

**Minutes for the Regular Meeting of the
Walpole Conservation Commission
October 5, 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: Myra Mansouri

Visitor: Kara Dexter, Ray Boas, Tom Murray, Eva Beauregard

Call to Order: Alicia called the meeting to order at 7:29 p.m. at Walpole Town Hall.

Review and Approval of Minutes: Lew asked that the minutes of September 14 reflect that the Monadnock Conservancy awarded grant money to the town of Fitzwilliam for the rail trail. With that correction, John moved, France seconded, and all voted to accept the September minutes.

Correspondence: Alicia shared the DES newsletter and a letter from the Monadnock Conservancy on Going for a Walk and Paddle.

Treasury: Forestry Account - \$31,079.80

Conservation Account - \$142,738.53

Walker Road Account - \$3,363.55

Fanny Mason - unavailable at meeting (posted in an email from Alicia)

Old Business (Walker Road)

Walker Road Access: Alicia shared an email from Chuck about the lower field. He said many are passionate about using it, and many are willing to volunteer to improve it.

Ray Boas reviewed the reasons for purchasing the land with the idea of the town taking it over and the WCC managing it. He expressed regret for not reviewing the vision/mission with the WCC before the group took over management. There have been complaints about the property and access to the river, and Ray stated that some citizens have expressed a willingness to take care of the property and road. Laura stated that many comments and suggestions are not feasible, per state order.

Public Forum: Ray suggested that the WCC, town representatives, and concerned citizens sit down and discuss this situation during the winter in order to come up with ideas for the spring. France reiterated John's idea of having an open, broad-based discussion to determine policies for all town properties used for recreation. She stated the WCC does not want to become dictators; the land belongs to the people and that should be acknowledged. She said the WCC should not be judge, jury, and deciders of how things should be.

Alicia said an open forum would be important. She said a date for the forum should be set this evening before the end of the meeting. She asked who the target audience should be. Ray suggested donors and stated that Chuck and the town office have a list of donors. John stated that the WCC was the largest donor toward the purchase. John then suggested getting the recreation department involved. Ray also stated that an article could be prepared for the Clarion; October 22 is the deadline for the next issue.

Laura stated there is a lot of work for the Commission to do; Ray stated there are people who have volunteered to help. Tom Murray stated that the Highway Department has to take care of town roads yearly.

Concerns About the Walker Road Access: Alicia stated that the field at Walker Road is not good for agriculture so there is no need to gate it for agricultural use. How should the land be used? Tom Murray believes trails need to be maintained. Lew said some events in the recent past had been planned by the WCC but were cancelled due to Covid-19.

Steven referred to a draft letter to the public he wrote concerning the Walker Road property and river access, which he shared with WCC members via email. He stated they all want beautiful land but there needs to be a balance between recreation and conservation. He stated that when you have a wooded area hidden from the road, it is often destroyed by a few. He agreed to the idea of the public forum but stressed that they don't want what happened to the land across from Aubuchon to happen at Walker Road.

Steven stated that the road is in bad condition. Putting a boat in the river there is difficult, and there is better access elsewhere. France said people will find out for themselves that this area is not a good boat landing. Alicia said there would be significant cost to improving the access road and caution must be taken to preserve the topography of the land. Alicia stated that before any decisions can be made, a natural resource inventory of the property needs to be taken. Laura stated a soil study would probably show that the land is highly erodable.

Steven said a boat landing would not be possible per the DES. He said they could build a landing but the DES would take it over like they did in Bellows Falls. They had to close it because of problems.

Peggy stated that there have been complaints from people who want to drive down the road with kayaks and canoes to access the water. Tom and Mark Houghton said they could put down gravel. Alicia answered by saying they could not get a permit to extend the road any further due to the Shoreline Protection Act, and the act would bar them from making improvements and building a parking lot.

John stated that no land they have can be all things to all people. Laura stated that the public is invited to attend WCC meetings to discuss any topic of their choosing. The WCC has been grappling with these issues for months and would welcome visitors to hear and participate in their discussions.

Plan for the Public Forum : Alicia said the group will need a facilitator and structure for the forum. To do this well, they will need time to plan. The group decided on a date of January 13, 2021, for the public forum at Town Hall. Information can go into the Clarion November, December, and January issues. Steven will write an article for the November issue and will email a draft to the Commission.

Alicia will talk to her co-workers about different formats of public forums and the role of the facilitator. She said there should be an opening discussion and, given what they know about the property, decide what is possible and what is not.

France said she might be interested in facilitating once she knows what the role of facilitator entails.

Peggy suggested dividing the participants into breakout groups in which Commission members will have prepared questions to steer discussion.

It was decided that the issue of camping and trail maintenance could be included in the forum. Myra cautioned that if more than two topics were discussed at the forum, nothing would get done. Alicia stated they would focus on the Walker Road property and camping.

Natural Resource Assessment: Alicia suggested having this inventory done for planning purposes. It would give information about soils, vegetation, fauna, and habitats of the Walker Road property. Laura suggested talking to Peter about this because he always has students in the spring looking for projects.

In the Meantime: With support from the WCC Tom Murray will weed whack and clear brush around the kiosk. Kara said if volunteers know what needs to be done, they are ready to work. Alicia said she will get folks to help with trail maintenance. Steven will get a contact list of volunteers and put out a call on the WCC Facebook page.

Haying Agreement: Alicia moved, John seconded voiding the haying agreement with Christian Gowdy (hay unusable). All voted in favor.

New Business

Spending Down Conservation Funds: Alicia asked how the Commission would like to use funds before the end of the year. Lew asked for trail maps - Mason Forest and Mill Pond. Steven asked for maps of conservation lands. Laura suggested checking with the Conservancy and Forest Society for accuracy before printing.

Trail Maintenance: Tom asked if the Ravine Trail is part of a work plan. Lew gave a brief history of the trail and why it was let go. Tom and Eva have done some trail maintenance there. Alicia stated there should be a subcommittee on trail maintenance. France and Steven volunteered as did Kara and Tom. Lew will give Steven tools.

Old Business

Cranberry Meadow Preserve: John reported that the pipe between the Cranberry and Hooper Ponds was cleaned out. Alicia will invite Josh Beer and Mark Houghton to another meeting to discuss sharing the water.

Long View: Alicia was in contact with Alex to get the estimated revenues from timber harvesting and invasive control. He stated the timber harvest should take place in 2022. He estimates \$8,000 revenue and \$3,500 for the plan and species eradication.

Alicia presented an invoice from Long View for \$262.50. Alicia moved, Laura seconded, and all voted in favor of paying the invoice from the Forestry account.

Blazing Properties: At the November meeting, dates will be set for blazing.

Reservoir Dam: John, Fuss and O'Neill, Mark Houghton, and Steve Delessio went to the site to update data. Cost estimate to harden the downside of North Road is \$22,000. The work on the spillway is complete. The DES permit process should begin soon. It has been held up because there is a new dam engineer at DES and he considers this a high risk project. He wanted to see data again.

Other Business

Lew said the rail trail discussion continues and he will present more information to the WCC in November.

Kara reported that the Savings Bank of Walpole and the Ct. River Conservancy did a clean-up at Hall's Crossing.

Adjournment: John moved; Laura seconded, and all voted to adjourn the meeting at 9:13 p.m.

The next meeting will be November 2, 2020, upstairs in Town Hall.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jean Kobeski, Recording Secretary

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