

LAND STEWARDSHIP SUBCOMMITTEE

Virtual Meeting via Zoom
Thursday, September 10, 2020
8:30 AM

APPROVED MINUTES

Chair Ann Welsh called the meeting to order at 8:30 AM

ROLL CALL ATTENDANCE: All joined remotely via Zoom: Larry Brickner-Wood, Gale Carey, John Carroll, Mike Everngam, Rachel Gasowski, Dennis Meadows, Rich Reine, Todd Selig, Sally Tobias, Ann Welsh. Ellen Snyder joined at 8:40 AM. Larry Brickner-Wood left the meeting around 9 AM. Rachel Gasowski left at 9:35 AM. Rich Reine left the meeting around 10 AM.

MEETING PREAMBLE: Chair Ann Welsh read the “Meeting Preamble During COVID-19 Emergency.”

MEETING AGENDA approved by roll call

KENNY ROTNER REMEMBRANCE

Dennis Meadows mentioned Kenny’s special relationship with the proposed Oyster River Bridge, as a Town Councilor, School Board member, and LSC member. His family said that donations can be made to the Town for the bridge project. Dennis said there have been 100+ contributions. A plaque will be placed at the bridge in remembrance of Kenny. Todd S. described a planned service at WHF on Sunday, Sept 13th. The members said that Kenny will be missed. Todd S. noted that at a recent meeting there was a big void because Kenny was not there.

AUGUST 13, 2020 MEETING MINUTES. Motion by Mike Everngam, Second John Carroll, approved as written by roll call vote; Abstained: Larry Brickner-Wood and Gale Carey.

OYSTER RIVER BRIDGE UPDATE

Dennis M. stated that everything is in place to finish the bridge. A small group (including Ann Welsh and Gale Carey) is helping to fundraise—about half the money needed for the bridge and abutment construction and associated costs has been raised. An escrow account has been created to cover the costs. The Town Council will vote at its September 14th meeting to allow Administrator Selig to sign contracts for the project, with a goal to have the bridge in place by the end of the year. Administrator Selig asked if neighbor’s concerns have been allayed. Dennis M. feels that what is feasible has been incorporated to reduce noise as much as possible.

DOE FARM

Mike Everngam described a planned winter timber harvest at Doe Farm, which would be managed by consulting forester Charlie Moreno. The goal is to remove the declining red pine (due to red pine scale) and a selective harvest of other trees to make it a marketable logging operation. The red pine will likely die within 2 years. Ann W. had provided some information via email about red pine scale and the planned harvest. There will likely be some residual impact to the forest, as with any logging operation, but the impacts will disappear within a few years. The consensus is that Doe Farm should be closed while the timber harvest is underway. Ellen S. suggested invasive plant control should occur pre- and post-harvest to continue to reduce impact to the regenerating forest. A winter harvest should also help reduce exposure to bare ground, which will limit ability of invasive seeds to take hold. Ellen S. and Mike E. will draft something for a Friday Update as we get farther along in the planning. Once harvest is underway there will be signs at the entrance. John Carroll asked if this would interfere with the EAB study; it will not as

that will conclude in October. Mike E. said there is enough money in the Doe Farm Trust to cover Charlie Moreno's initial costs and noted that managing the forest is an important mission of the Trustee's fiduciary responsibility for Doe Farm. We hope that the harvest will provide some profit that can be put back into managing the property.

MOTION to support the Trustee's decision to move forward with a planned timber harvest at Doe Farm, by Mike Everngam, Second by Sally Tobias, all in favor by roll call vote.

John Carroll mentioned that a wire fence is down along the trail/railroad track where the trail bends to the left and feels that it should be repaired. Ellen S. noted that this fence has been down for a while as people keep walking onto the tracks at that location and that it is difficult to stop. John suggest that we at least say something to the RR; Mike E. suggested relaying the concern to the PD. Mike E. said the Durham Police Department (PD) has authority to enforce trespass on the RR. Ellen S. stated that there is a site walk with PD and Fire/Safety at Doe Farm on Friday, Sept 11th at 10 AM to assess emergency access to Moat Island and discuss ways to reduce violations/vandalism. It is difficult to enforce violations; will focus on better signage.

Mike hosted a meeting on September 2nd with PD and Safety, along with Ann W., Ellen S., John Nachilly, Todd S, and Rachel G. to discuss Doe Farm issues. Mike E. described the goal and objectives of Doe Farm as developed by the Trustees – four objectives: rapid public safety response plan, encourage Doe Farm as an educational resource, identify processes to follow-up on vandalism and damage – maybe hire off-duty Police, develop process for permitting of activities that are allowed but require a permit, including camping and campfires. Ellen S. added that it has only been Scouts who have gotten a permit in the past. There is no framework for someone applying, so we are going to flesh out a framework/criteria for when a permit should be issued and how campers should behave when on-site. One parameter could be that an applicant should be a civic or educational group. The site that has been permitted is on the mainland, not on Moat Island. Ann W. noted that because it is hard for PD to enforce, it is important that we have volunteers to keep eyes on the property and that current impacts may decline once we are past COVID.

MERRICK BRIDGE UPDATE

Ellen S. stated that granite abutments are in place. The next step is to order the lumber and find time to build given the COVID restrictions. The granite slabs are a reuse of this material, provided by DPW and ORCSD.

