

**Minutes for the Regular Meeting of the
Walpole Conservation Commission
September 13, 2021**

Members Present: Alicia Flammia (Chair), Lewis Shelley, Peter Palmiotto

Members Absent: John Peska, France Menk, Laura Hayes, Steven Dumont

Seating of Alternates: Gary Speed, Kara Dexter

Visitors Present: Paul Looney, Peggy Pschirrer (Selectboard), Jean Kobeski, Recording Secretary

Call to Order: Alicia called the meeting to order at 7:06 p.m. in Town Hall, first floor. This meeting was being recorded.

Review and Approval of Minutes: Kara pointed out spelling and grammar errors in the August 2 minutes: p. 1, paragraph 1 under new Business - *road*; p.3 paragraph 1 should read *she said she will*; p. 3 paragraph 7 should read public relations *are* needed. Lew moved to accept the minutes as amended; Gary seconded, and the minutes passed.

New Business

The Community Power Committee of Walpole: Paul Looney, chair, began his presentation by explaining a bill leading to the deregulation of utility companies in NH in the 1990s. When this was passed, Liberty Utilities, Eversource, and Granite State Cooperative had to get out of the business of generating electricity. They would then buy power from separate organizations that produce the power. He stated there are probably eight or nine companies from which you can buy power, or you can buy it from Liberty Utilities, like most of us do. Paul stated that the rates just went up in August. He said the state was not satisfied with this arrangement, thinking there was not enough competition in the marketplace. A law was then passed in 2019, SB 53-E, which gave municipalities the power to negotiate a better rate for their towns. So now the energy committee and the selectboard can come up with another provider that can give Walpole a better rate. In the process of doing that, a coalition was created, the Community Power Coalition of New Hampshire (CPCNH), which is a group of several towns that will group their collective buying and force the rate down as much as possible.

The CPCNH will begin its work in October. Walpole citizens will need to approve Walpole's involvement at next year's town meeting. Paul explained the town would not join this coalition unless they could provide a better rate than the town gets from Liberty. It does give the town an opportunity to provide greener energy. Right now, 21% of the energy provided by Liberty must be green. For example, Hanover wants to buy 100% renewable energy. Paul explained that each town can determine their own needs, and that can be to simply find the lowest rate. It depends on the citizens and the options the coalition is able to present.

Peggy Pschirrer added that, confusing as the program was at first, the selectboard felt they needed to do something to try to bring down energy costs for Walpoleans. The first step was to join the CPCNH. That gave Walpole a seat at the table so the town could help make decisions on how the organization would be run. Paul Looney is Walpole's representative to the CPCNH; Dennis Marcom is the alternate.

Lew Shelley asked the difference in price between green energy and non-renewable. Paul explained that the figure is not yet known because they need to find out how many towns will be involved and how many megawatts will be used. Peggy explained that the Public Utility Company got

permission in mid-summer to increase utility costs by 30%. By working with the CPCNH, the town will have more control over what we will spend on electricity.

Alicia asked how the people of Walpole will be able to decide if they want this or not. Peggy explained that, at town meeting, citizens will be presented a warrant article outlining a plan the committee is developing. Alicia asked if people will then decide if they want a certain percentage of green energy. Peggy said that will be an individual choice. Paul explained the warrant article will give the selectboard the power to enter into these agreements. People can then decide to opt out of the program, if they choose.

It was announced that there will be a public hearing October 13th. Committee members Paul Looney, Dennis Marcom, Andrew Dey, Rod Brouchard, Steve Grenier, Pat Kinary, and Peggy Pschirrer will explain this program and answer questions people have about it. Paul was thanked for his presentation.

Public Business

Correspondence: Alicia announced she received notification of the Monadnock Conservancy's 32nd annual celebration on September 18th along with a donation envelope. She received a copy of *Supply Lines*, a publication from the NH Charitable Foundation, and a check for \$3,052.05 from the town with no explanation. Alicia was unsure of what it was for, so she said she would follow up with Rich.

