

Calais Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes
Town Hall and Zoom
January 5, 2022, 7:00 pm

Present: Mark Brown, Julie Hand (recording minutes), Stephanie Kaplan, Tracy Coolidge, Neal Maker, Larry Bush.

Guests: Jordon Keyer, Chris Connor, Emilie Clark Connor, Steve Connor, Jim Clark, Bill Davis, Toby Talbot, John McCullough, Denise Wheeler, Scott Bassage.

1) The meeting came to order at 7:00 pm.

2) Agenda revisions or additions. It was decided to shift the agenda to accommodate guests. We began with the Connor subdivision.

3) Connor Subdivision: One of the roles of the Conservation Commission is to advise other town bodies about issues that affect Natural Resources. The Commission is looking at the proposed Connor Subdivision in that light.

Stephanie Kaplan backed off from the discussion as she is on the Development Review Board (DRB). Larry Bush initiated the discussion by stating that he had looked at the Town Plans' Natural Resources Section, which states that class 2 wetlands are protected, the wetlands on Connor property are considered class 2 wetlands, and Larry wanted assurance the these wetlands be protected with a buffer.

Another concern Larry raised was the priority of maintaining connectivity of interior forest blocks, ensuring that wildlife can move through (the Connor parcel) without impingement.

Neal stated that two of the wetlands directly adjacent to the Connor parcel are mapped and there is another wetland in the middle of the parcel.

Owners said they had talked to the state and they were assured that as the land was forested on both sides of the road, the land qualified as a safe wildlife crossing.

Tracy commented that her biggest concern was that the development respect wetland buffers as the class 2 wetlands on the edges of the property are critical wildlife habitat. It seemed to her that the Connor development was staying out of the wetlands.

Stephanie interjected that a Conceptual Review was scheduled for January 15th. This review will be an opportunity for the DRB to review and discuss the Connor project with the applicants. There will be a couple of opportunities to weigh in and express concern about the subdivision's impact on Natural Resources but it would be helpful to raise issues during this conceptual review.

Stephanie remarked that a few years ago in Calais there was a concern about a Fen being at risk from the proposed expansion of the McCullough gravel pit. The Conservation Commission got involved and the Fen was eventually protected.

Tracy said that she wanted more information about the undeveloped part of the development and to ensure that it remains undeveloped.

Larry commented that the land was in Current Use and that it would be a good idea to keep it that way. He also said that perhaps part of the land could be permanently conserved.

A representative of the Connor group stated that the land was put in Current Use in 2016/2017, and that a network of logging roads had been established and that they had steered clear of the wetlands in building these roads.

The plan for the land is to build three houses with common land. There was an exclusion zone in the forestry plan, they moved this zone so they could use the logging road as a main route in and out of the land. This would keep the development high and dry.

The three couples plan to build cluster housing off a shared driveway they said would minimize impact. They took careful consideration in choosing the site - ie utilizing existing logging road and choosing house sites to have minimum impact - ie near where power line crosses.

Neal remarked that in several places there is low-shrubby growth which is home to a diversity of species.

A representative from the development said there were two beaver ponds and a large wetland in the middle of the property and they needed a State Wetlands permit before building. Someone from the state will visit the property to assess potential impact. Depending on this assessment they will be granted a wetlands permit.

The applicant group expressed they may be willing to put a conservation easement on the property as they want to preserve and respect the land.

The DRB conceptual hearing is scheduled for January 13, 2022 at 7 pm, both online and in-person at the Town Hall. Tracy agreed to attend the meeting and advise the DRB of the Conservation Commission's natural resources concerns.

Bill Davis was curious about the process - Why this discussion was occurring before the DRB met?

Toby Talbot expressed that it felt like the discussion was jumping the gun before the DRB meeting.

Stephanie explained that the reason the Conservation Commission was discussing this now was to advise the DRB about any natural resource concerns that the DRB may want to address with the applicants as part of the conceptual hearing process. John McCullough, zoning administrator, agreed this was appropriate for the CC to be doing now.

In response to questions about some of the language in Neal's proposed Shade Tree Plan Stephanie said that the question of what is a Hazard Tree and who decides should be decided and addressed in the Shade Tree Plan. Neal agreed, and explained that the one he uses is based on the Forest Service definition, but it would be good for Calais to have its own definition.

Shade tree plan will be part of Tree Ordinance. After holding a public hearing, the Selectboard adopts a Shade Tree Plan. Then they adopt a Tree Ordinance that includes the shade tree plan.

To clarify any questions we consult the Calais Tree Warden. Should there be a stipend for the Tree Warden?

Neal: Utilities have a right to maintain their corridors. Generally they supersede Tree Warden, but communication is important.

5) Bliss Pond Town Forest:

In 2019 Larry submitted a formal proposal to preserve the forest. Neal has a very different view, as he would like to see it as a model working forest. Its history and accessibility make it an excellent site for educational purposes as well as an ideal example of a well managed forest.

Neal and Larry met to talk about their differences and see if they could come to an agreement. They discussed the idea that maybe they could have two different policies in Bliss Pond Forest:

- 1) An example of a well managed forest.
- 2) Keep an area that allows for an old growth forest to develop.

Can we have both? They discussed potential areas for each idea - the west side being an example of a model management program, and the N, S, and E sides being preserved.

Neal thought it is a great idea - as it achieves what both of them are looking for. One unresolved issue is that it is a land-locked property, and the challenge will be to find a way to access the timber while preserving the most ecologically important areas. It will likely require getting access over private property.

Stephanie wondered if there was enough forest to show an example of a good management plan. Neal responded that he felt it could work as long as a right of way for access is found.

Stephanie asked Larry if he felt the area was large enough for a preserved forest. Larry described areas that could be exempt from logging – from the cedar swamp southward through the [in](#) the heart of the forest to Bliss Pond and then along [a](#) wide corridor to the southwest where vernal pools are located.

The question was raised as to whether we want to bring the idea discussed above to the public as it is or do we want to present a more fleshed out plan?

Larry felt that they were not yet ready to commit to a plan - he would like to confer with Eric Sorenson, Neal, and the new County Forester first.

Neal stated that access will decide next steps - we need to explore options first. We should move forward; We should also explore a possible Conservation Easement or a Working Forest Easement.

Things that need to be done:

- 1) Contact adjacent landowners about access issues.
- 2) Flesh out a plan for a working forest within a forest preserve.
- 3) Contact Paul Hannan to estimate cost of a survey of the town forest property. Based on this, approach the Selectboard to approve payment for this.

Bill Davis had questions about access as several years ago the access on his father's property was moved to the walking path, and that might not be wide enough for logging.

fa

Julie asked about past access when the forest was logged. The response was that ~~that~~ it might have been through David Morse's farm, northeast of the town forest to Old West Church Road, or in the west, across Stanley Morse's farm, to County Road. Bill Davis suggested that access could also have been obtained to Bliss Pond Road in the south, near the sugar shack where David and Katherine's new house has been built.

The former Morse farm is under new owners now, so that access may no longer be possible.

The upshot: We need to contact adjacent land owners to see if we can use their property for logging access.

9:00pm The Commission voted unanimously to go into Executive Session to discuss a real estate matter about which premature public knowledge would place the Town at a substantial disadvantage. The Commission came out of Executive Session at 9:15pm. No action was taken. **Meeting ended at 9:20pm**