

**Calais Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes**  
**Via Zoom Call**  
**Wednesday, March 3, 2021, 7:00 pm**

**Present:** Stephanie Kaplan, Larry Bush, Neal Maker, Julie Hand, Pat Johnson (arriving 7:46 pm), Mark Brown

**Guests:** Katie Lane-Karnas (recording minutes), Scott Bassage, John Brabant, Hannah Singleton

1. Call to Order: The Chair called the meeting to order at 7 pm.
2. Agenda revisions or additions: None.
3. Approve minutes: Neal Maker moved and Larry Bush seconded to approve the minutes of the February 3, 2021 meeting, as edited. The motion passed 5-0.
4. Conservation Fund Balance: The current balance is \$79,939.38. The money for Memorial Hall is remaining in this balance (\$50,000).
5. Commission organization and elections and rules: This is the first meeting after Town Meeting. Stephanie emphasized the importance of all members of each Town group considering afresh each year who they want to select for chairperson roles especially when a role has been held by a single individual for a long time. Larry Bush nominated Stephanie Kaplan as Chair of the Conservation Commission, with the understanding that the Commission can work this year to identify a successor to the role for when Stephanie would like to be done serving. Mark seconded. Stephanie nominated Larry Bush as Vice Chair and Neal seconded. Both motions were voted and passed unanimously.

Stephanie brought attention to a guiding handbook about conservation commissions written in 1998 by a Calais resident who was the head of the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions. The current head of the AVCC has offered to share it digitally, which we are awaiting. The handbook has some good ideas about the operation of conservation commissions. Stephanie had sent the CC members a template for CC rules. Larry noted that it would be a massive effort to modernize and revise our own rules from such a template document. Neal asked if Calais ever did adopt and has existing organizing rules; Stephanie has a file that may include historical information on this and will check.

Discussion moved to the role of the chair. It is spelled out in statute for select boards, but not for conservation commissions. In thinking about that, in light of how much work should be done, Stephanie encouraged that members should and could take more responsibility.

6. Chapin Town Forest: Stephanie called Paul Hannan, who has offered to survey the potential parking area at no cost to the Town. She and Neal discussed the beginning stages of this effort with the Selectboard who asked the Commission to return to a meeting after they have gained more information about next steps.

7. Tree warden law & shade tree preservation plan: Neal and the group reviewed a draft document he made to consider elements of a shade tree preservation plan. The heart of the work may be around *designation* of shade trees. He has discussed this with the Road Commissioner whose concern is around the plows and trucks being able to trim enough for their trucks to move through. Larry asked for clarification about what is meant by “canopy.” Neal referred to a forestry term that applies to any tree in the ROW that is tall enough that is in the main leaf area (they get sun from above). If a tree reaches out over the road or does not, its including as a “shade tree” depends on if it gets light from above. Neal considered this is a well-known forestry definition and is a manageable tool for decision making as the Tree Warden and catches the trees that are the main ones that impact how much light and rain reaches the road. The additional trunk diameter measurement qualification is a simple one.

Consideration turned to how to address roads currently without any tree canopy, or with small trees growing toward a canopy. Stephanie read state highway statute recently revised to align with the new tree warden law. John Brabant added that we recognize that shade trees in addition to shade and beauty slow raindrops and keep roads from baking in the sun; chloride applied is a cost to taxpayers in an effort to wet the roads and slow moisture loss—something done by shade trees at no cost or environmental tradeoffs. The tree plan will limit the amount of material we need to add to roads (an endless cycle of adding gravel and chloride). He advised the Commission include in this plan the reasons behind measures and what we are trying to accomplish in the longer term. He suggested: an education class for Highway Department by the Tree Warden yearly and including “stem density” as part of an indicator for regulating cutting. Mark noted that North Calais Road (turning off Moscow Woods, where there is no shade) becomes a hard-packed “moonscape” every year and John’s suggestions would apply very well.

Scott praised the draft Neal created and supported addition of the “shade tree” definition Neal discussed in the plan. He discussed his efforts and concerns about protecting the trees on his property’s roadside, which have been there for 200 years, and invited anyone to come see them to illustrate the need for keeping historical roadsides preserved. The group discussed ways to give flexibility to the road crew and protect trees as described by Scott, especially into the future. John Brabant suggested designation of “historic roads,” for roads intact and treed as they were at the time of the Civil War. Potentially at the time of submission to the Selectboard of the plan, there could be an attached proposed ordinance that is a companion document that discusses how the plan is implemented, for the purpose of regulation (of the Town, of future select boards and future road commissioners). We are at a good place now with people who want to work toward a common goal and should take advantage of this moment. A “historic roads” designation would signal to the plow truck driver that care must be taken.

John commented that generally, a “plan” is an overarching concept document, then you build an ordinance (a regulatory document) that implements that plan, and is enforceable. Fees for replanting should be included.

Stephanie responded that the Calais Road and Bridge Standards are the result of two years of work of a committee on this very topic, which the Selectboard adopted. She stated her anger and frustration that these Standards are largely ignored by the road crew and the Selectboard has done nothing for enforcement (for example, as the crew widens roads and digs ditches in violation of the Standards). She questioned what another attempt at a working group and ordinance would accomplish when the existing ordinance is not followed. Jack Hill Road as an example of a road that has been widened over time despite the Road and Bridge Standards adoption. John agreed and noted the Board's hands are tied in some ways. Pat suggested increased communication of the Commission's work and imperatives with the Selectboard and John encouraged the Commission to provide a regular report to the Board. The group thanked Neal for all his work on this process.

8. Work plan for 2021: The Commission discussed how to implement a group to support Town roadside trees (Stephanie's initial outreach around a tree committee was met with essentially no interest). Ideas were generated:
  - The tree committee would meet monthly to do something (planting trees, a project) rather than meetings.
  - Commission to monthly (and briefly) plan what the tree committee will be doing that month.
  - The guiding document for a tree committee could be the Town Roadside Vegetation report compiled by Joanne Garton.

The Commission has planned to review the Calais Town Plan's Action Steps for the CC and discussed the best way to approach it. Larry reminded the group that the Commission was at this exact same point three years ago; we know that we must work with the Planning Commission in addressing action steps that have been eclipsed and exceeded by state law; he suggested a review in which a significant pruning is done to conclude what the Commission could reasonably be charged with. Larry suggested a direct effort to put a lot of it away (such as individual landowner education), prioritizing what is important (such as contiguous forest corridors and how Act 171 can be implemented in our town).

Having just read the Town Plan, Pat said the amount of education efforts included stood out to her and she suggested highlighting priority initiatives for resident education. Members weighed in on best steps forward and priorities. They decided to individually think about what topics each are most interested in/find important. Members will report in on their findings by email ahead of the next meeting.

9. Other business: Tom Blachly will be attending the next meeting to talk about trails. The next meeting will be held Wednesday, April 7, 2021 at 7 pm.
10. Public comment: None.
11. Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 8:53 pm.

Date: 3/3/2021 Respectfully Submitted, Katie Lane-Karnas

*Approved by the Conservation Commission at the 4/7/2021 meeting*