

Calais Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes
Calais Town Office
Tuesday, June 12, 2018, 6:00 pm

Present: Stephanie Kaplan, Larry Bush, Neal Maker, Julie Hand, Maddy Morgan, Pat Johnson

Absent: Drew Lamb

Guests: John Brabant, Denise Wheeler, Katie Lane-Karnas (recording minutes)

1. The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:04 pm.
2. Agricultural land issues: John Brabant, Selectboard member, attended to share his perspective with a background in hydrogeology, environmental issues and farming. He discussed historical farming practice in contrast to increasingly large farms, Fairmont Farm being the large-scale farm in Calais and East Montpelier. He and the Commission discussed details of no-till practice that includes applying Roundup (glyphosate) and potentially other chemicals to kill weeds, and the local and worldwide environmental consequences of this. They discussed the fields in Calais (and fields above Calais waterways) that are currently used by Fairmont Farm.

Much of the agricultural land that Fairmont has purchased over the years has been in part financed by the Vermont Land Trust and the Vermont Housing & Conservation Board. John and the Commission recalled the Armstrong Farm sale and Calais' discussions with Jon Ramsay from the VLT at that time to only allow a farmer to purchase it who followed organic practices due to the Town's concern about harmful agricultural practices that involve applying chemicals to the land, especially when (as with the Armstrong Farm) there are streams or rivers on or near the land.

John Brabant explained that Fairmont Farm continues buying and leasing more and more land, which means increasing the amounts of land in our region that are getting poisoned and will not be able to be used for organic agriculture for years to come.

The Conservation Commission discussed how this model of farming and land conservation affects Calais. They decided to consider taking a water sample of a few ponds (Mirror Lake, Sodom Pond, Curtis Pond) to get base levels for glyphosate and other chemicals.

The Conservation Commission is interested in trying to meet with the Boards of the VLT and the VHCB to discuss our concerns about their support of agricultural practices that can have a detrimental effect on the soils and neighboring properties and water supplies. It would carry more weight if other conservation commissions were to join in expressing these concerns.

The Conservation Commission decided to draft a letter to send to neighboring Conservation Commissions and Regenerative Vermont about their concerns surrounding these issues, with a copy to CVRPC, with the possibility of a joint meeting to consider how best to pursue this,. A suggestion was made to contact Alan LePage regarding this topic to discuss on his WGDR radio show. Pat agreed to draft the letter for review.

3. Agenda revisions or additions: The Chair added Peter Harvey's Wild Chervil discussion from the last evening's Selectboard meeting to the Other Business section. The Chair will contact the Planning Commission to communicate handling habitat blocks and corridors for incorporation into the next Town Plan.
4. Hiring Matt Peters: The Commission reviewed last meeting's plans to hire Matt Peters to work with the Commission in the habitat blocks identification process, and to hire him for follow up on the Natural Resources Inventory that Matt Peters worked on. The Commission discussed landowner follow up and potential further outreach.
5. Approve minutes: Julie Hand moved, and Larry Bush seconded to approve the 4/10/18 minutes. The motion passed unanimously. Larry Bush moved to approve the 5/17/18 minutes, with edits as provided by the Chair, and Neal Maker seconded. The motion passed unanimously.
6. Recruiting new members: Julie Hand reported that she has approached a community member as a potential Commission member and will keep the Commission updated.
7. Proposed revised shoreland zoning: The Chair reported that the Planning Commission has sent documents on a proposed Shoreland Overlay District (SHROD) to be more in sync with the State Shoreland regulations. Commission member Larry Bush, who also lives within 100 feet of a water body, discussed details of the SHROD proposal, including details of restrictions to landowners (mowing, tree removal, etc.) and his appreciation for the content. The Chair suggested becoming familiar with the proposal and any questions ahead of the PC's June 19th meeting. The Commission and Selectboard Chair discussed VLCT guidelines on what constitutes a quorum and meeting (in terms of warning).
8. Beavers: The Commission and Selectboard Chair discussed an issue with beavers in a small stream in a wetland on Kent Hill Road across from the substation. The Road Commissioner and Operations Manager removed a beaver dam with an excavator; some Calais residents objected to this approach and contacted a representative of the Fish & Wildlife Dept of the

State who met at the site with the interested Town residents. He suggested installing a beaver baffle similar to the one at Adamant Pond. The Commission will make copies of the document “Best Management Practices for Resolving Human-Beaver Conflicts in Vermont” for the Town to have available. The Commission reviewed a beaver policy that was never adopted and will consider whether it is needed. The Commission and Selectboard Chair discussed the chain of command in deciding whether a road is in imminent danger necessitating beaver dam removal, and inclusion of this in a Calais Beaver Policy.

9. Roadside vegetation meeting: Neal Maker and the Selectboard Chair reported on a meeting that they attended for road crews from around the state that was held at the Town Garage about roadside vegetation management. The Chair provided a background on Calais and East Montpelier’s Resilient Rural Roads pilot program with Joanne Garton assessing vegetation along roadsides for hydrologically connected roads, considering overlapping issues such as erosion, hazard trees needing removal, tree canopy and needs, invasives, Act 64, etc. There is an advisory committee including Neal Maker, Stephanie Kaplan and Denise Wheeler and a few others including the Road Commissioner.
10. Other business: The Commission discussed invasive mowing and pulling timelines in Calais. The Chair updated the Commission on the conversation from the Selectboard meeting last evening with Peter Harvey, tools for weed removal, best practice, wild parsnip and Emerald Ash Borers. They considered education and outreach in Calais.
11. Public comment: None.
12. Adjournment: The Commission adjourned at 8:30 pm.

Date: 6/13/2018 Respectfully Submitted, Katie Lane-Karnas
Approved by the Conservation Commission at the 8/23/2018 meeting