**Bethlehem Conservation Commission (BCC) meeting**

**October 19th, 2023**

**Draft meeting minutes**

**Location:** Bethlehem Town Library

**Committee members present:** Ivan Ash, Margaret Gale, Cheryl Jensen, Vivian Winterhoff

**Apologies from:** Betsey Phillips, Rachelle Lyons, Veronica Morris

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

Cheryl called the meeting to order at 6:05pm.

**Meeting minutes to approve**

**Cheryl made a motion to accept the draft September 21st, 2023 meeting minutes as amended. Margaret seconded the motion. Ivan abstained. Motion passed (3 in favor, 1 abstention).**

**Incoming mail/emails**

**NHDES Wetlands Rules Update**

Updated rules became effective on October 13th, 2023.

Discussion around Permit by Notification (PBN) changes, as outlined in the NHACC email dated October 16th, 2023. One of the updates is: “Applicants are strongly encouraged to include a signed written waiver of intervention from their conservation commission. If they do not, assigned staff will review PBN applications within 25 days”, presumably instead of 10 days. The waiver refers to a Conservation Commission (CC) waiving the right to intervene.

There are 3 types of applications and review processes, clarified to a certain extent by the NHACC handout about the CC review process, previously sent around to BCC members by email titled as “RSA 482-A: Conservation Commissions Responsibilities in Wetland Permitting and NHDES responsibilities to Conservation Commissions/ municipalities”.

*Action:* Cheryl suggested to review what documents each member has on wetlands application review and whether or not they are up to date. Members agreed to bring the document they have – either hardcopy or electronically – to the next meeting.

**NHACC conference**

The conference is happening on November 4th, 2023. Margaret will be attending. She will check with Betsey if she plans to attend as well.

**Shoreland application intention to submit (River Rd #209 - 60.5, Mycroft)**

Cheryl stated the CC does not have a say on shoreland applications. It is within RLAC’s (Ammonoosuc River Local Advisory Committee) purview to review shoreland applications.

**NHDES solid waste management rule changes**

NHDES comment period on the latest changes closes November 7th, 2023.

**Newsletter subscriptions**

It was agreed to leave receipt of all newsletters off the mailbag list, including any from the NHACC.

**BCC priorities discussion**

It was agreed to postpone this discussion to November’s meeting, as two members were not present at this meeting.

**Treasurer’s report**

The BCC’s account balances are as follows:

Town account: $801.98

Savings account: $17,479.14

**Margaret made motion to expend $250 from the Town account for dues to the NHACC for the 2024 calendar year (Jan-Dec 2024). Ivan seconded. Motion unanimously passed.**

**Wetlands permit review guidance and assistance + Natural Resources Inventory discussion**

Discussion around Eversource’s intent to submit a wetlands application to renew electricity transmission lines. Cheryl suggested to consider what the BCC is going to do once the application is submitted. Can we use the Northern Pass submission that Elise Lawson prepared and assisted with as a basis for an impact assessment or statement?

*Action:* Margaret will get in touch with Sugar Hill residents and property owners to find out if Sugar Hill constituents are planning on taking any action.

*Action:* Cheryl will reach out to the Franconia Conservation Commission.

*Action:* Margaret will also reach out to Elise Lawson to ask if she believes the objections cited in the Northern Pass document are still valid, if Elise is willing to look at the application when it comes in, and how much would it cost to do so.

Cheryl can send around the Northern Pass documents if anybody needs it.

**Cheryl made a motion that the BCC pay Elise Lawson up to $1,000 to review the Eversource wetlands application and to see if the impacts of this project would be the same or similar to Northern Pass.**

*Action:* Cheryl volunteered to notify DES that the BCC intends to comment on any Eversource wetlands application coming in regarding the renewal of the electricity lines.

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Cheryl said that she had looked at the Randolph wetlands study that Elise had completed for the town and it was very specific. The purpose of such a report was to designate a prime wetland or to develop certain town ordinances.

*Action:* It was suggested for BCC members to look at the Randolph wetlands report and to review the 2006 Bethlehem NRI (if not yet reviewed) before discussion at next meeting.

Cheryl confirmed that the recent Bethlehem Planning Board revisions have nothing specific to wetlands in them.

Elise has done the Forest Stewardship Plan, last NRI, Northern Pass objections.

*Action:* Margaret will ask Elise to send a contract proposal for an NRI, so we can compare the wetlands contract proposal with the NRI proposal.

**Draft budget request**

Discussion around 5% of Land Use Change tax (LUCT) being received: Bethlehem is one of the towns receiving the lowest percentages of LUCT being received by CCs. We know this because Margaret has already asked the NHACC what the range of donations from LUCT is to CCs across NH. Where does the remaining 95% go?

*Action:* Discuss at the November meeting whether or not to submit a warrant article to increase the amount of Land Use Tax percentage the BCC receives.

*Action:* Vivian will ask Nicole where the remaining 95% of LUCT received by the Town goes.

The budget for 2024 was agreed as follows:

NHACC $250
Conservation Education $600
Road-side clean-up $150
Admin/Supplies/Training/Consultants $270
Total: $1,270

**Cheryl made a motion to ask the Select Board to return the BCC to the budget of past years, which has been $1,270. Margaret seconded. Motion unanimously passed.**

*Action:* Cheryl or Vivian to email the Select Board with the budget request for 2024.

**Other/New business**

**Bethlehem Sustainability Working Group**

We will receive any updates at next meeting since Rachelle not present.

**Request to sponsor educational legislation**

Discussion around the background to the request, the legislation proposed. Has the Sustainability Working Group received a response? What was it? It would be good to hear absent members’ input before making a decision.

*Action:* Vivian will check with Rachelle if they have received a response.

**New member appointment**

Chris volunteered to be an Alternate as opposed to a full Member, given his numerous other town-wide commitments.

**Margaret made a motion to recommend to the Select Board that Christopher Jensen become an Alternate for the BCC for one term beginning in November 2023 and ending on March 31st, 2026. Cheryl seconded. Motion unanimously approved.**

**Solarize the North Country event**

There will be a launch party on November 3rd at 4115 Main St, Franconia, 6-8pm. Info at solarizenorthcountry.com.

**Next BCC meetings**

The next meetings will take place on November 16th at 6pm, and December 14th at 6pm.

**Cheryl made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:50pm. Margaret** **seconded. Motion unanimously passed.**

**The meeting was adjourned at 7:50pm.**

*Respectfully submitted by Vivian Winterhoff, Recording Secretary.*