**Bethlehem Conservation Commission (BCC) meeting**

**January 12th, 2024**

**Draft 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:** Suzanne Schott

Cheryl called the meeting to order at 3:05pm.

**Past meeting minutes**

**Cheryl made a motion to approve the December 14th, 2023 minutes with amendments. Betsey seconded. Motion passed unanimously.**

**Treasurer’s report**

Town account balance: -$250; This is because we paid the 2024 dues for the NHACC early. The balance will remain negative until the Town budget has been voted on.

Savings account balance: No balance to report yet; waiting to hear back. Margaret will email the amount to the BCC email address.

*Update sent by Margaret to BCC members by email on 01/15/2024 (added to minutes ex-post):* The Town Savings account balance was $19,403.42 as of 12/31/2023.

*Action:*Margaret will email NHACC and ask if we can obtain 6 copies of the NHACC handbook to be purchased by the BCC.

**Mailbag**

Many of the incoming items are related to projects we will be reviewing at this meeting.

**Eversource transmission line rebuild projects (U-199 and X-178) update**

The Energy Commission will not comment on this application, as it does not fit in its remit, even if individual members might be privately concerned.

Fish and Game: Rachelle spoke with Josh Megyesy who gave some recommendations. NH Heritage Bureau has a data check tool, via which one can submit an 8-page request for a $25 service fee. If we submit the data check, he has to take a look at it and it would mean another pair of eyes looking at the area in which the Eversource work will take place.

NH Natural Heritage Bureau has an archive of lists of what has been identified as threatened or endangered species. There are a handful of endangered species that have been historically present within the last 20 years, and are likely to be in the areas in which will work will take place.

**Ivan made a motion to submit a data check request to the amount of $25 to the NH Heritage Bureau. Margaret seconded. Motion passed unanimously.**

Later in the meeting, Rachelle reported that she had just found out that landowner permission is needed for the data check. A question was raised about whether it would it be a $25 fee per tax map parcel? This gave rise to questions on whether Eversource has to complete a data check themselves. There was some recollection of smooth green snakes and wood turtles having been found in the affected areas, from previous email exchanges and information shared by a private landowner with the BCC. Eversource appears to have completed these checks in 2023.

**Therefore, it was decided to not act on the previous motion.**

Josh had also raised the point to look at buffers for wetlands and vernal pools as prescribed by Town ordinances, which could give us some leverage. While the Town does not currently have such ordinances, this is something that has repeatedly come up in the past and may be something that we can raise during the process of Town Master Plan.

**Biological monitors**

If there are enough interesting indicators, we have more leverage to request biological monitors. Apparently, Eversource decides on who the monitors are.

**Drone work**

Chris sent an email to the person who operates the drones requesting an estimate. Still waiting to hear back. Bill Church received his drone license recently.

**Wetlands impacts investigation by Elise Lawson**

Margaret had not heard back from Elise yet.

**Comment period**

Once Mary Jackson signs the Eversource application, we have 40 days (including weekends) to provide comment. Cheryl spoke with Mary Jackson about email notifications and will let her know to send application notifications to ConservationCommission@bethlehemnh.org.

*Action:*

Rachelle will check in with Josh Megyesy at NH Fish and Game to ask if he has any further recommendations, and how we go about requesting biological monitors on the project.

Chris will email Bill Church to ask about his rates for any drone work.

Cheryl will let Mary Jackson, Town Clerk, know to send application notifications to ConservationCommission@bethlehemnh.org.

**Casella GSL landfill application update (#2023-03259)**

NCABC will be happy to share information with us from its wetlands scientist about the Douglas Drive portion of the application.

Cheryl sent an email declaring our intent to comment on Dec 26th, 2023. A reply was sent to Dalton Conservation Commission by accident.

Emma Burger is going to be our contact regarding this project and the NCES seep project.

The application has since been considered incomplete, and we can request a 40-day extension to our comment period. Casella has 60 days from the letter stating that it was incomplete to submit the missing information (until approximately February 19th, 2024).

Cheryl will keep us updated on progress on this application.

*Action:*
Cheryl will send NHDES an extension request to the BCC’s comment period.

**NCES “seep project” application update (NHDES file #2023-03087 and #** **231117-231)**

NHDES has asked for and received extra time to look into the history of the seep project as a result of our recent letter.

**Annual Report**

*Action:*Rachelle will update the draft with amendments, send to Margaret for a final check and submit to the Town for including in the Annual Report.

**Natural Resources Inventory update**

Elise wanted to know if we wanted her to include the White Mountain National Forest (WMNF) in the NRI and it was decided that we would not include it.

Rachelle will be the BCC contact person for Elise going forward on the NRI.

*Actions:*Margaret will respond to Elise’s latest questions.

**Old Business**

**Bethlehem Sustainability Working Group update**Rachelle reported that they probably won’t be meeting until February 2024.

Discussion around the supporting the climate change education letter to NH legislators. Decided to table it. BCC members can communicate individually with legislators if they wish to.

**Lighting ordinance**
The suggestion is to add a link to the New Residents page on the Town website, alongside links to other ordinances.

The Select Board is the enforcement authority on such issues.

Bob Francis, Bethlehem code officer, could be contacted about this. We can explain that there have been complaints about the lighting ordinance not been followed, and suggest that when he receives a building permit application, applicants be sent the Dark Skies information as part of the response. We can request for him to enforce it on existing buildings.

The current ordinance has room for improvement – but it would be a year out to introduce a new ordinance.

*Action:*
Chris will contact Bob Francis to let him know that the BCC would like him to consider enforcing the lighting ordinance.

**Land Use Change Tax (LUCT) update**

Vivian working on it. She recently found out that it requires going through past annual reports which are (thankfully) available on the UNH extension website.

**Other / New Business**

**New Bethlehem Ammonoosuc River Advisory Committee member**

Andrea Bryant has been appointed to the Ammonoosuc River Advisory Committee.

*Action:*
Cheryl will send Andrea the letters that we sent to DES regarding the oingoing projects.

**Phone numbers**

*Action:*Vivian will send phone numbers to BCC members.

**Member terms**

Cheryl’s term ends March 31st, 2024.

**Vivian made a motion to renew Chery’s term starting April 1st, 2024 and ending April 1st, 2027. Betsey seconded. Motion unanimously passed.**

**Chair responsibilities**

Vivian will hand over writing minutes *or* handling the BCC email inbox and compiling agendas after the BCC’s March meeting. Revisit at February meeting to decide who will take on either role.

**Local event**

Chris Schadler Littleton Public Library Tue Jan 16th at 6pm giving a talk about Coyotes.

**Scholarship application**

**Next meeting days and times**

Going forward until further notice, BCC members agreed to meet on the ***third Wednesday of the month, starting at 5pm.*** Therefore, the next meetings will take place on Wednesday Feb 21st, March 20th, April 17th at 5pm going forward.

We can revisit the meeting schedule in May when Rachelle’s schedule changes again for a June meeting.

*Action:* Margaret will check if we can get the Library room on those dates.

**Public comment**

No public comment.

**Cheryl made a motion to adjourn at 4.38pm Rachelle seconded. Motion passed unanimously.**

*Respectfully submitted by Vivian Winterhoff, Recording Secretary.*