

Minutes Land Stewardship Subcommittee
April 25, 2023
8:30 am
Council Chambers

Members present: Ted Howard, Gale Carey, Sally Tobias, Ann Welch, Jim Lawson, Sara Callaghan, Mike Drooker (Zoom), Rich Reine

The meeting did not have a quorum in Chambers therefore the meeting was informative only.

Presentation by Megan Howie, UNH Professor, Archeologist

Professor Howie is involved in a cross Atlantic project looking at indentured Scotts and their environmental and cultural impacts, The Landscapes of Indenture. Professor Howie is working with a group from the UK.

They are looking for non invasive sources to study as well as collecting core samples. Spruce Hole Bog is a site of interest to measure sediments. They are looking for a deforestation signal from the 1600s. The core would not be very deep. They (group from England) will be coming in May to accomplish a test sample 10 centimeters deep. Most of the core will be returned to the site and trampling will be limit.

Sara commented that there are no management restraints on the area as a Natural National Landmark and sees no reason the work can not go forward. It was discussed that Todd would be able to officially permit the investigation since no vote would be possible for the LSC during this meeting.

Environmental Conflicts Group Project from UNH class

Looking for an open discussion on Wagon Hill disputes.

Identified key themes such as trails, recreation, parking fees and the dog issues

They were interested in what has been accomplished by the committee/town since they were last here.

The town has not done anything specific since the first presentation by the student group however the town is involved with on going projects to address various issues.

Signage about dogs off leash have gone up. Ann commented that what the survey showed were issues the town was already aware of. Rich Reine updated the group on a trail/bridge project. Mike Drooker commented that parking issues such as charging a fee was not going to happen. There have been various discussions about it in the past and there are a few issues that would not make it feasible. Sara addressed the challenges of the trails along the water and how the town plans to move forward on those.

Question: How do people communicate to the town their concerns with Wagon Hill.

Ann answered that most issues go to Todd Selig (Town Administrator). Jim Lawson volunteered to filter some emails addressing these issues and will send them on to the group.

Question : Are you seeing off leash dogs or other recreation activities causing negative impacts on habitat or wildlife. Sara commented that she is planning on fencing off Bobolink nests.

We have modified our mowing schedule and model. Sara added the deteriorating shoreline is the most concerning and the town does have long term plans to address this. Wagon Hill North is managed for New England Cottontail rabbits.

Question: What is the outcome of an earlier plan to rescind off leash dogs.

Ann answered that it was indeed the opinion of many on the LSC however community feedback and the actions taken by off leash dog owners to improve the situation led the town to the opinion that it is best to continue to allow and monitor off leash dogs. She added that many on the committee are still concerned. Sally added that there are set times when off leash is allowed but that that time is often ignored and this is where the tension starts.

Question:

Would you consider a dog park/area somewhere on the property.

Ann answered that that has been discussed by Parks and Recreation. The problem is the location would be difficult to find and the off leash dog community are not in favor of it. It would not solve the problem but may indeed create another one. Sally added that it could potentially increase dog use and would do nothing to help the main issue.

Ann asked if there is anything in particular the group still needs and they said they would email any they come up with.

Report from Sara Callaghan Land Stewardship Coordinator :

Pike Property vernal pool walk:

Sara did conduct a tour of the vernal pools on the Pike Property. Luckily there had been recent rain so the pools water levels were up and eggs masses were present.

Youth group from Durham Evangelical Church helped with a clean up of a trail off Jackson's Landing. There is a need of signage in that area to help lead people to it. It is a good trail for smaller children.

Ash Tree removal Wagon Hill:

The trees were victims of the Emerald Ash Bore and needed to be taken down. Informational signage was put up to explain to the public the reasons for removal. The Emerald Ash Bore is a devastating invasive species that does kill the trees. There are also a couple of trees at the Milne property that are infected and will need removal.

Kenny Rotner Bridge Bench:

A Durham resident has requested that a commemorative bench be added to the Kenny Rotner bridge area. They have offered to assist in the cost as well. Sara presented her plans for it and the suggested location. She considers a spot on the Stevens Woods side be the best venue for the bench. She also showed the area on the pump house side that needs to be addressed. There is overgrown grasses and invasive species on the strip of land in front of the pump house. Consultation with Roann Robbins leads her to propose a kill off of the invasive plants using black plastics and mulch which heats up the

soils and seed stock. She will then replant with native shrubs. This process is less intensive than removal of the existing soil and planting of wildflowers.

Sara proposed a cost of \$2000 which she will bring to the Conservation Commission.

There was some discussion about the material used for the bench. The use of composite materials would be more sustainable.

She showed some photos of an area off the trail of the Kenny Rotner Bridge near the river's edge that is showing signs of dispersed use. This could become problematic and lead to erosion. She recommends putting in a small trail from the main trail down to the river and planting native shrubs to discourage dispersed pedestrian access.

Spruce Hole Bog and Oyster River Forest:

Sara has been working on updating the trail markers and signage. Some trails will be renamed and colored. Stratford Regional Planning Commission can update the maps with a fund they have available. We will need about \$200 for markers and signage. There is some money fundraised for trail improvements and she plans on bringing this to the Conservation Commission for approval of funds. Gale asked about informational signage at the Spruce Hole Bog. Sara expressed a concern for her time in a project that is not necessary at this time but was supportive with Gale's offering of help.

Update from Gale Carey:

Stewarding our Lands Working Group continues to post questionnaires for the Milne, Town Landing, Packers Falls and Wiswall properties.

She asked about a wooden structure at the town landing, Mike explained that it is a lift to aid in oyster bed restoration activities and that it was indeed not a gallows.

She explained that the working group is winding down its work and she suspects the end of 2023. She envisions the group becoming a trail stewarding group.

Reports from other committees:

Jim Lawson will bring the new council goals that reflect LSC values to the next meeting.

Mike Drooker reported Parks and Recreation will be discussing a community needs study proposal. This pertains to Wagon Hill and Woodridge park. It will survey public opinion and aid in guiding activities there by Parks and Recreation.

Ann had some information from John Carrol and Lee Alexander pertaining to someone who can represent LSC on the Bee City group. She is hoping we can find someone and has asked the group to reach out to possible candidates. Ted asked if Lee could create a job description of the role which would be helpful in finding a candidate for the position.

Sara asked the group about her process and how best to coordinate that with Conservation Commission meetings. There is a conflict in timing that does not work well for her presentation to LSC and then going to the ConCom for funds approval. The group discussed the timing issue and how best to proceed. The LSC may need to change its meeting day to accommodate a better schedule. Ann will survey the LSC members about options. Ted suggested the ConCom could approve funds

contingent upon LSC however Sara appreciated the feedback the LSC offers that may change the scope of her project.

The informational meeting ended