

Calais Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes
Monday, May 13, 2020, 7:00 pm via Zoom conference call

Present: Stephanie Kaplan, Larry Bush, Neal Maker, Julie Hand, Drew Lamb, Pat Johnson, Mark Brown

Guests: Katie Lane-Karnas (recording minutes), Scott Bassage

1. The Chair called the meeting to order at 7:10 pm.
2. Agenda revisions or additions: Stephanie announced that the Town has received the \$2,000 EAB grant money. \$1774 of it will be used to purchase and plant trees, and the rest will be sent to Pat to reimburse her for expenses.
3. Approve minutes: Larry Bush made a motion to approve the minutes of the March 10, 2020 meeting. The motion was seconded and passed unanimously.
4. Conservation Fund Balance: The current fund balance is \$71,846.31.
5. Trees Purchase Planting Location: The group has reviewed a tree catalog. Nicko (East Hill Tree Farm) wrote an invoice for the \$1774 grant money that can be used for plants, labor, and materials. Next steps are to consider tree planting locations and coordinate with Nicko again to find out how many trees we'll be able to purchase with that money. The group discussed the edible garden and the parking configuration of the Town Hall and possibly plantings that can screen the parking from the road down the sloping hillside to the parking, or along the roadside.
 - Drew to learn what the options are for planting at the Town Hall
 - Neal to learn about Nicko's schedule for planting in the spring and fall
 - Neal will learn approx. how many trees this grant money will fund
 - Stephanie to check with Cemetery Commission about potential locations for plantings
 - Scott will ask Reed Cherrington about who to talk to about maple tree plantings in Maple Corner
 - Drew will check with the school to learn if they need any trees

Scott Bassage noted his opinion is that there are enough trees already at the East Calais Post Office area (owned by the East Calais Community Recreation Association, whose board he is on). Larry noted that he'd be reluctant to approach private property owners about plantings (such as Adamant). The group considered some locations along town right of ways that may be optimal for plantings. The town has the authority to plant trees in the right of way, but landowners and Selectboard should be consulted. Optimally, planting along public roads may include wider public involvement and input. The "Resilient Right-of-Ways: Rural Road Vegetation Assessment" report for

Calais created under Joanne Garton's leadership may be a resource for consulting to consider areas for planting along roadways.

6. Ash Tree Corridor Tagging: Pat got the *This Is an Ash Tree* posters (for tagging trees) laminated. They are intended to be used at the beginning and the end of three different corridors the Commission had identified for raising public awareness. Julie, Pat, and Neal planned to go put up the tags.

Ginger from Forest and Parks contacted the Commission asking for volunteers in central Vermont to hang the purple EAB traps. The group will further consider this following more information from Forests and Parks.

7. Conservation Fund Guidelines Revisions: The group had begun the process of revising the Guidelines, at which point the Commission learned the language authorizing the Fund's uses needed to be clarified and approved by the voters. It was voted and approved at Town Meeting 2020. Stephanie will review the latest draft and send it to the Commission members for discussion at the next meeting,
8. Bliss Pond Town Forest: The Commission's efforts around the future of Bliss Pond Town Forest had left off in planning for a public meeting. In the context of the pandemic, and without any urgency, the group agreed it was best to wait until people can gather and have meaningful discussion. Larry noted that he may be the person with the most urgency to move the discussion forward; however, he reluctantly agrees that we should wait until a group gathering and discussion is possible.

Neal commented that he envisions framing the town discussion about the future of the forest as a conversation: we should think about what we want to do about it, as a Town; if we want to protect it, as a Town, there should be a conservation easement. There would be space for Larry's proposal, and Neal's perspective, and perhaps others; it would be broader than a standoff between two ideas.

Mark commented that this goal of a nuanced, broad conversation that generates excitement and interest would be better done in person. Lords Hill Natural Area (Groton State Forest, Marshfield) may be a field trip example of an old-growth forest. Every place in Vermont is going to be unique from other areas; it is possible to find "forever wild" properties with management plans and conservation easements for considering. A slide show may be a possibility. In May 2019, there was a presentation by an authority on old growth forests who explained what is biologically different in terms of soil, microbes, etc. His presentation was recorded and could be shared. Scott will email everyone a link to it. Larry noted that forever wild properties still do have accompanying documents articulating a lot of management.

9. Other business: The Commission considered whether there are other projects that may want to be undertaken. For example, revisiting the Natural Resources Inventory to identify natural resources that were identified as significant and the contacting the landowners.

Larry noted that the Selectboard is involved in an exercise to figure out what can be cut from the budget to cope with loss of funds due to COVID. They would like input from the Commission. Two things that directly affect the Commission include dropping the Fund contribution from \$8,000 to \$6,000 in the upcoming fiscal year and not buying a woodchipper. Larry mentioned at the Selectboard meeting that the chipper is going to be a critical piece of equipment in dealing with the EAB—perhaps not for the next fiscal year, but certainly in years following.

The next Conservation Commission meeting is scheduled for Wednesday, June 3, 2020 at 7pm via Zoom conference call.

10. Public comment: None.

11. Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 8:45 pm.

Date: 5/13/2020 Respectfully Submitted, Katie Lane-Karnas

Approved by the Conservation Commission at the 6/3/2020 meeting