**Bethlehem Conservation Commission (BCC) meeting**

**December 14th, 2023**

**Meeting minutes**

**Location:** Bethlehem Town Library

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

**In attendance:** Barry Zitser (Transfer Station Committee), Mary Polaski (left at 7.32pm), John Polaski (left at 7.32pm)

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

**Minutes**

Nov 16th minutes: Margaret moved to approve the minutes with amendments. Cheryl seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

Nov 27th minutes: Margaret moved to approve the minutes with amendments. Cheryl seconded. Motion passed unanimously.

*Action:* Ask Eversource to include us in their Town Officials list to receive notifications on the X-178 and U-199 power line update projects.

**Mailbag**

*Action:* Vivian to ask Nicole regarding the mail process + Can Mary Jackson give us heads-up that she just signed an application? She used to do that.

No further discussion. Most items to be covered when discussing next agenda items.

**Eversource Transmission Lines Rebuild Projects (U199 and X178)**

Concerns about them implementing Northern Pass by increments.

Discussion around height of towers. Hard to ascertain whether the updates Eversource is planning are necessary. We need to focus concerns about wetlands and wildlife. Would the Energy Commission be interested in taking a stand?

*Action:* Margaret will bring awareness to the project and ask Energy Commission.

Rather than or in addition to listing any wetlands impact concerns, what can the BCC ask of Eversource? For example, Franconia is requesting a gravel road to be re-seeded in their Town Forest. Eversource was originally not going to do so.

Discussion around access roads. We received an update from Matthew Koehler at Eversource with the following information:

*Below are the possible points of entry to the right of way that may be used during the project. This is subject to change as we are still working on finalizing additional access points, and they will be further refined once we get a contractor on board next year.*

* *Rt. 18*
* *Rt. 302*
* *Cherry Valley Road*
* *Rt. 116*
* *Prospect Street*
* *Glessner Road*

It was suggested that a drone could be used to take drone pictures before and after the roads are used. Mary Polaski offered get in touch with the person who took some drone picture for her and to ask for a quote and whether he would be available for this kind of work. She will give him Cheryl’s contact information.

GIS (via arcgis that is used for the Town tax maps) can be used to monitor as well or instead.

It was mentioned that bio monitors can be hired. This could be requested the 37-acres wetland and locations of pads very close to wetlands.

*Action:* Rachelle will ask NH Fish and Game how these kinds of projects have been handled by them and other local communities in the past when Eversource has been doing work in sensitive wildlife habitats.

Elise Lawson confirmed that what she had written for the Northern Pass application would still be pertinent for this one.

Ask Elise Lawson to review the permit application once it comes in. We do not have to comment on AoT permits, but can.

*Action:* Margaret will ask Elise Lawson if she can review the Eversource permit applications within the previously voted on budget of $1,000 (see October 19th, 2023 meeting minutes) as they come in, including: Is there anything we can ask Eversource to do?

*Action:* Cheryl will send Matthew Koehler the aquifer ordinance link.

**Casella NCES “Seep Project” applications (Muchmore Rd, #419-25)**

CLF cannot comment or talk about it.

BCC should not only be making comments, but also be asking for something. Hence, the request to “ask that DES hire a third party that has no connections to Casella/NCES to test the river to determine at what level these substances are currently present after the 2010 remediation. We ask that the testing be done before, during and after this (2023) as a condition of approving the permit so that we have some baseline data going forward.” There should also be assurance that this work will include a plan to prevent future contamination.

The CLF suit spelled out several contaminants. This is not just an “aesthetic restoration” as NCES continues to refer to it as. Demand that DES required NCES to no longer refer to it as an aesthetic restoration, and instead a “pollution remediation project” or similar.

Specific references to the presence of environmental toxins in the samples taken, including dioxane and arsenic, will be included in the letter.

**Cheryl made a motion to accept the letter that she and Betsey drafted with amendments and to send it to NHDES. Margaret seconded. Motion unanimously passed.**

*Actions:* Cheryl and Betsey will make the amendments and send the final letter.

**Natural Resources/Wetlands Inventory update**

Veronica brought our request to hire Elise Lawson to carry out the NRI to the Select Board and this has been approved. Elise has received notification of the approval.

Who is going to be the point of contact for the NRI? This person wouldn’t necessarily be expected to do everything, but would assume the role of the project manager.

Revisit at next meeting and obtain information from Elise about timeline.

**Land use tax percentage change warrant article**

Margaret passed around a map from the NHACC that showed the percentage that different towns receive. She read out wording of Bethlehem article in 2004 as it passed for 5%. Numerous other towns receive 75% to 100% of LUCT.

In light of recent tax changes within the Town, it may not be good timing to ask for more funds this year. Once some funds have been spent on the NRI with valuable resources documented and once we may have other projects under our belt, there could be a more compelling case for increasing funds to come to the BCC.

*Action:* Vivian will ask Nicole if she can provide historic LUCT figures.

**Ivan made a motion to postpone submission of the warrant article. Cheryl seconded. Motion passed unanimously.**

**Treasurer’s Report**

As of November 30th, 2023:

Town account balance: $801.98 (72% of our original allotment). $318.02 have been expended to date.

Savings account balance: $18,600.62

In February, $820 was transferred from the savings into the town account to cover BES field trip expenses. Margaret will check exactly how much was spent on the field trip to Plymouth. The Transfer station trip did not happen and money was not transferred to BES.

Barry Zitser said he came across a grant of around $1,000 that would fund student education and asked if the BCC would be interested in him trying to obtain the funds to be awarded to the BCC. It was the Fidelity Foundation Grant. This is to be discussed by the BCC in the future.

**Cheryl made a motion for Margaret to contact the Town Treasurer to transfer over the balance in the Town account after deduction of the NHACC 2024 dues of $250 into the BCC’s savings account.**

*Action:* Margaret will check how much of the funds reserved for the BES field trip to Plymouth was spent.

*Action:* Margaret will arrange for Town account balance to be transferred to Savings account.

**Old Business**

**GSL AoT permit application comment**

NHDES confirmed receipt of BCC’s comment letter.

There will be an upcoming public hearing on a related issue. BCC members agreed for Cheryl to send a copy of the AoT comment letter as comment at this public hearing.

*Action:* Cheryl will send the same letter submitted as comment on the GSL AoT permit application to a related public hearing as BCC comment.

**Draft BCC Annual Report**

BCC members received Ivan’s draft.

*Action:* All BCC members to review the draft and bring comments and suggestions to the January meeting.

**Meeting for BCC priorities discussion**

Set up a working meeting to tackle what to prioritize going forward. Agreed to meet on January 11th, 6pm.

**Other/New Business**

**Future BCC meeting dates**

**Ivan made motion to have the regular BCC meetings on the second Thursdays of the month, and failing that the third Thursday of the month. Cheryl seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.**

Exceptionally, next meeting date will be Friday January 12th, 2023 from 3-5pm, to accommodate the priorities discussion on the prior Thursday evening.

Margaret made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8.11pm. Motion seconded by Betsey. Motion unanimously passed. Meeting adjourned at 8.11pm.

*Respectfully submitted by Vivian Winterhoff, Recording Secretary.*