

**Minutes for the Regular Meeting of the
Walpole Conservation Commission
December 4, 2023**

Members Present: John Peska, Alicia Flammia, Lewis Shelley, Wendy Grossman,
Steven Dumont , Steve Dalessio (Selectboard Liaison)

Members Absent: Peter Palmiotto, France Menk

Seating of Alternates: Nicole Adams

Alternates Present: Nicole Adams, Kara Dexter

Visitors Present: Ryan Owens (Monadnock Conservancy), Kate Buckman (CT River
Conservancy), Jean Kobeski (Recording Secretary)

Call to Order: John Peska called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m. This meeting was
recorded.

Review and Approval of Minutes: In the November 6 minutes Kara asked that, under Old
Business, Gateway Update, the first sentence be changed to read: *Kara proposed that the gate
be **locked** on November 15, not closed, as written.* With that correction, Lew moved to accept
the November 6 minutes. Wendy seconded, and all voted in favor. Motion carried.

Public Business

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|--------------------------|----------------------------|
| Financial Report: | Conservation: \$218,447.22 |
| | Forestry: 24,616.93 |
| | Walker Road: 709.49 |

Correspondences: DES Forest Statuary Permit by Notification, dated October 27, 2023
Monadnock Conservancy Newsletter

New Business

Ryan Owens, Monadnock Conservancy: Ryan attended the meeting at WCC request to dis-
cuss the Nerrie easement and the money the Commission pledged for the project in 2017. He
explained that the money could be used for surveying, lawyers, site research, the Monadnock
Conservancy staff, recording fees, and future monitoring. Because the easement is not com-
plete, no money is due at this time from the Commission. Though estimated costs have in-
creased significantly, the Commission will not be asked for any more money than was approved
in 2017. In order for the town to receive something tangible for the money they give, and to
meet state statutes, they will be named in the deed. Wendy asked if that means the town will
have an executory interest and Ryan answered, "Yes." She then asked if the Conservancy will
be responsible for the monitoring and Ryan said they would be and stated the town should ask
to see the Conservancy's monitoring reports.

Steve Dalessio asked if all the Nerrie land in the easement would be in Walpole. Ryan ex-
plained that, of the (current) 147.5 acres, 106.2 acres are in Walpole.

Lew asked if this easement would be different because Distant Hill is a non-profit. Ryan an-
swered no, that every landowner is treated equally.

Wendy asked what steps should be done and when. Ryan recommended the following steps:

1. Consider and understand what Executory Interest means and involves.
2. Ensure that the Selectboard is willing to sign it.

3. Consult the NHACC guidelines for how to take money out of conservation funds for the easement.
4. When the Nerries have completed the easement, schedule a required public hearing about the property easement: money involved and Executory Interest.

Alicia offered to put these steps on the Commission's drive for reference.

Kate Buckman, Connecticut River Conservancy: Kate reviewed the relicensing process currently underway for dams in Bellows Falls, Vernon, Wilder, Turners Falls, and the Northfield Mountain Pumped Storage. She stated the process normally takes 3-5 years, but this relicensing started in 2012 and still has two years to go. She said shutting down Vermont Yankee and two government shut-downs have caused the delay, and Great River Hydro was conducting a variety of studies from 2013 - 2019.

In 2020 Great River Hydro submitted an amended final license application. They not only had to address power generation, but they also had to give equal consideration to endangered species, water quality, recreation, and historical and cultural resources. In other words, they need to address how they will enhance the communities and provide protection, mitigation, and enhancement.

Kate stated she came to the Commission now because FERC has the Ready for the Environmental Assessment and this will be the last time for public comments. She said this would be the time for our community to comment on erosion along the river, recreation, and poor maintenance or lack of public access. She asked if the Commission has a conservation plan and if the plans in the license are in line with it. Do the the proposals in the application address where this community wants to be in 40 years (the length of this license)?

Kate stated that the CRC strongly believes that the application should require monitoring within the first 10-20 years, not wait till the end of the 40, to determine if the provisions are adequate.

Kate said FERC's Ready for Environmental Assessment will begin somewhere between February and March and will be open for 60 days.

Steve Dalessio feels that loss of land is the primary concern in Walpole.