Treasury: Conservation \$154,286.90
Forestry \$30,655.38
Walker Road \$3,077.93
Mason Expendable \$475,314.01
Mason Non-Expendable \$20,133.91

New Business Continued:

Brush Hogging the Rail Trail: Lew and Steven are pricing equipment. A walk behind with an electric start is \$2700, chainsaw (kit) is \$300 or less, and a blade type brush cutter is probably around \$500-\$600. Alicia asked about storage space for this equipment. Lew said there is a room in the back of the School Street garage dedicated to the WCC, but it is difficult to access. Peggy suggested that Lew speak to Mike Rau about finding a better storage area.

Lew announced that they got the Rail Trail grant, but the amount is still unknown. He feels they should learn the amount soon. But even the reduced amount recommended by the committee takes into account a lot of the necessary work to make it a walkable trail.

Old Business

Walpole Gateway: Alicia reached out to Maureen Jenkins for suggestions for the public forum. Alicia suggested a forum/walk of the property in the fall or something similar in the spring before high water comes from the dam. She said she is waiting to hear Maureen's suggestions for formats done in a quick turnaround time vs. a spring event. Lew stated that, since this land is used least in the winter, this should be resolved by spring. Alicia agreed.

Alicia asked Alex from Long View if Long View could provide the information on this property that the Commission wanted: potential permitting, shore land, development, site work, etc. Alex said it could be done and quoted a price of \$80/hour. He felt it would take about 6 hours. She also asked him if he and the invasive species expert could do an informational walk of the property. She asked if he could do it at an hourly rate.

Alicia asked about the good use/bad use sign on the kiosk. Lew said that was something he and France had talked about.

Alicia asked if the Commission believes a sub-committee on Walker Road is necessary. She feels that this issue could be addressed during regular meeting times. It was decided to table the discussion until more of the membership is present.

Other Business

Walpole Trail Subcommittee: Lew reported that the maps are done. The information for the back side is complete or near- complete. Steven and France will finish that.

Lew reported that the Mason Forest clearing was done. He announced plans for the Mill Pond Dam workday. It will be October 2 from 9-12 noon. The focus will be the west side. Just meet in the parking lot near the dam.

Fanny Mason Harvest: Alicia asked Peter and Lew if they have an update on this. Peter stated he and Lew walked the trail with Alex Barrett; they looked at invasive species and the proposed cut area. Alex suggested that they make it a spring cut because it is local, close -by, and it would be dry. They will stretch the cut toward the rest stop a little way. Lew stated that the trail would be impacted for a short while.

Virtual Meetings: Alicia reported that she has been asked about the possibility of Zoom meetings. The state legislature will no longer permit committees to meet via Zoom. Peggy stated hybrid meetings are permitted. These are meetings that offer both in-person and virtual options. Alicia said they would explore that option, and Peter volunteered to set it up, run the computer, and facilitate virtual attendees.

Peggy asked Alicia if a walk through was done at Hooper Forest, and if so, were there any recommendations. Alicia answered that Alex did a rapid assessment, and that was sent to Helen Dalbeck. Peggy asked that it be sent to the selectboard as well, since they are trustees of the Hooper. She reminded Alicia that cutting is certainly permitted, but the money would go to the Institute.

Kara asked who is responsible for the rest areas on Route 12. She reported a great deal of litter in those locations.

Lew announced that the next date for marking properties is September 25. He reminded everyone that that they cannot paint new markings; they may only paint over existing ones.

Peter reported that the woolly adelgid infestation has subsided. He also stated that the streetlights have not yet been changed. The new light bulbs have not come in.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:20 p.m.

The next meeting will be Monday, October 4th at 7:00 p.m.in Town Hall. It was decided this will be a hybrid meeting.

Respectfully submitted,
Jean Kobeski, Recording Secretary

*** These minutes are in draft form until approved by the Commission on October 4, 2021.