

These minutes were approved at the January 22, 2024 meeting.

DURHAM CONSERVATION COMMISSION
Monday, October 23, 2023
DURHAM TOWN HALL, COUNCIL CHAMBERS
7:00 p.m.

MEMBERS PRESENT: Jake Kritzer (Chair); Erin Hardie Hale (Vice Chair), Richard Kelley (Planning Board Rep); Nick Lanzer (Alternate); Neil Slepian; Roanne Robbins; Dwight Trueblood (Alternate) and Carden Welsh (Town Council Rep).

MEMBERS ABSENT: John Nachilly and Town Planner Michael Behrendt

I. Call to Order

Chair Jake Kritzer called the meeting to order at 7:02 p.m.

II. Land Acknowledgement Statement

The Chair read the Land Acknowledgement statement as adopted by the Town's Human Rights Commission.

III. Roll Call and Seating of Alternates

The Chair seated Alternate Dwight Trueblood as a voting member this evening.

IV. Approval of Agenda

Mr. Kelley MOVED to approve the agenda as submitted; SECONDED by Mr. Welsh; APPROVED unanimously, 7-0, Motion carries.

V. Public Comments: There were none this evening.

VI. Land Stewardship Update. Sara Callaghan, Land Stewardship Coordinator.

Ms. Callaghan has been working on budget proposals for next year. She distributed a memo to the Commission earlier today about previously committed funds that she's proposing to uncommit and return to either the Conservation Fund or the Land Stewardship Patrons Trust Fund. Some projects have been completed and others are not going forward. These include:

- **Doe Farm Trail Bridge Project:** Completed.

- **Moat Island Bridge** – Ms. Callaghan said she’s unclear about the necessity for the project which was first proposed in 2019. The bridge washed out, but it’s in an area that is dry most of the year.

She added the Town is seeking to discourage trips to Moat Island by those camping illegally or drinking. The Police were called this summer to clear out campers. In her view, there should be a boardwalk across a wetland from one part of Moat Island to the other instead.

Mr. Welsh said he’s removed trash bags filled with beer cans from the site. Members discussed if *not* building the bridge would impede legitimate hikers who want to get to the island – but they reached consensus the project could be re-visited at a later date when the necessity and/or goals for a replacement bridge are better understood.

- **Long Marsh Preserve Replacement Bridge** (Eagle Scout project): \$750 was originally committed; However, Ms. Callaghan said she’s reached out to the Eagle Scout several times and he’s unable to complete the project.

She’s working on an alternate proposal to the Land Stewardship Committee that is more comprehensive and would address multiple crossings. It may involve fundraising or seeking grants.

- **Bridge at Wagon Hill Farm** by Eagle Scout (Finnian Harvey) – Completed.
- **Uncommit funds for Ellen Snyder to work on invasive species at Doe Farm, Thompson Forest and Oyster River.** Ellen did wild parsnip work at Oyster River Forest this year and said she does not want or expect to be paid.

Mr. Trueblood noted the total funds requested to be uncommitted is \$3,282.98.

Mr. Welsh MOVED to uncommit the funds as presented by Ms. Callaghan; SECONDED by Ms. Hale; APPROVED unanimously, 7-0, Motion carries.

Ms. Callaghan then raised another outstanding budget item regarding Pike Property. The Commission originally committed \$35K for acquisition, however the project came in under budget and there’s \$16,050 remaining in that line item. She’s proposing to uncommit the funds for acquisition and re-commit them for stewardship of the property.

She noted the Commission previously agreed to a Land Stewardship Plan for Pike Property, which included:

- Removing old fencing and obstructions in the field;
- Managing invasives;
- Updating the kiosk at Thompson Forest to include one big map of both properties and information about Pike.

Ms. Callaghan stressed that it's best practice to include funds for long-term stewardship when acquiring new land. This was her experience with the Society for the Protection of NH Forests and what she would advocate for Durham going forward.

