**Bethlehem Conservation Commission (BCC) meeting**

**August 24th, 2023**

**Meeting minutes**

**Location:** Bethlehem Town Library

**Committee members present:** Cheryl Jensen, Margaret Gale, Betsey Phillips, Rachelle Lyons, Vivian Winterhoff

**In attendance:** Mary Polaski, John Polaski

Cheryl called the meeting to order at 5:32pm.

**Meeting minutes to approve**

**Cheryl made a motion to accept the draft July 12th, 2023 meeting minutes as amended. Betsey seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.**

**Cheryl made a motion to accept the draft August 3rd, 2023 meeting minutes as amended. Margaret seconded. Motion passed unanimously.**

**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

**Wetlands permit application: Parker Rd, Lot 202-39 (Selleck)**

The information regarding setbacks that came to light regarding the town ordinances after our last meeting and the letter that we sent to NHDES et al. is confusing. Apparently, they do not apply if a structure is not yet on the property.

Cheryl drafted a second letter on behalf of the BCC to be sent to NHDES and Mr Carbonneau of Connecticut Valley Septic Design, as well as town officials, to clarify our position after learning about the setback *non*-requirements.

**Cheryl made a motion to send the draft letter, as amended, to CT Valley Septic Design and NHDES with town officials in copy, including the Town’s code officer and planning & zoning clerk. Rachelle seconded. Motion passed unanimously.**

**Wetlands review guidance and assistance**

There was discussion around how the BCC can deal with the increasing complexity in wetlands regulations and the type of applications we are receiving and are expecting to receive going forward, including an Eversource application regarding replacing electricity towers and more.

Margaret had reached out to Elise Lawson, a wetlands scientist, who will be able to attend our September meeting and is interested in working with us. We can have an initial meeting with her in September, perhaps via Zoom if that is preferable to her, and ask her if she can review wetlands permit applications initially. Before considering hiring her for larger projects, we will want to find out what our threshold for Request For Proposals (RFPs) is.

The Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) needs to be updated. This will be very time-consuming. BCC members can go to the UNH website and look for NRI to find out more about the process of creating one. Rachelle will forward a link to resources.

Margaret offered to call Barbara Richter, NHACC Executive Director, to have a chat with her about the situation of feeling the lack of resources to deal with the applications we are receiving, including how other Conservation Commissions manage these situations and how NHACC might support Conservation Commissions like ours more.

**Old Growth Forests and Town Forest Management**

Cheryl shared that she had seen logging operations in other Town Forests and was appalled at the outcome. Logging is currently included in our Town Forest Stewardship Plan.

It feels pertinent to have a discussion about priorities for the Town Forest and to revise the Stewardship Plan. Cheryl will send BCC members the latest plan, dated 2009, and a letter from Grafton County Forester, David Falkenham, written at one point after the Stewardship Plan had been established. The letter confirms that at the time of writing it we were close to having an old growth Town Forest.

NHACC is hosting two programs about old growth forests. See page two of the NHACC August e-newsletter. Betsey will look into the programs to find out further details.

**USFWS grant update**

We are expected to hear in September or October 2023 regarding news on this grant.

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

The number of volunteers that attended is unclear until the sign-up sheets can be found, but in total participants picked up 137 bags of trash, and Casella weighed 0.58 tons (= 1,160 lbs.) of trash collected.

**BCC priorities discussion**

A Conservation Commission (CC), per RSA 36-A, the NHACC CC handbook and website, has the duty to:

1. "... conduct researches into its local land and water areas ..."

2. "... seek to coordinate the activity of unofficial bodies organized for similar purposes ..."

An issue is more likely to be resolved or a project undertaken if all concerned can agree on the scope of the problem or project and the desired outcome. A town meeting or city council bombarded with requests from groups of citizens with different proposed solutions to a natural resources concern is less likely to solve a problem than one approached by several groups with one solution in mind. A conservation commission, as a part of municipal government, is in an ideal position to assemble representatives of concerned groups in order to develop mutually satisfactory goals.

3. "... keep an index of all open space and natural, aesthetic or ecological areas ... all marshlands, swamps and other wetlands ..."

This is the Natural Resources Inventory (NRI) that we have and needs to be updated.

4. "... keep accurate records of its meetings and actions ..."

Among these, some of the priorities named involve:

* NRI
* Forest Stewardship Plan (Town Forest)
* Wetlands applications
* Landfill pollution issues

Each member to bring a list of what they see as BCC priorities, ranked in order of importance, for discussion at the next meeting.

**AOT permit application: Trudeau Rd EMS facilities**

This is a major project; over 200 sqft. We received this application one month after it was submitted, so missed the opportunity to comment. Cheryl spoke with NHDES staff about possibly extending the comment period, but we would not get enough of an extension to engage external input to review the application.

**Incoming mail/emails**

We ran out of time to discuss any items.

**Town Sustainability Committee update**

NH Saves Button-Up Workshop (for home winter readiness) on Wednesday, September 20th.

**Next BCC meetings**

Next meetings will take place on September 21st and October 19th.

**Cheryl made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 07:02pm. Rachelle** **seconded. Motion unanimously passed.**

**The meeting was adjourned at 7:02pm.**

Respectfully submitted by Vivian Winterhoff, Recording Secretary.