

Approved December 13, 2007

DURHAM CONSERVATION COMMISSION Special Meeting Minutes of Thursday November 29, 2007 Durham Town Hall – Council Chambers 7:00 PM

Regular Members Present: Cynthia Belowski, Beryl Harper, Julian Smith, George Thomas, Jim Hellen, Stephen Roberts

Alternate Members Present: Dwight Baldwin

Regular Members Excused: Duane Hyde

Alternate Members Excused: Robin Vranicar, Peter Smith

Public Attendees: None

1. Call the meeting to order and acknowledge absentees and those with voting authority.

Cynthia Belowski called the meeting to order at 7:05 pm. It was noted that Dwight Baldwin would vote this evening in place of regular member Duane Hyde.

Stephen Roberts moved to accept the agenda as written. This was seconded by Jim Hellen and approved unanimously.

There was a brief discussion regarding the role of the alternates and if they could enter into discussion on subjects that they would not be voting on. It was decided that alternates would be able to speak to issues they are not voting on.

2. Update on the status of the Roselawn Farm Project – Cynthia Belowski reported that the full appraisal price came in at a higher rate than expected. The additional amount will bring the total to \$170,000 (previously \$163,150) for the purchase of the Conservation easement on Roselawn Farm. Madbury is requesting permission to expend the same amount of funds for their portion of the purchase costs. There is also an additional \$9000 needed for transaction costs. The Durham Town Council unanimously agreed that they would like to see these funds expended from the Conservation Fund. The Commission discussed the need to hold a public hearing at their next regularly scheduled meeting on this topic and requested Dea Brickner Wood be present at the meeting .

Jim Hellen moved that the Conservation Commission conduct a public hearing at its next regular meeting on Thursday December 13, 2007 at 7:00 pm in the Council Chambers at the Durham Town Hall relative to the expenditure of \$170,000 to participate with the Town of Madbury and the Strafford Rivers Conservancy, in acquiring two conservation easements encompassing approximately 67.2 acres of property on the Roselawn Farm located in the Towns of Durham

and Madbury, between Perkins Road and the Route 4 Bypass. This was Seconded by Stephen Roberts and approved unanimously.

The Commission then discussed the feelings of the Town Council on this subject and Julian Smith reported that he felt there was a consensus of approval among the Council. The Commission also discussed the Town of Madbury's feelings regarding this project and how they would be funding the project if approved. It was felt that the Town of Madbury would be putting the project up to a vote at a special meeting and none of the Commission members were aware of how Madbury's funding would be arranged for the project.

3. Discussion and preparation for the upcoming workshop with the Town Council

regarding the disposition of future land use change tax funds -- Cynthia Belowski reviewed with the Commission that they may be meeting with the Town Council in the near future to discuss the Commission's plans for using the Conservation Fund monies. She suggested that this meeting be used to discuss how the money will be best used. Cynthia reminded the Commission that the Town Council would like to see the Commission more active in managing the lands. With this in mind, she also suggested that there should be a discussion regarding conservation planning. Beryl Harper noted that Neil Niman (Town Council Chair) felt that the three priority areas are; 1) stewardship of land, 2) water and 3) the library. She suggested taking these in to account and addressing them where possible. Jim Hellen noted that Neil is also concerned with recreation. Cynthia suggested that this could be discussed and mentioned during the discussion on management of land. Dwight Baldwin noted that community farming may be an idea for some of the easement land. Stephen Roberts said that he felt there were 5 priority areas: 1) acquisition of land, 2) stewardship, 3) water, 4) farmland, and 5) recreation. He strongly suggested that the Commission put together specific uses for the LUCT funds and that these also be included in the Annual report as well as presented to the Town Council. Jim Hellen discussed the need to have funds available in the Conservation fund for future unknown acquisitions. Cynthia noted that the Master Plan identifies possible areas of acquisition. Stephen suggested that this should be repeated in the Commission's annual report as well. Beryl suggested that it is a high priority for the Commission to work with other organizations and/or partnerships to leverage the monies being spent. This type of leveraging has been done for the last six Durham Conservation projects. Beryl noted that it is imperative that some funds are left unexpended in the Conservation Fund, so that they are available when opportunities arise (the Roselawn Farm project is an example). The Commission then began a discussion as to how the lands they are responsible for are managed and whether they are capable of this or if professional management is needed.