Lengthy discussion followed. Chair Kritzer said it's unclear if \$16K is needed for the Pike Property and he's uneasy about tying the funds specifically to the property. He would advocate for putting the money back into the Conservation Fund and making decisions project by project, as is typically done.

Ms. Callaghan doesn't yet have the itemized cost of stewardship projects for Pike Property. Discussion centered around whether she should be granted the \$16K to use at her discretion; if funds should be reserved for Pike Property only or if the money should go back into the general fund and be allocated for all properties as needed. Members agreed that in either case they would expect to approve itemized expenditures.

There was discussion about deferring the decision until next month to give Ms. Callaghan time to get cost estimates for the work needed.

Mr. Kelley MOVED to uncommit the remaining balance of the Pike Property acquisition monies of \$16,050 from the Conservation Commission Fund; SECONDED by Mr. Welsh and after lengthy discussion on the motion, APPROVED unanimously, 7-0, Motion carries. (Note: the vote occurred at 1:07 on the D-Cat video, after Ms. Hale's motion below was made and withdrawn.)

Some points during discussion:

- This may be an opportunity for the Commission to adopt a new practice of allocating specific funds to stewardship when acquiring new land. (Mr. Trueblood)
- Mr. Welsh asked if there are potentially other funding sources available for stewardship of the property.

- The Commission could consider a policy that would provide for any unspent acquisition funds to go toward stewardship for all future purchases. (Chair Kritzer)

Vice Chair Hale MOVED to authorize the expenditure of the remaining \$16,050 on the Pike Property Project as long as the Conservation Commission approves each expenditure before it's made; SECONDED by Mr. Trueblood, however motion was withdrawn after further discussion.

Continuing with the Land Stewardship Report, Ms. Callaghan requested \$3K for the mowing of the fields at the Pike Property and Thompson Forest. Mr. Nachilly had previously done some of the work, but his equipment broke down and his availability is now limited.

Ms. Callaghan received an estimate for the work from a Newmarket company, which will involve removing some rocks along the access way first. The Town's DPW doesn't have the proper equipment or time to do this.

After discussion, ***Mr. Trueblood MOVED to authorize the expenditure of \$3K from the Conservation Commission Fund for the mowing of fields at the Pike Property and Thompson Forest; SECONDED by Mr. Welsh; APPROVED unanimously, 7-0, Motion carries.***

Ms. Callaghan said she's spoken with Administrator Selig about budgeting \$15K toward survey costs each year and he agreed. Some town-owned properties don't have a proper survey and they believe corner monuments should be set.

VII. UNH Master Plan. Select representative from Conservation Commission to join UNH Master Plan Land Use Committee.

Chair Kritzer asked if any member is interested in serving on the UNH Master Plan Land Use Committee.

Mr. Slepian said he would be interested if it's a full voting position. It's unclear if this is the case. Vice Chair Hale, who teaches at UNH, said she'll get in touch with the contact person to get more information. She's interested in serving if meeting times don't conflict with her teaching schedule.

VIII. Conservation Commission Initiatives. Discussion of proposal from commission members regarding prospective projects, educational programs, and improvements in the application review process.

Vice Chair Hale had asked each member to come prepared with ideas for the Commission's priorities in the upcoming year. Given the late hour, she proposed to table it for this evening.

The Chair asked if they could share their individual lists for now without discussion. Following is a summary of ideas shared:

Mr. Kelley: Identify opportunities to modify culverts and remove barriers to stream flow; Implement best practices for land management and monitor municipally-owned properties.

Mr. Slepian: Advocate for trail connectivity with Lee and Newmarket; Under Permitted Use B – when any conditions change after review by the Planning Board, bring the project back to the CC; Use Friday Updates more effectively to let community know about the CC work or other relevant conservation issues.

Mr. Welsh: Invite PREP to give a presentation about their work to improve and preserve the estuary; Adopt a practice to take six areas of concern in the Natural Resources Master Plan and track progress; Look into implications of a stormwater utility tax, similar to what Portland (ME) has adopted.

