

**Minutes for the Regular Meeting of the
Walpole Conservation Commission
June 7 2021**

Members Present: Alicia Flammia, John Peska, Cheryl Mayberry (Selectboard Liaison), Peggy Pschirrer (Selectboard Member), Jean Kobeski (Secretary)

Members Absent: France Menk, Jackie Kensen, Lew Shelley, Laura Hayes, Steven Dumont

Alternates Present: Peter Palmioitto

Visitors Present: Kathy Urffer, River Steward for NH and VT, CRC; Mr. and Mrs. Grossman

Call to Order: Alicia called the meeting to order at 7:05 p.m. in Town Hall, first floor.

Presentation: Relicensing Dams on the Connecticut River

Kathy Urffer, Connecticut River Conservancy (CRC) River Steward for NH and VT, explained the process by which the Federal Energy Regulatory Commission (FERC) relicenses dams. Currently five local hydroelectric facilities on the CT River are in the process of renewing their licenses, which will be good for 40-50 years and impact more than 175 miles of the river. These include Wilder, Bellows Falls, and Vernon, owned by Great River Hydro (GRH) and Turners Falls and Northfield Mountain Pump Station in MA owned by First Light Power Services LLC. Their licenses were issued 40 years ago and expired in April, 2018. Urffer and Andrea Donlon, CRC River Steward for MA are now making public presentations to educate communities on the relicensing process and encourage people to send comments to FERC in relation to their community's needs. The GRH released the application for review on December 7. The public comment period is July - September.

Kathy Urffer gave a brief history of the most recently expired license and discussed some of the GRH proposed operational changes in the new license. These include flexible seasonal hours, inflow = outflow to address water fluctuation, and upramping and downramping. There are other concerns that the CRC does not feel are adequately addressed. They are advocating change to include:

1. safe, effective upstream and downstream fish passage
2. operational changes to dams to better regulate upstream and downstream water fluctuations to minimize bank erosion and threats to rare and threatened species
3. healthy habitats for aquatic creatures
4. ecologically sound and accessible recreational facilities
5. protection of historic and archeological resources

The CRC is calling for the GRH to study erosion and monitor river changes. They want GRH to support academic research. The CRC has also made a number of recreation recommendations:

1. Improve portage.
2. Provide annual funds to communities for maintenance.
3. Provide ADA facilities.
4. Create historic and archeological interpretive programs.

Peter asked who checks to make sure what is in the license is enforced. Kathy said FERC enforces but may require GRH to monitor. Peter then suggested the WCC conduct an annual review of the license and send a letter of support to the GRH, not just complaints.

Cheryl asked if there will be mitigating funds to build up areas in North Walpole damaged by erosion. Kathy said this question/suggestion be addressed to FERC during the public comment period.

Improving portage is an important concern of the CRC. This is a particular challenge in Bellows Falls due to the length and safety of the Bellows Falls portage trail. Kathy announced that on July 17, the CRC will sponsor a Portage Paddle Parade, starting at the Pine Street Boat Launch in N. Walpole. This is a press event and public parade along the portage route to tell the hydro company you want better access to the river. At 10:30 there will be a press conference and speakers at the Pine Street Launch and at 11:00 the group will parade down Route 12 to the area below the dam.

Kathy stated these recreational changes advocated by the CRC will all support the local recreational economy. She ended her presentation by encouraging members of the community to contact FERC with suggestions and concerns during the public comment period. The power company is using your river; you have the right to tell them what you want and need. You can go to ctriver.org to get more information or contact Kathy at kurffer@ctriver.org.

Due to the lack of a quorum at tonight's meeting, no votes were taken. It was considered an informational meeting.

Review and Approval of Minutes

Public Business

Treasury: Forestry Account - \$30,653.77
Conservation - \$154,278.76
Walker Road - \$3,364.13

Correspondence: none

Report from the Chair

New Business

National Scenic Byway: Funding is available; letters of application are due June 15. Alicia felt this would be a good source of money for the Gateway Project. Cheryl suggested recreational parking and river access be included in the letter. Alicia will write the letter, send a draft to WCC members, then submit it.

Old Business

Gateway Kiosk Bench: Lew reported via email that work on the Walker Road bench will be done after July 4.

Monadnock Regional Rail Trail: The Grossmans reported that the grant was finished and expressed appreciation to the WCC for the funding.

Other Business

Trail Subcommittee: Lew said trail maps are ready for final review by the Trails Committee and will be sent to Steven to distribute. There is still one trail to hike and gather data for - Table Rock. Peter presented copies of the Town and Conservation Land maps.

Trail Clean-up: Lew still has the backpack with the monitoring kits as well as one pole for trail work. He suggested looking at the storage room in the old town garage for the Con Com where everything can be stored.

Reservoir Dam: John reported repair costs would be \$419,840 (1-year-old-data). 20% -35% of that

amount would be engineering costs.

Adjournment: Alicia adjourned the meeting at 8:35 p.m.

The next in-person meeting will be on July 12, 2021, at 7:00 p.m. in Town Hall.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jean Kobeski, Recording Secretary

*** These minutes are in draft form until approved by the Commission on July 12, 2021.

