Bethlehem Conservation Commission Minutes

November 21, 2024

Bethlehem Town Hall

(Minutes by Chris Jensen)

Present: Veronica Morris (select-board liaison), Cheryl Jensen, Rachelle Lyons, Betsey Phillips, Margaret Gale, Ivan Ash.

Joanne Jones and Chris Jensen (humble alternates).

The meeting began at 5:04 p.m.

**Minutes**

Ms. Lyons made a motion to approve the minutes from October 17, 2024. It was seconded by Ms. Phillips and unanimously passed.

**Treasurer’s Report**

Ms. Gale reported that the appropriation account had $750 and the savings account had $16,661 and six cents. The savings total was after Elise Lawson was paid for her consulting work.

Ms. Jensen made a motion to transfer the $750 to the savings account. It was seconded by Ms. Gale and unanimously approved.

Ms. Gale said she would check on how much the commission will be getting for the land use change tax, which is basically property coming out of current use.

**Lighting and Sign Ordinances**

Ms. Jensen briefly described her presentation to the planning board. She said the planners had no objections to the proposed changes and agreed to put the changes on the ballot for town meeting. Ms. Jensen noted there will be a need for letters-to-the-editor explaining the changes and that existing lighting will be grandfathered.

**Town Forest**

Despite her humble, alternate status, Ms. Jones received universal acclaim for her research on the town forest, including a timeline and comparison of boundaries from two different surveys. This is a prelude to work on trails.

The commission agreed that the role of the town forest is so important that the commission should do some work on it at each meeting. The topic for the meeting on Dec. 19th will be the purpose of the town forest.

Ms. Gale also noted that the Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust (ACT) trail builder, Conor McCourt, would probably be available to help – outside his duties with ACT.

**Priorities**

The commission agreed to add the town forest to the priority list. The other items on that list are wetlands protection; natural resource inventory; Adopt-A-Spot and the Bethlehem Master Plan.

There was a discussion about who would handle those priorities. Ms. Jensen said that she expects to be busy the first four months of 2025 and will have a limited amount of time for BCC projects. She said after 17 years, she no longer plans to work on wetlands permit applications.

Ms. Morris said for at least the next four months she would be happy to keep an eye on permit applications.

Ms. Jones, a humble alternate, said she would take on the town forest.

Ms. Lyons is keeping track of the Natural Resource Inventory.

It was agreed that assigning commission members to the master plan could wait a little since work won’t begin until next year. The deadline for its completion is the end of 2026. There were no volunteers for the Adopt-A-Spot program and it was suggested that perhaps someone who is not on the commission might be recruited.

**Annual Report Draft**

The commission thanked Mr. Ash for his extensive, detailed work on the annual report. He agreed to try and slim it down to better meet the format of the annual report.

**New Permit Applications**

Ms. Morris briefed the commission on a shoreland protection permit for a proposed house on River Road and an alteration-of-terrain permit for a new ski lift at the Omni Mt. Washington Resort.

The commission agreed that the house on River Road would be so close to the river that it raises serious concerns about environmental issues including septic. Ms. Jensen made a motion to inform the state that the commission reserves the right to comment. The motion was seconded by Mr. Ash and unanimously passed. Ms. Morris said she would handle the notification.

Ms. Morris said that the Omni work is a replacement for an existing ski lift and the plans promise standard environmental protections such as erosion control. The commission saw no need to comment.

**Updates**

Ms. Morris said the Eversource X-178 project is still before the Public Utilities Commission and the Site Evaluation Committee. No decisions have been made.

**Next Meeting:**

The next meeting will be December 19th.

The meeting adjourned at 6:49 p.m.