

Calais Conservation Commission Minutes
10/4/2023 - Calais Town Office
Approved 11/1/2023

Present: Larry Bush, Paul Olander - recorder, Mark Brown, Walt Amses, Stephanie Kaplan

Proceedings:

Chairman Larry Bush called the meeting to order at 7:06 pm. He added an Executive Session at the end of the meeting agenda.

The minutes from September 5, 2023 were approved as drafted.

2025 Budget

The Selectboard has asked the Conservation Commission submit a budget request for FY2025. The CC budget line items in the current Town budget are as follow:

	FY23 Budget	FY23 Actual	FY24 Budget	FY25 Budget
CONSERVATION COMMISSION				
CC Rec Secretary Wages	600.00	-	600.00	
CC Education/Training	200.00	-	200.00	
Green Up	200.00	-	200.00	
Conservation Commission Expenses	250.00	-	-	
Conservation Fund	5,000.00	5,000.00	8,000.00	
Total Conservation Commission	6,250.00	5,000.00	9,000.00	-

The CC discussed each item:

There is currently no recording secretary for the CC; Paul Olander is acting recorder as a volunteer but the Commission agreed to continue to seek a Recording Secretary, and voted to keep the line item at \$600 for FY2025.

The Education/Training line item funds are intended for general education of Calais residents and/or training for CC members in topics such as natural resources conservation or invasive species control. There was a good deal of discussion about the Calais Lakes and Stream Committee and their efforts to restart publication of the Newsletter, which was defunded several years ago amid concerns that it was not of sufficient interest to enough residents to justify the expense. The CC members voiced their opinions, unanimous in our appreciation of previous editions and the well-written articles on natural history or resource conservation topics of great interest, in a beautifully put-together newsletter. But that quality comes at a price of \$1800 - \$2000 per issue.

During their recent meeting at the gorgeous newly restored Memorial Hall (which restoration was made possible in part by Calais conservation funds) the CLSC decided to request financial support for publication from the Selectboard and the CC. Some discussion also took place on ways to lower the cost of publication perhaps by reducing print quality, or by not mailing out the newsletter but distributing via an FPF link to it on the Town website, with a limited number of hard-copies placed for distribution at the Town Office, the East Calais General Store, the Maple

Corner Community Store and the Adamant Coop, for example. The members voted to keep the Ed and Training fund request at \$200 but to raise that sufficient to support the newsletter with the Selectboard's approval. It was noted that there may be other sources of funding, perhaps some residuals from the MOMC calendar sales, or even a petition for inclusion of a dedicated funding request in the agenda for Town Meeting.

It was moved, seconded and approved to keep the Green-Up Day funding the same as in past years, at \$200.

The CC Expenses line item was not funded last year but it was voted to request it be reinstated for FY'25, at \$250. There was also discussion of a separate line item request this year for \$600 to purchase two heavy-duty bladed weedwhackers and appurtenances for the Commission's invasive species work.

The Conservation Fund is used to support conservation efforts by providing the municipal buy-in for projects with land trust or other preservation entities, or efforts in public education, or projects such as an updating of the Calais Natural Resources Inventory. There is currently \$47,483 presently in the Fund. It was voted to keep the request at \$8000 this year, but it was noted that the Fund is not keeping up with the recent increases in land prices. Larry will discuss with the Selectboard the need for a significant increase in the future.

Subject to further discussion with the Selectboard, the FY'25 CC budget would be a total of \$9850. The CC will present this budget to the Selectboard at their October 23rd meeting.

Town Plan Revision

Larry attended the recent Planning Commission meeting at which the PC began the process of revising and updating the Town Plan. An over-arching goal is to reduce the size of the document, with far less detail. They are very open to assistance from the CC in the Natural Resources section of the Plan. Eric Sorenson, author of much of the detail of the Natural Resources section, and Melanie Kehne, point person for the PC on that section, will be invited to attend our next meeting for discussion. Larry asked CC members to read the Natural Resources section for our next meeting November 1st, and consider what should stay in, what could go or be moved to an Appendix, what needs to be added to reflect actions in support of Act 171 goals for Calais, etc..

Bliss Pond Town Forest Rules

This topic was tabled for a future meeting after a brief discussion.

Invasives

Neal and Larry walked the *Phragmites* patch at the Maple Corner WEC substation. Their report is that cutting this patch would be very difficult but possible. It is very wet; this year the water level there would require waders for cutting work, but bladed weedwhackers would do the job.

Fall Foliage Walk

As the forecast for the scheduled walk on 10/7 during the Fall Foliage event was very wet it was decided to postpone the walk until Saturday 10/21 at 9 am. Mark to post on FPF.

Town Hall Tree Planting

No action was taken on this item – tabled until further information is available.

Executive Session

Chairman Larry Bush made a motion to go into Executive Session at 8:24 pm under 1 VSA 313(a)(2) “negotiating or securing of real estate purchase options”. This motion was seconded, voted on and carried 5-0.

The Chair made a motion to come out of ES at 8:46 pm, which was seconded, voted on, and carried 5-0. The Conservation Commission had nothing to publicly report.