The Commission reviewed the list of Town owned or Easement Lands and decided which properties are important for management – need focused management and/or easements that need to be monitored. Cynthia noted that a professional may be needed to do a management plan on some of these properties and that the NH Estuaries Project has a grant round in December that offers technical assistance to communities to help with management plans. This would include up to \$8000 to be used towards a professional writing a management plan for a piece(s) of land. Cynthia suggested that this would be a good way to leverage the Conservation Funds being expended to pay a professional to write a management plan for the prioritized properties. The

order of priority for properties was listed as: 1) Longmarsh Preserve, 2) Doe Farm, 3) Spruce Hole, 4) Wagon Hill.

The Commission then discussed the fact that Longmarsh Preserve is part of a larger conservation area that has several owners. The members wondered if the management plans would deal only with the Durham portion of the property. Cynthia suggested that the plans would deal with the Durham portion only, but would take into account the overall land, thereby helping with the larger management of the land.

The Commission then began a discussion on trails on these lands. Stephen suggested that it would be helpful to have an update of the mapping of these lands. Cynthia noted that within the management plan of these lands it may be suggested that an updated trail brochure be published. Mapping would be required for this and the LUCT funds could be used to pay for that, as well as to restore/improve trails, removal of invasive species and improvements of erosion control on these lands.

The next topic of discussion was the monitoring of easements. The Commission noted that some of the easements that they are primary holders on are relatively small and do not require a large amount of effort to monitor. However, some of the easements are larger and will require a professional effort to monitor and report on. It was determined that Fogg Farm is the major concern. This may require professional monitoring. Cynthia noted that the Town is the primary easement holder on the back section of the Roselawn Farm project and that they will need to pay for a baseline to be done and decide how monitoring will be done. It was noted that the Town is listed as secondary on a few easements. Cynthia stated that for these easements the Town (Commission) should be receiving annual reports from the primary holder.

Julian brought up the topic of the property know as "Town Landing". Cynthia noted that this piece of property has never shown up on the Commission's lists and that it is managed by DPW. Stephen reminded the members that the Council asked the Commission to take an interest in the town landing project. He explained that the Council feels it is under utilized and could be developed as a recreational area. The Commission then engaged in a discussion regarding their role as defined by state statute. Cynthia noted that the Conservation Fund monies should not be used to develop parks it should be used for natural resources and that the Commission should work together with the Parks and Recreation Commission on appropriate use of lands. If the Council would like to talk about restoration of the Town Landing area the Commission would be happy to look in to that possibility. The Commission decided that "Town Landing" should be added to the list under; Town Owned Land under the subheading, 'Parks'.

The Commission briefly discussed the land donated to the Town by Mrs. Milne. Julian will look in to the specifics of this land and the endowment for management and report back to the Commission.

Stephen brought up the topic of prime wetlands being a responsibility of the Conservation Commission. Cynthia replied that the Commission should keep this in mind during the planning process and see where the wetlands are and if they need to be targeted for protection. Cynthia asked when the report was done by the trails subcommittee (Conservation Commission members

on the subcommittee were Beryl Harper, Jim Hellen and George Thomas). Beryl responded that a report was done on May 5, 2005 and presented to the Council. The subcommittee visited every piece of property and made recommendations to the Town Council as to what should be done, including the recommendation of selling some pieces of property.

Beryl reported that the LUCT fund revenue averages less than \$15,000 per year. She noted that currently the balance in the Conservation Fund is \$386,792.00, after the expenditures for Roselawn Farm (\$179,000) and the \$70,000 earmarked for Jackson's Landing*.

**Note: Current Conservation Fund balance is \$635,792 - \$179,000 (Roselawn Farm) - \$70,000 (Jackson's Landing) = \$386,792.00*

In summary, Cynthia will prepare a quick outline of what the Commission wishes to expend the Conservation Funds on. She will email this list to the Commission members for their review.

Julian distributed to the Commission members a report written by the College Brook Restoration Work Group. Cynthia noted that a discussion of comments and feedback regarding the group's report will be on the agenda for the Commission's next meeting.

Beryl Harper reported that the Trails Subcommittee will be officially disbanding as it has fulfilled its original charge and should no longer be listed as an agenda line item.

Next regular meeting -- The next regular meeting of the Durham Conservation Commission will be held on December 13, 2007 at 7:00 pm at Town Council Chambers in Town Hall.

4. Adjournment

Jim Hellen moved to adjourn at 9:33 pm. This was seconded by Stephen Roberts and approved unanimously.

The November 29, 2007 special meeting of the Durham Conservation Commission was adjourned at 9:33 pm.

Respectfully submitted by,

Sue Lucius
Durham Conservation Commission Recording Secretary