Bethlehem Conservation Commission Minutes

Dec. 19, 2024

Bethlehem Town Hall

Minutes by Chris Jensen

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

Joanne Jones and Chris Jensen (alternates)

Guests: Rosalind Page, Barry Zitser, Paul Karpawich

Ms. Jensen called the meeting to order at 5:02 p.m.

**ACT Conservation Land in Bethlehem**

Rosalind Page, the executive director of the Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust, wanted to let the commission know that the non-profit is considering purchasing a 747-acre tract fronting the Ammonoosuc River in Bethlehem.

Ms. Page said that the land was attractive because it is a large, non-fragmented parcel that includes about two and one-half miles along the river. She said ACT is having the property appraised and is conducting an environmental assessment. If there are no issues, ACT would go ahead with fundraising.

She said the parcel would be used as conservation land, but snowmobiling would still be allowed. But there would be no other motorized vehicles. While ACT is a non-profit and is not required to pay taxes, Ms. Page said ACT would do so.

Ms. Lyons said environmental-wildlife reports indicate “it is a fantastic piece of property.”

Ms. Page asked if the commission would provide a letter-of-support. Ms. Jensen made a motion to provide a letter of “strong support,” which was seconded by Mr. Ash and unanimously approved.

**Plastic Resolution**

Mr. Zitser and Mr. Karpawich presented a proposal asking the commission to support a request to the select board. It would ask the select board to take actions supporting the reduction of plastic in town.

Ms. Morris said she had discussed the proposal “with a colleague and we agreed that the select board would not take it up.”

“It is not the town’s business to tell private citizens what to do,” Ms. Morris said. . If private citizens want to work to reduce plastics, that would be great, she said. But it is not the town’s role.

Mr. Zitser said this would simply show that the town supports voluntarily reducing the use of plastic, which is an important, environmental issue. “There is nothing that forces anybody to do anything,” he said. But the select board’s endorsement could have a positive impact ranging from making grant money available to residents voluntarily taking action.

It is not that the select board does not care, Ms. Morris said, but the board is overwhelmed with other efforts

Ms. Jensen raised the possibility that the conservation commission could undertake the project, but the issue is that the commission is already extremely busy.

**Minutes**

Ms. Gale made a motion to approve the Nov. 21st minutes as amended. The motion was seconded by Ms. Phillips and unanimously approved.

**Treasurer’s Report**

Ms. Gale reported that the commission has received $2,973 in the land-use-change tax. In addition, the commission has $17,411 and 78 cents in the savings account. That does not include the land-use-change tax. There is nothing in the commission’s appropriation (checking) account.

**Lighting and Sign Zoning Changes**

Ms. Lyons said the planning board was receptive to the changes proposed by the commission. A public hearing before the planning board is scheduled on January 8th before they can go on the town warrant in March.

**Annual Report**

Ms. Morris suggested adding a paragraph noting the commission’s support of land conservation, including ACT’s effort on the Ammonoosuc and the Winterhoff property. Mr. Jensen offered to write a paragraph about that. Mr. Ash suggested an edit. The commission thanked Mr. Ash for compiling the information.

**Shoreline Protection Ammonoosuc House**

There was a discussion about the proposal for a new house at 476 River Road, within the Shoreland Protection buffer on the Ammonoosuc River. Ms. Morris said DES has asked the owners for extensive, additional information. Ms. Jensen made a motion to authorize Ms. Morris to send a letter to DES saying the commission is familiar with the area and the BCC objects for reasons including septic, loss of trees and an increase in impervious surface. Ms. Lyons seconded the motion, which unanimously passed.

**Next Meeting**

The next meeting was scheduled for either January 16th or the January 21st at 5 p.m. Ms. Gale agreed to see if the library would be available.

**Adjournment**

Mr. Ash made a motion to adjourn, which was seconded by Ms. Jensen and unanimously approved at 6:40 p.m.