**Bethlehem Conservation Commission (BCC) meeting**

**July 12th, 2023**

**Meeting minutes**

**Location:** Bethlehem Town Library

**Committee members present:** Chery Jensen, Margaret Gale, Betsey Phillips, Ivan Ash, Veronica Morris, Rachelle Lyons, Vivian Winterhoff

Cheryl called the meeting to order at 6:04pm.

**Meeting minutes to approve**

**Margaret made a motion to approve the June 22nd, 2023 meeting minutes as amended. Ivan seconded the motion. Motion passed: 5 in favor, 1 abstention.**

**Incoming mail/emails**

**NHACC comment on changes to wetlands rules**

NHACC did not comment on this issue due to mixed feedback from different Conservation Commissions. Unfortunately, we missed the deadline to comment as the BCC.

**Wetlands permits Parker Rd, 202-42.23 (DesRochers) and 202-39 (Selleck)**

Clarified that these are distinct applications and that they are neighboring lots, with the same septic system engineer, Michael Carbonneau.

The plan for lot 202-39 (applicant is Gwen Selleck) was looked at, as was the town tax map and zoning for the lot. The driveway and leach field are too close to property boundaries. Bethlehem’s zoning places this lot in District 2, in which the following setbacks are prescribed: 30 feet for any improvements on the property, or 15 feet with special exception.

Discussion around whether the BCC should intervene, even though we missed the deadline to comment.

It was agreed to send a letter to the Town Select Board, Town Code Officer, Michael Carbonneau (Septic System Designer), Gwen Selleck (applicant) and the relevant point of contact at NHDES:

The proposed driveway and leach field appear to be non-compliant with the 30-foot setback required as per the Town of Bethlehem’s zoning ordinances. It appears the zoning ordinances would be violated if construction were to proceed as proposed in the current plans.

**Margaret made a motion for the BCC to send a letter to the above-named recipients on behalf of the BCC in reference to the application by Gwen Selleck for a proposed driveway on lot 202-39. Betsey seconded. Motion passed unanimously.**

Cheryl will send the drafted letter to Veronica for distribution.

**Treasurer’s report**

The BCC’s account balances are as follows:

Town account: $870.00 (with Cheryl’s reimbursement of $68.02 still outstanding)

Savings account: $17,477.71

Cheryl’s reimbursement for ice-cream tokens amounts to $168.02 minus $100 in donations collected by Betsey, so will be reimbursed $68.02.

**Margaret made a motion to reimburse Cheryl. Betsey seconded. Motion passed: 5 in favor, 1 abstained.**

**US Fish and Wildlife Service (USFWS) 40k Funding Eligibility**

Rachelle gave an update on the goals of the USFWS for these funds, as she had recently spoken to the grant officer, Latice Fuentes, at the USFWS:

The USWS is most motivated to fund projects related to restoring habitat for the migratory songbirds that died in 2017 as a result of the oil spill at the Mt Washington hotel and that this restoration take place as geographically close to the incident as possible, within the Ammonoosuc watershed.

They want to see immediate “on the ground” impact, so dam removal scoping would not be a project they would fund.

Riverbank restoration for access points to the Ammonoosuc would be an ok candidate, but not great.

The Bethlehem Heritage Society site in the center of town may not prove a strong enough case for bird habitat restoration.

The grant will pay for some outreach and education.

**Discussion:**

NH Fish and Game has issued information on a significant amount of Northern swamp habitat being lost.

Could we purchase land to join parcels of already conserved land with the funds?

Veronica noted that the Select Board has $40,000 in American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) funds available that could be used as matching federal funds for any project that is funded with these funds.

Rachelle discussed with her the dark skies project in this context, which if implemented impacts on all (not only bird) migratory species. Very few of the light fixtures on Bethlehem Main St are compliant with Bethlehem’s own lighting ordinance. Information on lights that would be compliant with dark skies can be shared with the Planning Board. The Town’s Sustainability Committee is also interested in this topic. BCC could collaborate with the Town’s Energy Commission.

**Cheryl made a motion for Rachelle to continue to talk with USFWS about the idea of using the grant money for light pollution reduction. Margaret seconded. Motion passed unanimously.**

Rachelle will prepare a draft application and pitch it to USFWS, get feedback from them and then bring it to the next BCC meeting for comment and further discussion of next steps. She will also speak to the Sustainability Committee and the Energy Commission.

The goal is to reconvene in August 2023 to review the application. This could be a work session during which no public comment is received.

**NCES Report Omissions, and PFAS and 1,4 dioxane in the Ammonoosuc: Conservation Law Foundation (CLF) response**

Per the information that Jon Swan has been emailing about, it appears from the tri-annual reports that Casella left out information about elevated PFAS per Jon Swan.

Cheryl provided an update on lawsuit activity between different parties and Casella.

There was discussion around whether we as a Conservation Commission can test water ourselves upstream and downstream of possible landfill contamination sites, so that we have our own data.

The Bethlehem Village District already performs source testing. Agricultural water testing labs could potentially be used. A dragonfly monitoring project that is looking specifically for PFAS could test some sites. Rachelle will ask if the latter can incorporate two additional testing sites into their project.

Cheryl shared information on previous water testing that was done at the behest of the BCC many years ago.

Veronica suggested we look at test data from around the old landfill, the Town Forest, as well.

**Wetlands review guidance and assistance**

Margaret has yet to speak to Elise Lawson. She will update at a future meeting.

**Town Sustainability Committee update**

Maybe the BCC could collaborate with the Committee to be part of the Ten Towns Initiative.

Update at next meeting.

**Roadside Clean-up 2023: Final Details**

To be discussed at the next meeting.

**Other/New Business**

* Cheryl will send BCC members the current Natural Resources Inventory (NRI).
* A “Solarize” campaign is being organized with a potential kick-off event in September. The aim will be to provide information and hold an event with vendors and people who already have solar installations.

**Next BCC meetings**

Work session meeting on Thursday August 3rd, 2023, 10am.

Usual meeting on Thursday August 24th, 2023, 5.30pm.

Margaret will check with Library if meeting room is available on those dates.

**Cheryl made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:06pm. Margaret seconded. Motion unanimously passed.**

**The meeting was adjourned at 8:06pm.**

Respectfully submitted by Vivian Winterhoff, Recording Secretary.