

Calais Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes
Calais Town Office
Tuesday, September 11, 2018, 6:00 pm

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

Absent: Drew Lamb, Maddy Morgan

Guests: Rob Lamb, Eric Sorenson, Doug Bullet, Katie Lane-Karnas (recording minutes)

1. The Chair called the meeting to order at 6:08 pm.
2. Agenda revisions or additions: The Chair added a few items: regarding a meeting she attended with the Regional Planning Commission and hydrogeologists; how to proceed with Scott Bassage's presentation about gravel sources for the town from last meeting; Fall Foliage Festival guided walk.
3. Approve minutes: Julie Hand moved and Neal Maker seconded to approve the minutes of the 8/23/2018 meeting, as amended. The motion passed 4-0 (Pat Johnson abstained).
4. The Fall Foliage Festival in Calais, which is usually the first weekend in October, has in the past included an interpreted walk sponsored by the Conservation Commission. The Commission was enthusiastic about offering this event again this year. Larry Bush shared his experience at the recently extended trails at Robinson Hill. They will check with the landowner in anticipation of offering it this year at the Robinson Hill trails.
5. Four Winds Program: The Chair announced that the Four Winds Program, which uses volunteers to go into the elementary schools once a month to provide nature-based programming, needs volunteers at the Calais Elementary School. It involves one Monday two-hour training each month and a one-hour lesson in the classroom.
6. Conservation Fund Balance: The balance was not available at this meeting; this item has been tabled until a subsequent meeting.
7. Letter to other Conservation Commissions about industrial scale agriculture: The Chair reminded members and guests about information presented by John Brabant at a previous meeting, regarding the funding of industrial farms by the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board through the Vermont Land Trust. Money that VLT conserved farms receive in payment for conservation easements is not dependent on whether those lands are used for industrial farming practices (including use of glyphosate, atrazine, and other chemicals

on GMO crops, potentially polluting surface and groundwater with substances deemed carcinogens and banned in some other countries including the European Union) or organic practices. The VLT finances land purchases that end up contaminating the land and water, without there being a means for local conservation commissions to create standards for organic farming practices. The Commission discussed a draft letter to other Central Vermont conservation commissions regarding this issue and the possibility of joining together in contacting the board of the VLT to request a meeting to discuss these issues.

They discussed concerns that include sensitivity and research around the impact that the letter may have within the community. Rob Lamb clarified that the Commission would be asking the VLT to add language to the conservation easement to require organic farming practices, and that he has consulted with the VLT regarding their easement language, and sees problems created by overly restrictive easement language. For example, if forestry on the property can only be done when “best forestry management property is used,” this potentially creates an enforcement obligation, and the easement can be vulnerable to legal challenges. He explained that fuzzy language like “only selective logging” means that it needs to be enforced, but the VLT frequently doesn’t, or it’s very expensive for them to do so. Members discussed that in looking at permanently binding documents, are we looking enough into the future to be sure we never want them to change? Rob shared his experience that Land Trusts are heading toward less restrictive programs and using their stewardship programs to promote best management practice. They discussed meeting with the VLT initially to gain information and feedback, and perhaps with the chairs of other commissions to consider options. The Commission decided to investigate this further and revisit the issue.

8. Forest habitat blocks: Eric Sorenson, ecologist for the State of Vermont and resident of Calais, attended at the request of the Commission. The Chair shared background on Act 171 and its references to forest block management, and the Commission’s role to recommend to the Planning Commission prioritized habitat blocks in Calais, to be incorporated within the Town Plan.

Eric began by giving a computer presentation on Act 171. It included topics around forest blocks and habitat connectors, towns’ need to plan for land development in those areas to minimize forest fragmentation, statute established definitions, benefits of large forests and their role in Vermont’s economy. Eric presented maps illustrating how large forest (habitat) blocks need habitat connectors including forested roadways to be undeveloped to allow for animal movement. The slideshow included regional connectivity

maps, topics such as Vermont Conservation Design and ecological function. Eric reported that there are 4,055 forest blocks in the state (blocks less than 20 acres were eliminated). The Commission and Eric studied intricate details of a variety of illustrative maps including features such as ecological perspectives, connectivity blocks, landscape components, interior forest, connectivity and physical landscape blocks. They clarified language for labeling different features and forest blocks, and the significance of Calais' resources in relation to neighboring towns and regional areas. They discussed riparian areas' inherent value, and especially their value as connection corridor areas where connectivity is not optimal.

A physical landscape feature that is unique to Calais is the Waits River Formation, a calcium rich bedrock, from an ancient sea, which contributes greatly to animals and agriculture. They discussed different forest block assignments within Calais, which have already been completed in incredible detail, and the potential use of these identified areas for the Town's work aligning with the intent of Act 171.

The Commission and Eric considered best routes for accomplishing the Act 171 requirements and discussed taking Matt's information and doing a GIS overlay with the physical landscape diversity block map from the state, incorporating natural stream corridors as well. They discussed ecological hotspots—looking at concentrations of species and biological diversity—and the need to look at those in the context of maintaining the larger forest blocks.

They decided to consider how to proceed at the next meeting, and thanked Eric for his fascinating presentation.

9. Kingsbury Branch Stormwater Management Plan: The Chair reported that the Operations Manager, Road Commissioner, Selectboard members, Jan Ohlsson (Planning Commission), Pam De Andrea (RPC and Calais resident) and herself attended a meeting with Watershed Consulting, along with the Regional Planning Commission (RPC), to study their work identifying runoff concerns in Calais. Their consulting work identified 72 sites, and out of that identified the top five, which will receive money toward preliminary engineering plans. The Commission studied the Preliminary Project Ranking map provided by Watershed Consulting.
10. Emerald Ash Borers: The Chair reported on her communication with Joanne Garton regarding guidance in developing a management plan for Calais as well as guidance in finding materials to use for sharing information with residents.

11. Gravel: The Chair asked the Commission to consider the information shared by Scott Bassage at the last meeting regarding how to potentially accomplish a Town owned gravel pit. The Commission briefly discussed the background on the conversation with Scott.

12. Proposed revised shoreland zoning: The Chair reported that she is meeting next week with Jan Ohlsson regarding the proposed revised shoreland zoning, including the North Calais village district boundaries and the distinction between guidelines and regulations. A public meeting will be held in Adamant about changing the district boundaries. The Chair reported on some of the details of the regulations proposed in Calais.

13. Maple sugaring: This item was tabled until a subsequent meeting.

14. Other business: None.

15. Public comment: None.

16. Adjournment: Larry Bush motioned to adjourn at 8:42 pm; Neal Maker seconded. The motion passed 5-0.

Date: 9/11/2018 Respectfully Submitted, Katie Lane-Karnas
Approved by the Conservation Commission at the 10/24/2018 meeting