr. Hardy explained that if Walker Pond does not become a Town Forest, they cannot use any of the proceeds. Mr. Kaplan thinks they should delay this until the determination is made in March. Matt Burdick explained that the Select Board are on board with the preservation of that area. Ms. McNaughten asked if they had received estimates to remove the building at Walker Pond. Does the building belong to them now? Mr. Hardy explained that the building is on land that was owned by the precinct that was bought with Conservation funds and therefore is town land. The Commission manages it on behalf of the town. Ms. Mihai asked if there was any way to quantify that money, i.e. this is what we have and this is what we need? If done properly more of the decision can be made at town meeting. Mr. LaPierre asked if they can come up with a dollar value of the work that has been done over the years? Forester Niebling explained that 100% of the 2017 sale went into rebuilding the road to the Weir Farm and restoring and recreating 5 acres of fields, which is not inexpensive.

Mr. Hardy asked Forester Niebling to speak during town meeting to explain what the Commission has done over the years. Forester Niebling agreed. Town meeting is March 12, 2024. Mr. Hardy would like as much support there as possible. Mr. Mihai wanted to know if they could get a quote for removing the building before the designation of the town forest. Mr. Hardy believes that makes sense. He asked if they would use funds out of the conservation fund between now and town meeting as they are taking care of the land. He feels it is logical to do so. If at town meeting they approve it as a forest, they can use town forest funds for the care of the town forest. Mr. Kaplan believes they should wait until the status of Walker Pond is determined. Mr. Mihai would like to have the information sooner rather than later.

Forester Niebling reiterated that the funds belonged to the town and the Conservation Commission has the responsibility to decide how it is used.

Mr. LaPierre asked if people are ready to allow them to keep 100% of the funds? Mr. Hardy thought it depended on who shows up to town meeting. Mr. Kaplan interjected that their job is to know as much as they can to inform people as best as they can as to how conservation and its funds work. Proving the argument that development is better than conservation is difficult. Ms. McNaughten explained that there have been studies about conservation vs development and how conservation is better for the town. Forester Niebling interjected that those studies are called Cost of Community Services Studies. Mr. Kaplan feels that they need to give people that information. Should they partner with some other committees? Ms. O'Brien suggested they have those conversations with the Economic Development Committee or Planning Board.

Mr. Hardy explained the short-term focus is to prepare for town meeting. They have until 2.7.24 to put a petition Warrant Article together.

- LCIP Properties Monitoring Reports – Mr. Hardy asked Ms. O’Brien when it needs to be in November and May. Traditionally Mr. Abbe went out with Mr. Cousens in November. Mr. Hardy asked if they needed to act on this right now. Ms. O’Brien answered they did not. She will email them the last date they went out tomorrow. Mr. Mihai believes they went out last November.
- Walker Pond Town Forest Warrant Article – see above.

Former Chairman Tom Gilmore had suggested that the Commission forego their operating budget of \$2,200.00. Mr. Hardy asked the Commission if they wanted to do that this budget cycle. Mr. Mihai had concerns that if they give it up, they will not get it back. He believes they discussed this a couple of months ago and there were a few expenses that were taken out of the wrong accounts so they were moved into the line items of the budget. He believes they should keep it as is; keep the funds. Mr. Hardy was concerned that they are arguing to keep the \$66K from the sale of timber and they are also asking to keep their operating budget. He is a proponent of keeping the operating budget. Mr. Abbe noted that if they do not use the money, it goes back into the general fund anyway. He believes they should keep it. Ms. Easler is presenting the Planning Budget this week with no increase or decrease. Mr. Abbe explained that in the past they have used the money to go to conferences, etc. There is education and membership, etc. that comes out of the budget line item.

Non-Public:

Other Business:

Next Meeting: January 16th, 2024 @ 6:30 p.m.

A **motion** to recess the meeting at 7:54 pm was made by LaPierre, seconded by Mihai, and passed by a unanimous vote.

*Respectfully Submitted,
Rose Fife, Recording Secretary*