

Land Stewardship Subcommittee Meeting Minutes for January 30, 2023

1. The Meeting was called to order at 8:30 am by Ann Welsh.

Members Attending:Mike Evergam, Mike Drooker (on Zoom), Marty Gorham, Gale Carey, Sally Tobias, Ann Welsh, Larry Brickner Wood, Sally Needell (on Zoom), and John Carroll. **Absent:** John Nachilly. **Also attending:** Sara Callaghan, Tom Brightman (on Zoom), Todd Selig, Rich Reine, Ted Howard, and Rachel Gasowski

2. The Agenda was approved unanimously.

3. The minutes of December 8, 2022 were approved with changes, unanimously.

4. Land Stewardship Coordinator Update-Tom Brightman and Sara Callaghan

Tom and Sara have been working on the transition of the Land Stewardship Coordinator responsibilities being passed on to Sara. They have visited the major town properties and discussed past and future activities at those sites, and reviewed the Conservation Commission budget. Tom has passed on files and prepared property activity summaries of ongoing and future projects.

Pike Property-Draft Management Plan:

- Sara explained the Land Management Plan for the Pike Property and some of the challenges and costs of maintaining the property. The property helps to protect the water that the Town of Durham draws from the Lamprey River. Costs associated with this property include mowing and management of invasive species.
- There are many wetlands on the property, and though they make trail building challenging, there is hope that in the future there will be a trail through the property that will connect this property to existing trails and conservation properties. There are no plans for maintaining a trail at this time.
- There are no management funds required with the purchasing of properties by the town. It was recommended that properties ideally should come with funding for future needs.
- Properties that use LCHIP funds are required to allow hunting.
- There is State funding that is available if hunting is allowed. The hunting of deer populations has ecological benefits for other species.
- Ted Howard reminded the group that the 500-foot setback requirement for hunting would limit the available hunting space on the Pike property.
- Todd Selig shared the concerns of citizens regarding hunting.

The motion to accept the Draft Management Plan for the Pike Property was approved with two members abstaining (Mike Evergam and Sally Needell).

Use of poles with QR codes for property questionnaires:

Sara will be posting QR codes at Longmarsh to allow for additional property users to add their input to the questionnaire shared online with town residents on Friday Updates.

5. Stewardship Working Group Updates-Gale Carey

Gale and Sally Needell met with the HDC/HC to discuss findings from the town property questionnaires. Residents have asked for more signage about artifacts and the properties at Doe Farm and Wagon Hill Farm. The HDC/HR agreed to partner with the Land Stewardship Subcommittee to work on new signage.

Gale reviewed the findings from the WHF questionnaires for the committee, and described the tensions among the many uses of the property. She shared the aim of the purchase of WHF from the Durham Special Election vote of July 18, 1989. *“...to preserve its scenic vistas, provide for future municipal purposes and preserve open space in order to provide for healthful and attractive outdoor environment for work and recreation and to conserve land, water, forest, and wildlife resources...”*

Recommendations from the Working Group cover three areas of concern: parking, dogs, and wildlife.

Parking

- Larry Brickner-Wood described the current plans the HDC/HC have for future use of the restored Bickford-Chesley house at WHF. Potential uses are meeting and gallery space, an apartment, and public restrooms. A need for additional parking at the site is not anticipated.
- Properties that use LCHIP funds may not ban non-residents from using funded properties, however, a fee may be required. The cost of a fee system would not be balanced by the cost of maintaining the system.
- There is enough parking usually. On days where there is peak usage, police monitor the parking. Parking spaces regularly become available.
- When Parks and Rec uses WHF, students are brought to the site, or parents drop off and pick up.
- The Agriculture Commission would like to be sure that gardeners have available parking.

Dogs

- A long discussion of the dogs on the WHF property followed.
- Dogs off leash damage the shoreline and disturb sensitive habitats.
- Should dogs only be allowed to be off-leash in designated areas?
- Is there another town property where dogs would be able to be off-leash to help alleviate the impact of dogs on WHF?
- Descriptions of dog parks of other communities were shared.

Wildlife

Spatial separation would support habitats. For example the bobolink nesting area could be protected with a temporary fence around the nests that would be located where needed each season.

6. Portsmouth Water Line Project:

- Wayne Burton shared his concern that the access road construction necessary for the water line project will be very disruptive to the Wagon Hill Farm property. He suggested that the Town ask Portsmouth about creating an **access road that would enter directly off of Route 4** and run parallel to the eastern edge of the property making a straight-line road to the shore. This roadway would cause the least amount of disruption and be mostly out-of-sight.
- Rich Reine explained that Durham is working with Portsmouth on a negotiated agreement. Portsmouth has a deeded right-of-way diagonally across the WHF property, and Durham is working with Portsmouth to come up with a plan that will protect the land and gardens. If Portsmouth is able to get approval from regulatory agencies, work would take place at WHF from November 2023 to April 2024.

- There is discussion of finding a **laydown area off-site** to reduce the impact of the current plan for the laydown site near the shoreline.
- Portsmouth has agreed to provide water for the Bickford-Chesley house to replace the current well that is not adequate for the house.
- When the plans for the project are more formalized, the LSC would like to hold a **site walk** to see and better understand the extent of the changes to be made.

7. Properties Needing Boundary Surveys-Ann Welsh

Doe Farm, Mill Pond Park, Milne Nature Sanctuary, Stolworthy Wildlife Sanctuary, Jackson Landing, Wagon Hill South and North, and the Meadows property do not have land surveys on record. Ann will send a list to LSC members for their comments on suggestions for the order in which the surveys should take place.

8. Reports from Committees:

Planning Board: Working on definitions for the Zoning Ordinance.

Town Council: Residents are invited to make comments regarding the Solar Ordinance at the next meeting.

Parks and Rec: There are 3 new members. Discussion of how P&R might use the pump house.

9. Other Business

A UNH class has students working on resolving environmental conflict. The LSC was asked for permission to use Wagon Hill Farm for this project. Gale Carey made a motion to "Approve the UNH class to evaluate Wagon Hill Farm for environmental conflict resolution." The motion was approved unanimously.

Mike Everngam asked that the members of the LSC introduce themselves to Ted Howard, Mike's Trustee of the Trust alternate member to the LSC.

10. Adjournment

The meeting was adjourned at 10:40. **The next meeting is February 28, 2023.**