

Calais Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes
Via Zoom Call
Wednesday, April 7, 2021, 7:00 pm

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

Guests: Katie Lane-Karnas (recording minutes), Tom Blachly, Jan Ohlsson, Scott Bassage, Rob Lamb

1. The Chair called the meeting to order at 7 pm and introduced Tom Blachly, Chair of the Trails Committee and Jan Ohlsson, Chair of the Planning Commission.
2. Agenda revisions or additions: None.
3. Approve minutes: Larry Bush moved and Julie Hand seconded to approve the minutes of the March 3, 2021 minutes with edits as noted. The motion was voted and passed unanimously.
4. Conservation Fund Balance: The Fund balance is \$79,939.38 (the Memorial Hall \$50,000 is included in this amount). The Town Treasurer said the Fund is in a money market account with many other funds, making almost no interest.
5. Calais Town Trails: Tom Blachly opened a discussion about a trail that goes through Bliss Pond Town Forest property, which is not well-marked for finding your way, that is under the jurisdiction of the Conservation Commission. He would like to be able to put up more markers and begin marking for side trails. Two Trails Committee members have volunteered to help them make them for the Town Forest side trails. Tom additionally proposed a kiosk, which would allow people to take a picture of the trails map for their hike, include information about the Town Forest, etc. The group discussed a joint effort between the Conservation Commission and Trails Committee to request use of funds for a kiosk (Randy Allen is open to building it). Members agreed best practice may be to locate it well off the roadway and inside the easement. The group agreed to have the Trails Committee follow through on the effort of putting up the markers. There may be small maps or instructional signs at key points along the trail. Stephanie and Tom will talk to the Selectboard about funding for the kiosk.

The Trails Committee has a subcommittee for mapping, a major effort this year. The signs will be available on the website. Mark raised questions about the adjoining property owners on Old West Church Road and communicating optimal parking for trail use; Larry Bush considered the Town widening the road for parking alongside the trail. The groups may approach the Selectboard about this parking effort. Historically, there have been concerns about making maps available and attracting a lot more visitors and uses but the Commission agreed that it's important for people to be able to spend time at the forest in order to appreciate and care about it.

Discussion moved to next steps for parking area surveying at the Chapin Town Forest (Paul Hannan) and Tom said the Trails Committee would appreciate knowing the date to join. The next steps will involve trail making and marking. Tom noted they have significantly expanded

the trails in Calais this year, starting with [the east corner of town](#) and another off of Batten Road, and another to come in the southeast corner of Town off of Max Gray Road.

6. New Tree Warden Law & Shade Tree Preservation Plan: Neal noted the heart of the effort has been how to define “shade trees” along the sides of the road. He is now considering defining three size classes of trees, and described details of a plan that would aim to keep all trees larger than 12” diameter and a healthy number of small and medium trees as well. The group considered how to make the law understandable to landowners and the road crew and Scott Bassage suggested diagrams or graphics that make the regulation useful. Neal clarified that this law will include all public roads (which does include Class 4 roads). [First the plan gets adopted by the Selectboard and an ordinance gets adopted later.] A “preamble” or prologue section could be created to highlight the purpose of the Plan/Ordinance and how it is in the public interest. Neal added that he created these guidelines to also address the “historic roads” piece. The group may identify the roads/road sections they would consider historic and discussed with Scott whether that might be addressed as part of the Roads Ordinance or even a separate ordinance. Neal will update the plan and get in touch with the Commission when leaves are out for a walk to be able to see and consider the impact of shade and roadside trees.
7. Town Plan Suggestions from CVRPC: Last night the Planning Commission (PC) had a meeting with a representative from CVRPC, Zach Maia. The North Calais Memorial Hall Association (NCMHA) is seeking “village center” designation, allowing them to be eligible to apply for certain grants. In order to redraw the boundaries of the village center, Zach said the Town Plan needs to be amended. He also explained that the forest sections of the Town Plan should also be amended to address the requirements of Act 171, and the two amendments could be done at the same time. Eric Sorenson attended a Conservation Commission meeting a few months ago and had suggestions as well about updating that section; this NCMHA revision may present the opportunity for doing so. The timeline needed is public hearing in August; then to Selectboard, then to vote, to be completed by the end of December. Language changes must be submitted by the end of May.

The PC is in a tight spot to get this done as soon as possible, to end up in compliance with the statute. Act 171 is emphasizing the importance of Towns’ roles in forest blocks and habitat connectivity. Larry asked whether the minimal effort could be done to get in compliance with Act 171 (to support the NCMHA and PC) and a more substantive and inclusive process could be undertaken for the next planned revision of the Town Plan (begins next year). Jan clarified that this effort is a stop-gap to help North Calais, but some of Eric’s ideas could potentially be integrated in this particular opportunity. Specifically, Eric should be consulted around section 2(a) and (b) for language and a map. Stephanie has contacted him about this.

The Planning Commission is also still working on updating bylaws including shoreland zoning and river corridors. Town plans are adopted by the Selectboard after public hearings, while zoning bylaws have to be approved by the townspeople.

8. 2021 Work Plan: At the last meeting members agreed to individually review the Town Plan action items that involve the Conservation Commission, with a view to deciding what should

be done and how. Larry shared his review in a notated document. The group will continue to work on it and follow up with each other by email.

9. Invasives: Rob Lamb, consulting forester, joined the meeting and explained that his business, EcoForesters, is based in North Carolina (although he lives in Calais) and one of the primary things they deal with is invasive plants that have taken over whole ecosystems. Vermont doesn't have ecosystem-level invasive plant problems, usually confined to patches and fairly small (bush honeysuckle, Japanese barberry) that can be knocked back with some work and not inhibit forests. He suggested the Conservation Commission may be a good vehicle to do an inventory of where invasives are located and landowner education about how to deal with it or possibly seek funding assistance. He suggested starting with roadways rather than private land inside of forests and off of roadways. He pointed out that prioritizing keeping invasives out of high-concern areas such as connectivity blocks and habitat corridors may align with the Plan.

Stephanie noted the roadside inventory report Joanne Garton created included a section on invasives and proposed a mowing schedule to try to minimize the spreading of invasives. Peter Harvey leads a citizen effort to pull wild chervil from the Old West Church and Bliss Pond Roads. Neal commented that the successful role of the Conservation Commission may be to be a catalyst to get other people interested in doing it. Stephanie suggested a Front Porch Forum outreach to learn more from residents. Rob invited Commission members to join him to work on forming a long-term plan; Neal planned to join him and they will reach out to Drew Lamb and check on the Roadside Inventory.

10. Other business: The next meeting is planned for May 5, 2021 at 7pm and the group considered moving meetings outdoors or in the Town Hall and will see how things develop over the next month.
11. Public comment: None.
12. Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 9:07 pm.

Date: 4/8/2021 Respectfully Submitted, Katie Lane-Karnas
Approved by the Conservation Commission at the 5/5/2021 meeting