Alicia asked if the application can be reviewed before the public comment period begins. Kate said it is available now on the FERC docket. She will also send a hard copy to John. She said it is quite lengthy and overwhelming and recommends looking at Exhibit E - Environmental Review, which has a good Table of Contents. She also referred to Exhibit G, maps of project boundaries. Kate offered to come back and evaluate comments before they are submitted to FERC.

Alicia stated the Commission should try to link the relicensing to their updated conservation plan.

Old Business

Topics for Annual Report: Kara asked Commissioners what they would like to include in the annual report, due in mid-January. They would like Kara to highlight accomplishments for the

year (trail work, forester, Rail Trail, Gateway work, property stewardship). Focus areas for next year include property stewardship, trail plans, and dam relicensing.

Barry Scholarship: John reported that Justin Cassarino and Amy Treat will identify a scholarship recipient by January 15.

Fanny Mason Clean-up: John said the individual who has been cleaning the area will continue to do so. She reports that it is in the worst condition it has ever been. There is evidence of undesirable activity. It is generally cleaned once a week.

It was reported that the stone steps on the east side and the structures need to be repaired. Lew gave a brief history of the construction of the structures. He also said there had been plans to remove the steps but it hasn't been done yet. He said that since they aren't functional, they should be torn out and also suggested cutting down or pruning trees on both sides for greater visibility. Lew reminded the group that there is a trail head here, and the more activity the trail gets, the less undesirable activity that occurs. He said that making the area more pleasant and inviting will boost use. John stated plans for repair etc. should be made in the spring. Kara said she spoke with David Konesko of DOT about the state-owned property. She reminded the Commissioners that any mowing or upkeep of the area would be of state-owned property but Kara seemed to think this would not be an issue.

Kara asked if trees can be taken down on state-owned property. Lew said they will need to talk to the state before any tree removal is done.

NHACC Dues: Lew stated that annual dues are \$250, due in October. Lew moved to pay the \$250 NHACC dues. Alicia seconded and all voted in favor. Motion carried.

Cranberry Meadow Update: John said he spoke with Mike Hubbard about the clean-up. Mike is not interested in cleaning the area for the state inspection. John spoke to Mark Houghton about it and will follow up with Mark next week about the state requirements. He has a DES contact who would issue the permit if work is to be done with machinery.

Wendy reported that, while looking at the files on Cranberry Meadow, she discovered a 1994 letter from Harold Putnam to Leslie Hubbard. They had a legal search done of the land. Since the search showed that since no taxes were paid on the land and no member of the Knapp family claimed the land, the land belongs to the Town of Walpole by adverse possession.

Gateway Update: Kara asked if anyone had locked the gate on November 15; no one had. Lew said he would lock it.

Other Business

Walpole Trails Subcommittee: Wendy reported that the Fanny Mason Bridge is fixed. Steven Dumont talked about the repair.

Kara planned a trash clean-up near Dexpart on November 12 and collected 210 pounds of litter.

5 trees are down on the Fanny Mason Trail.

Commission Website: Steven stated there have been some changes to the website that have not been approved by the commissioners. Wendy stated there is some incorrect information on the website. Alicia said she would talk to France about the website.

Rail Trail: Wendy reported that the RTP Grant work officially ended November 7. A trail walk took place on the 19th; 15 people participated. They walked from Route 123 to Black Jack Crossing with shuttles returning the walkers. Wendy said they had a number of positive comments from participants.

Wendy also stated:

1. They paid the contractor.
2. Rich found the \$5,000 Fanny Mason money.
3. The final report was sent to the RTP people.
4. The bond money was returned to Lew.
5. The \$20,000 grant money should be on the way.
6. A visit will take place but has not yet been scheduled.

Property Monitoring: Alicia gets reminders about property monitoring. Wendy will do the Graves Easement and Ballam Farm. Someone needs to fill out the forms for Wendy and Will's property.

John had a call from Phil Warren, who said he will be walking the Nelson Town Forest on Wednesday at 4:00 p.m.

Adjournment: Wendy made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Steven seconded and all voted in favor. John adjourned the meeting at 8:47 p.m.

The next meeting will be on Monday, January 8, 2024.

Respectfully Submitted,

Jean Kobeski, Recording Secretary

** These minutes are in draft form until approved at the January 8, 2024 meeting.