

Walpole Conservation Commission Meeting, April 1, 2024

Members Present: John Peska, France Menk (recorder of minutes), Wendy Grossman, Peter Palmiotto (Facilitating), Lewis Shelley, Steven Dumont

Selectboard member: Steve Dalessio

Members Absent: Alicia Flammia

Alternates Present: Nicole Adams

Visitors Present: *Monadnock Climbers Association members:* Jeff Archibald, Rob Koning, Becky Barrett, JC Woodward.

Ballam Farm: Holly Gowdy;

Brookfield Farm: Tom Beaudry.

Call to Order: Peter called the meeting to order at 7:00 pm in the Town Hall.

No Alternates were seated.

Review and Approval of Minutes: John amended the March minutes. Lew moved to accept. Wendy seconded, and all voted in favor. Motion carried.

PUBLIC BUSINESS

Treasury Report

Conservation: \$223,411.78

Forestry: \$25,176.40

Correspondence. There was no correspondence to report this month.

NEW BUSINESS

1. Monadnock Climbers Association. *MCA Mission: The Monadnock Climbers' Association (MCA) is a local 501(c)(3) non-profit volunteer climbers' organization that works to build cohesive relationships with landowners, conservation groups, advocacy groups, and state and local governments, to keep climbing areas open and conserve the climbing environment in southwest*

New Hampshire and surrounding areas.

Jeff presented a slide show outlining their thoughts about how we might form a liaison. They want

to secure formal recreational access to Fall Mountain, which will protect its ecosystem. Eg., build trails to: directly access climbing and hiking areas; avoid encroaching on private lands; prevent erosion, and interruption of the area's cyclical plant growth; and protect wildlife habitat,

in particular, our local Peregrine Falcon nesting areas.

Designing an appealing and protected recreational environment will attract visitors who

travel specifically for recreation. They will provide direct economic benefits to the surrounding communities of North Walpole, Walpole, and Bellows Falls.

Steve initiated a discussion about economic benefits vis a vis the tax base. The MCA asked for our assistance in their efforts toward obtaining broader support and grants, to present to Liberty Utilities for either a purchase or MOA. We asked to see details of the proposal they spoke about with all the benefits and concerns. Parking was the most significant concern. After some discussion, we said we would need to see more research, and that a briefing should be presented to North Walpole Commissioners for their support.

2. Ballam Farm. Holly Gowdy spoke about their invasive species control. Ballam Farm is a certified organic farm. She described how mulching and cyclical mowing of the invasives would keep hedges from shading the field; provide room for pollinating plants; encourage wildlife; support erosion control, and create good grazing land. Ballam Farm has a grant from the American Farmland Trust, and a partnership agreement with NRCS (she'll send us a copy of the agreement). This work has already been started.

3. Brookfield Farm. Tom Beaudry, a certified crop advisor, who advises farms along the Connecticut River Valley and seacoast, spoke about the importance of farming in Walpole, how farms struggle to survive, and how we are losing open spaces essential to the broad health of our ecosystem.

Walpole's farming community runs the gamut, from being fully organic to using commercial fertilizers and herbicides for the production of: vegetables; dairy cows and products; orchards; syrup-making; and raising cattle, poultry, and pigs. He discussed farming practices, how it is a balancing act to weigh methods' costs and benefits. Eg., the benefits of cover crops vs tilling, which destroys the soil structure. His description of how herbicides are used, the percentage to water, how they are spread, and that they are not residual, was reassuring. Only orchards use fungicides here, and most farms have nutrient management plans. Phosphorus runoff is our major concern. Managing the land for optimum, long term health of both the ecosystem and our own, is challenging. Conversion of farmland to solar installation, another reduction of open space essential to wildlife, is one example.

We spoke about creating educational outreach for residents. Many newcomers are unfamiliar with Walpole's foundation as a farming community - and of farming in general. Nicole, our representative to the Hooper Institute, will bring this up with program designers at their next meeting. (Peggy Pschirrer is their project manager.) Perhaps Hooper can integrate that with their elementary school programming; perhaps arrange tours to farms.

We may have a section on our website devoted to farming, with interviews and comments from farmers. Perhaps a meeting with the town. We'll continue this discussion at our May meeting.

4. Rail Trail. Wendy reported the estimated timeline for brush hogging to start in June. Mike Hubbard will do it - and the Gateway, if we wish - for the same fee as last year. To do the brush hogging, the Town must obtain a Special Use Permit from the Bureau of Trails. Wendy asked

the Conservation Commission to authorize \$100 for the Special Use Permit fee, and \$1000 for the required bond, which would cover any damage to the trail. This bond money has always been returned. The Conservation Commission approved both the \$100 fee, and the \$1000 bond. She hopes to establish a deeper relationship with the Bureau of Trails, that they might waive the bond requirement. They are planning a visit soon.

She also mentioned that deadlines for RTP grant applications are looming and that, should anyone wish to take advantage of the opportunity, they would need to make a timely decision.

5. Alternate nomination

Peter asked Tom Beaudry if he would accept a slot on the Commission, as an alternate. Tom agreed. Everyone welcomed him as our new alternate. His farming expertise will be a valuable addition, as we often need that knowledge for much of our project management responsibility.

6. OLD BUSINESS

Master plan - conservation lands table. Wendy and Peter are updating the land map.

Property monitoring: Alicia and Peter monitored the Aldrich easement: The Grossmans' property.

Walpole Gateway

Peter proposed that Larry Britton be allowed to farm the lower field if he is willing. We do need a survey to declare the precise boundaries of the rail trail and the Gateway's upper field. We have decided to unlock the gate at the end of mud season: usually Memorial Day weekend. Now that we have a turnaround space for cars to unload, we hope to see greater usage of the access.

Dam updates.

Reservoir Dam. Fuss & O'Neal design team (about 12 people) will start the final design and implementation of the repairs required by the NH DES Letter of Deficiency. Geo-Tech's work for 3 required borings will start in mid April, as will survey work and wetlands delineation. The slope angle will be mitigated, and the core material identified. We don't know if it's granite or cement. (Of historic interest: It was built in 1905 by immigrant Italian masons.)

The estimated date for completion is 2026, and they will send us quarterly reports. Jodi will manage reimbursements through our \$750,000 grant from the Federal and State Infrastructure Improvement Legislation.

Knapp Cranberry Meadow Bog Dam. Mark Houghton may do the work, and will need a wetlands permit because of where he needs to use his equipment. (Steve mentioned a potential two year wait for permits of any kind.)

Mill Pond. Steven, Lew, Wendy, and Will walked the trail to assess problems. Right now, it's almost a marsh. Beaver deceivers have prevented their building inside the culvert, but the state considers it high hazard, as overflow could reach Route 12. Main Street runs alongside, and is almost flush with the pond; hence this concern.

School Street Drainage. We're ready for permitting and bidding. No monies have been allocated yet.

Prospect Hill gully. The Army Corps of Engineers designated it as a seasonal stream.

7. OTHER BUSINESS

Trail committee report:

HOT day May 4th. Notices were printed in the April Clarion, and the event has been posted on our website and the Walpolean, with flyers by Kara distributed around town. We had an excellent turn out last year.

Forest management. Alex Barrett will be at our next meeting to discuss needed work on Fanny Mason forest, our next project:

8. Adjournment

Motion to adjourn was made and seconded. Peter closed the meeting at 9:30