**Bethlehem Conservation Commission (BCC) meeting**

**November 16th, 2023**

**Meeting minutes**

**Location:** Bethlehem Town Hall

**Committee members present:** Ivan Ash (arrived 6:10pm; left 7:30pm), Margaret Gale, Cheryl Jensen, Rachelle Lyons (by Zoom), Veronica Morris, Betsey Phillips, Vivian Winterhoff

**In attendance:** Mary Polaski, John Polaski (both left at 7:10pm)

Cheryl called the meeting to order at 6pm.

**Meeting minutes to approve**

**Cheryl made a motion to accept the draft October 19th, 2023 meeting minutes as amended. Betsey seconded the motion. 3 in favor; 2 abstentions (due to being absent at the meeting). No discussion. Motion passed.**

**Incoming mail/emails**

**River Rd #209 - 60.5 (Mycroft) shoreland application (NHDES #2023-02947)**

This application is under technical review.

**NHACC listserv**

NHACC recently started an email list that Conservation Commission members can opt into. It is supposed to be a means via which CC members across the state can ask one another and answer questions, and support one another.

**Granite State Landfill AOT permit application**

A response is due by Nov 27th.

The committee reviewed Cheryl’s draft. The discussion included whether or not to comment on increased traffic on Bethlehem’s roads impacting residents and wildlife.

Also: do we want to comment on the wetlands to be affected by the work on Douglas Drive (changing the configuration of, moving and widening the road)? There will be an addition of 12 feet to the width in some sections. There will be a deceleration and acceleration lane.

In addition, if there is a loss from the leach ponds it would flow onto Rt 116 into Bethlehem. There was a suggestion to add a comment to the letter on the importance of seeing wetlands as contiguous in relation to the widening of Douglas Dr, and not as individual “parcels” of wetland.

A member of the public inquired whether a petition on opposing the Granite State Landfill go around Bethlehem? Unfortunately, BCC members have no capacity to arrange it, but would welcome any member of the public to organize one.

*Actions:*

Rachelle will send Cheryl a paragraph on the traffic issue in relation to environmental justice by Nov 20th.

Vivian will send Cheryl a paragraph about wetlands impact and send to Cheryl by Nov 20th.

Ivan will also submit his suggestions to Cheryl.

Cheryl will compile submit the letter once additions and edits are in.

If anybody else wants to add anything, send it to Cheryl by Nov 20th.

**Eversource pending wetlands application**

This is regarding the Eversource transmission line rebuild/update.

There are two subprojects:

* **U199 from Littleton to Sugar Hill, of which** 5 structures are in Bethlehem.
* **X178 from Whitefield to Beebe River substation, of which** 95 structures are in Bethlehem on what had been proposed as the Northern Pass route.

There was discussion on why the height increase (of about 12 feet) was needed.

Cheryl has been in touch with Matthew Kohler, the local community relations contact at Eversource, who has offered for BCC members and others to attend a tour on Friday November 17th of transmission line projects at various stages of completion throughout the North Country. There is also an option of a presentation to BCC members to explain the project in more detail, answer any questions and receive any concerns.

*Action****:*** Cheryl will let Matthew Kohler know that the BCC will welcome a presentation on the project on Monday, Nov 27th, 6-8pm at the Library.

**Treasurer’s report**

The BCC’s account balances are as follows:

Town account: $801.98 (NHACC dues $250 still to be deducted.)

Savings account: $18,600.64

**Natural Resources/Wetlands Inventory discussion**

The BCC was considering prioritizing a wetlands inventory, as opposed to an entire Natural Resource Inventory (NRI), due to events in town, including the update to planning and zoning regulations currently in progress, and significant permit applications such as Eversource’s. However, having looked at the two wetlands studies that were completed for Randolph (NH), these were very specific to two areas within the town with the aim to potentially designate them as prime wetlands, and we don’t have any specific areas we would want to focus on at present.

The last NRI was done in 2006. That was a long time ago. Info from the NRI can go into the Masterplan.

**Margaret made a motion to update the NRI first. Cheryl seconded the motion. Motion passed unanimously.**

A large part of the preparation for the NRI is to contact landowners to ask for permission to be on their property. What is Elise’s estimate of how many landowners we need to contact? We will need to develop a timeline in liaison with Elise.

BCC members would like to know approximately how much work/time investment to expect in reaching out to landowners + timing of the work. We will need to decide who will take responsibility for liaising with Elise to implement the NRI.

*Actions****:***

Cheryl will send Veronica an email to request approval from the Select Board to hire Elise Lawson to complete the NRI for Bethlehem.

Margaret will let Elise know that we plan to move forward with the NRI, subject to Select Board approval, and will ask Elise about an expected start date, plus how many landowners she expects us to have to get in touch with.

**2024 budget request**

*Action****:*** Vivian will send the BCC proposed/requested 2024 budget that was discussed and agreed at the October 2023 BCC meeting to Mary Moritz (Town Administrator) on behalf of BCC.

**Land use tax percentage change warrant article**

BCC members need to decide whether we want to submit a “petition warrant article” or “Select Board warrant article”. The latter would be to obtain Select Board support before the warrant article is presented to the public to vote on. Jan 9th, 2024 is the deadline to submit articles for requesting Select Board support. Either way, this request would have to be discussed at the Select Board budget hearing which has to be held by Jan 29th, 2024.

*Action:* Margaret will draft some wording for a warrant article and present it at the next meeting.

Help for wording can come from Department of Revenue Administration, and the Select Board will run it by them as well.

**Other/New business**

**Draft BCC annual report**

Writing the BCC’s annual report involves looking at last year’s report as a template, going through our minutes, and writing up what we accomplished. A draft needs to be discussed and finalized at the January meeting.

One BCC members needs to volunteer to draft the report to be approved at an upcoming meeting. The report is usually due on or around Feb 1st.

**Sustainability Working Group (SWG) update**

**The SWG is holding a strategic planning session.** What suggestions does the BCC have for the SWG?

Two suggestions were made:

* It would be helpful to have some coordination of communication about Bethlehem’s amazing resources and events on social media and more. This could help the BCC and other committees get the word out about what they do and any events or initiatives they are hosting. Social media alogorithms often work against us, as we find it challenging to post and engage online frequently. If there is a group effort with more regular postings from different committees and initiatives, this would increase visibility online and more broadly.
* Let them know that BCC is updating the NRI and that it would be helpful to know if residents know of local ecological and historic information that we can include in our town’s NRI.

*Actions:*

Rachelle will report the BCC’s above suggestions to the SWG.

Regarding the request to send a letter to our NH legislators regarding regulating school education to include climate change: Rachelle will enquire with Bruce Caplain, the author of the letter, as to whether he has receive a response from either or both legislators emailed/sent the letter to, Carrie Gendreau and Jared Sullivan.

**BCC priorities**

Margaret suggested we set up a stand-alone meeting to talk about the BCC’s priorities (and capacity), since this item ends up not being discussed at regular meetings due to lack of time.

*Action:* BCC members to set a date and time at the next meeting for a separate meeting to establish where the BCC should and can focus its time and effort going forward.

**Next BCC meetings**

The next meeting will take place on December 14th at 6pm. The location is to be confirmed.

*Action:* Margaret to book Library if available.

**Cheryl made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 7:45pm. Margaret** **seconded. Motion unanimously passed.**

**The meeting was adjourned at 7:45pm.**

*Respectfully submitted by Vivian Winterhoff, Recording Secretary.*