Mr. Trueblood: Promote conservation activities more effectively in Friday Updates; Address issue raised by Mr. Rasmussen re: having the Conservation Commission provide the Planning Board with more information about environmental impacts on projects under review; For better planning purposes, identify and use maps of wildlife corridors, wetlands and areas with invasive species.

Mr. Kritzer: Revisit a comprehensive list developed by previous chair Sally Needell that outlined how to evaluate the environmental impact of a project; Integrate the Oyster River Master Plan with education on dam removal and other information on the river; Revisit work done by a sub-group on wildlife corridors and possibly expand the effort with a citizen science tool.

Ms. Hale: Look into creating a connected greenway, building on any work done by UNH and tapping into their Master Land Use Plan; Reach out to Parks & Rec Department to see if there are collaborative projects that could be done; Create a map of environmentally interesting sites in town to be used by visitors and schools, etc. Continue to bring in speakers each year.

Ms. Robbins: Look deeper into connectivity and wildlife corridors (building on previous initiative). Invite the community to get involved in phenology; Provide

practical ways residents can implement suggestions made by Dr. Tallamy; Consider expanding efforts to include a facebook page or other avenues in order to make it easier for the community to engage with the Commission's efforts.

Ms. Callaghan: In her role as Land Stewardship Coordinator, she's been asked about invasive species at the Mill Pond Dam site. The Oyster River and College Brook move seeds for invasive species downstream and need to be addressed. She's planning to do some workshops and could contribute to Friday Updates to further educate residents on invasive species.

Mr. Lanzer: Said he didn't prepare for the assignment, but he would advocate for a bigger focus on invasive species to include workshops for homeowners. Give residents information and tools to control them and emphasize their properties are part of the larger eco-system.

The Chair brought up the issue of how to archive and track all the ideas, possibly using google docs or google sheets to help with follow-through. This will be looked into further.

IX. 2024 Conservation Commission Schedule. TABLED

Mr. Kelley and Ms. Callaghan both left the meeting at this point.

X. Review of Minutes. August 28, 2023

Mr. Welsh said he sent minor edits to Karen [Edwards] on Town staff.

Mr. Welsh MOVED to accept the minutes of August 28, 2023 as amended; SECONDED by Mr. Trueblood; APPROVED unanimously, 6-0, Motion carries.

XI. Other Business – None

XII. Roundtable. Updates from Conservation Commission members.

Reporting on Town Council activities, Mr. Welsh said changes were made to the Housing Task Force initiative to reflect more environmental concerns. He also reported:

- Paul Rasmussen expressed kudos to the Conservation Commission's sub-committee on the SPOD and WCOD.
- The cost to build the bridge at Wagon Hill is \$140K and doesn't include everything wanted. It's been difficult to get contractors.

- Town Council has accepted almost all the funding to remove the dam and build a fish ladder on the dam upstream by the reservoir. A number of people have done a tremendous job on the dam removal project.

Reporting on the Sub-Committee on the SPOD and WCOD, Mr. Trueblood said the Committee is making slow and steady progress on updating the wetland and shoreland district. He expects something to be ready for review by the CC early next year.

In other news, Mr. Kritzer shared he had a paper accepted on gray fox denning behavior in the *Journal of Threatened Taxa*. He explained his two-year observations and video of gray fox near his home and how the publication came about with the help of graduate students.

The Chair gave a shout out to Durham's Cross Country middle school teams. He congratulated the girls' team for their first-place finish and the boys for a third-place finish at the statewide tournament last week.

XIII. Adjournment;

Mr. Welsh MOVED to adjourn at 9:30 p.m.; SECONDED by Ms. Hale, APPROVED unanimously, 6-0, Motion carries.

Respectfully submitted,
Lucie Bryar, Minute Taker
Durham Conservation Commission

Note: These written minutes are intended only as a general summary of the meeting. For more complete information, please refer to the DCAT22 On Demand videotape of the entire proceedings on the town of Durham website.