OTHER BRIDGE PROJECTS

Ellen S. reported that there are other trail bridge projects in the works at Wagon Hill Farm, Beaudette (LaRoche Brook), Longmarsh, and Stevens Woods. The Town submitted a moose plate grant application for a trail/bridge re-build at WHF, based on the overall trail/bridge assessment done earlier this year. Waiting on an engineering design for LaRoche. Looking at a possible re-design for Longmarsh or continue to rely on bog bridge repairs every few years, which would be the most cost effective. Still waiting to build bridges at Stevens Woods.

Dennis M.said that a trail counter would be helpful to determine how much effort should be dedicated to specific trails. Strafford Regional Planning Commission (SRPC) placed a trail counter at WHF based on a request from Rachel G. Ellen S. suggested that another good site would be Longmarsh.

Todd S. reported that the Great Bay/Rotary is looking for new projects to help with.

STEWARDSHIP BUDGET PROPOSAL

Ellen described a proposed draft stewardship budget for 2021 that she provided via email prior to the meeting. She reviewed the proposed projects for various properties including Doe Farm, Oyster River Forest, Thompson Forest, Jackson's Landing, Longmarsh Preserve, Milne Nature Sanctuary, and Stevens Woods. She noted some routine projects are done by DPW as in-kind, such as snowplowing of parking areas. Ellen S. noted that the Thompson Forest parking area is a little tight for snowplowing; Rich R. will talk with Ellen S. about the various snowplow sites.

A few highlights of the discussion: Mike E. said that at Doe Farm best to wait on any new bridges until after the harvest. Ellen said that most bridges are already in place so loggers will go around, and some areas will not be harvested including Moat Island. At Oyster River Forest, Ellen S. said that beaver activity on the main stem of the Oyster River is backing up water onto the trail by the existing bridge; we will need to investigate solutions. Other trail work is needed at ORF; the clay soil treads are difficult to manage. At Longmarsh Preserve we are focused on updated trail and kiosk signs and will evaluate the class VI road to see what improvements are needed to enhance as a biking and pedestrian passage. Looking into better parking at Longmarsh at both ends; waiting to hear from abutter about a potential new parking area on their property. Ellen S. asked about improving some on-road parking as well, as long as no blocking of neighbor's yard/driveway. Dennis M. asked about opportunities for parking beyond the gate on town property. Ellen S. said that Town property is much farther down; Fish and Game owns the closer land. At Milne Nature Sanctuary, shifted toward letting natural vegetation grow and not do any more intensive plantings, which is more sustainable. At Stevens Woods, DPW will build a parking area next year; then we will build a kiosk.

Mike E. mentioned the Dorothy Wilcox Trust which has some funds dedicated for Town Landing up to the Milne Nature Sanctuary and around Mill Pond. Ellen S. asked about the current status of the Mill Pond. Todd S. reported that consultant is working with Town on several possible options, still in discussion by Town Council. Ellen S. suggested that there is invasive work needed around Mill Pond, but best to wait on when a decision is made before a major effort. Mike E. also mentioned a Smith Town Improvement Trust to improve roadsides, which has not been used for several years. Ellen S. suggested knotweed control

Mike E. asked about the status of cottontail project on Wagon Hill North. Ann W. mentioned a harvest that was done there in 2014 in collaboration with NH Fish and Game to create early successional habitat. NHFG continued some invasive treatment for a few years and was to restore the trail through the property. Ann W. will check with NHFG on the current status as currently looks to be overgrown. Ellen S. noted that it is a hard site to manage due to the density of invasive plants and need to assess how much the site is used and how will it be kept open as it would take a lot of effort. Dennis M. noted that trail counts can help guide decisions. Mike E. had raised the question about Wagon Hill North as possibly suitable for green burial, but he wanted to understand the current management status.

Ellen S. described a few big picture topics/ideas: roadside knotweed control townwide; overall forest management planning on all Town-owned properties, especially to consider carbon storage and sequestration, which would provide some guidance on how to manage the forests. Ann W. note the recent sustainability report completed by Mary Potts, UNH Sustainability Intern; Todd S. will forward to everyone and discuss at next meeting; overall early successional habitat management across town properties-these sites are ephemeral so need some manner of active management.

VOLUNTEER TRAIL STEWARDS

Ellen S. noted that several people are serving as Volunteer Trail Stewards for Town owned lands, including LSC member Gale Carey. These volunteers take care of small trail issues and report larger issues to Ellen S. Ellen S. thanked volunteers. Gale C. suggested putting something in Friday Update to recruit more volunteers.

CONSERVATION EASEMENT MONITORING

Ellen S. reported on status of annual conservation easement monitoring. Several folks are volunteering to assist this year.

LSC AT-LARGE MEMBERS

The approval of the three At-Large LSC members will be voted on at the next Conservation Commission meeting to reaffirm these members. When these terms are up, then other people can apply. The slate is Ann Welsh (3-yr term), Vin Dell'Ova (2-yr term), Gale Carey (1-yr term). Voting members of the LSC include the three at-large members and the 6 members representing Agriculture, Heritage, Parks & Recreation, Town Council, Conservation, and Trustees. Ann W asked that committees identify a second person to attend the LSC meeting in their absence

REPORTS FROM OTHER COMMITTEES

Sally Tobias reported that the Planning Board approved the agricultural changes to Town zoning. John Carroll noted that the Agricultural Commission was pleased with this approval.

OTHER UPDATES

Gale Carey asked if at future meetings, could we show maps of the properties under discussion.

Next Meeting: October 8, 2020 at 8:30 AM

Meeting adjourned at 10:11 AM

Submitted by Ellen Snyder