

**CONSERVATION COMMISSION
DRAFT MINUTES
April 15, 2015**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Byron Quinn, Cyndy Kozara, Lynn Peterson, Lea Kachadorian, Al Alessi
MEMBERS ABSENT: Alan Willard, One Vacancy
OTHERS PRESENT: Bethany Powers, Mike Willis, Greg McKeney, Virginia Palmer, William Bradley, Chris Ambrose, Pete Fellows, Michael Brands

I. OPENING OF MEETING

Chair Quinn opened the meeting at 7:30 p.m.

II. MINUTES

The minutes of January 21, 2015 were approved as submitted.

III. NEW BUSINESS

A. V-3120-15 Alan & Bonnie Hammerschlag

The application is for Conditional Use Approval to construct a 5000 sf pond. The property is located at 3 Border Lane and is zoned Residential Low Density.

Willis Engineers, Mr. McKeney and Mr. Willis presented the application.

The CC reviewed a series of drawings and site plans.

The owner wishes to place a +/- 5000 square foot pond at 3 Border Lane. The site is approximately 200' below and west of the house. The pond would be fed by a well yet to be drilled. A float valve would activate the well pump.

There are no streams, wetlands or vernal pools or other natural water bodies near the site.

The soils were tested and show a high clay content. There would be no need of a synthetic liner.

The pond would be 7' deep. The proposed berms would be 5.5' high above existing ground elevation. The maximum width is 43' and length is 172'.

Construction would cause approximately 27,000 square feet of disturbance.

Stone patios, flower beds and shrubs would be placed to border the pond. A wood bridge over the narrow part of the pond would be placed. The owner proposes low level LED bollard lights to be placed along pathways and the bridge.

Mr. Alessi asked how the pond water would be kept fresh as there is no natural flow via spring or stream. Ponds such as these require constant maintenance.

The owner proposed aeration pumps and possibly a fountain to keep oxygen in the water. It was not known if the pond would be stocked with fish.

The spillways would allow overflow water to flow into the adjoining fields .

Two abutters, Mr. Bradley and Ms. Palmer, asked a number of questions about the pond. The Town Planner noted that should they have additional questions, the VDRB will discuss the application again on April 22, 2015.

After discussion, Ms. Kachadorian with a second by Mr. Alessi motioned to recommend approval as presented. The CC noted there are no natural water bodies near the proposed pond site. The motion passed with a 5-0 vote.

B. V-3123-15 Alex & Abbe Hochelman

The application is for Conditional Use and Design Review Approval to construct 1024 square foot addition with 445 square foot deck in Flood Hazard zone. The property is located at 6 River Street and is zoned Residential Low Density / Riparian Buffer / Flood Hazard / Design Review.

Mr. Ambrose, contractor, presented the application.

The CC reviewed a series of drawings and site plans.

The applicant is purchasing a home at 6 River Street and wishes to renovate an existing home and add a 21' by 27' two story el on rear of home.

A deck is designed on the West and South facade of the proposed el. The deck is six feet above ground level. A stairway to the lawn area is proposed for the south west corner of the deck.

The site plan showed the 100' riparian buffer line. A +/- 20 square foot portion of the deck is in the riparian area. This is mainly the stairway to the deck. A 3' x 3' cement support pad would be placed below the bottom stair.

When asked if the deck could be cut off at a diagonal to avoid the buffer area, the applicant noted the owner did not like the look. The deck is six feet above the ground level. The

existing property has a large lawn mowed all the way to the river. There is no existing riparian vegetation. The riparian buffer covers approximately 25,000 square feet of the property, 100' x 250'. The +/- 20 square foot intrusion to the riparian area is approximately 0.08% of the entire riparian area. The regulations allow up to a 5% disturbance of the riparian buffer intended for paths or walkways. The intrusion into the riparian buffer is well under the 5% threshold.

After discussion, Ms. Kachadorian motioned with a second by Mr. Alessi to recommend approval due to the minimal impact on the riparian zone. No riparian vegetation would be removed or displaced. The motion passed with a 5-0 vote.

C. Kedron Brook Restoration Project - Pete Fellows

Pete Fellows, TRORC GIS Planner, gave a short presentation on the Kedron Brook Restoration Project. TRORC has filed an application with the State's Ecosystem Restoration Program Review Committee to request funding. TRORC has been searching for fundable resolutions to the flood issues that resulted from Tropical Storm Irene. With a better understanding of flood issues, the State is starting to fund preventative measures that may improve riparian buffers around the State. This is especially true in areas damaged by Tropical Storm Irene.

Kedron Brook is a tributary of the Ottauquechee River flowing through South Woodstock and into Woodstock Village. It was especially hard hit during Tropical Storm Irene as many smaller bridges and culverts were washed out along with significant bank erosion. The communities of South Woodstock and Woodstock Village were directly impacted and worked hard to restore infrastructure and riparian features after the flood.

Agriculture and recreation are important components of the local economy and there are also farm and recreational lands along Kedron Brook. Over time these lands have impacted water quality in the stream due to nutrient, sediment, and bacteria inputs. TRORC supports working with landowners to develop strategies and project recommendations aimed at improving water quality in the Kedron Brook and preserving this important feature of our landscape.

Mary Nealon, Bear Creek Environmental, who recently helped write the "Ottauquechee River Watershed Stream Geomorphic Assessment" is working on the project. Reading resident and GHMA associate, Susan Greenall would also be involved.

There are four major nutrient producers along the study area: the Woodstock Inn's Golf Course, GMHA, Debevoise Dairy, and Kedron Valley Stables. The Woodstock High School Biology department has been testing the Kedron Brook for many years to monitor the presence of nutrient chemicals in the water course.

D. Forest Stewardship Atlas - Pete Fellows

Mr. Fellows also gave a power point presentation of the Forest Stewardship Atlas. This past Friday, he met with many other experts from around the State to discuss forestry issues and local planning.

There are many issues to deal with. A key element is that of linked habitat areas. A map of the Northern forest - New York, Vermont, New Hampshire and Maine, show the linkage at a macro level via all the connected large forests. Forestry is an important component of the north country both economically and ecologically. What's the effect of climate change on these forests? Will natural habitat have the geographic flexibility necessary to maintain themselves? As regions warm up, animals tend to migrate both further north and to higher regions. The various types of vegetation necessary for habitat feed stock will also change over time, as different tree and shrub species replace one another.

Mr. Fellows distributed charts of forest value in the Town of Woodstock to highlight his discussion.

A second map was distributed showing the potential to connect a four corner region where Woodstock, Bridgewater, Plymouth and Reading intersect. The intersection currently has large open forest areas with little to no development. Planning, regulation and stewardship tools could be created to keep these areas open to wildlife habitat.

The Town Planner noted the Town Plan discusses and shows support for the four corner concept.

Mr. Peterson mentioned there appear to be many groups working on this.

Mr. Fellows noted that he has met with many of the groups.

Mr. Alessi asked how would Woodstock work with other communities and achieve a development free area for the above stated habitat links. He has walked the ridge connecting Woodstock to Silver Lake. It is currently open and free of development. This would be a good opportunity.

At the State level, Jens Hilke, ANR is working diligently on linking habitat areas. Inter town and inter regional connections will require State efforts and assistance.

The Vermont Center for Eco Studies via the vernal pool work, is also working on forest preservation and habitat maintenance.

The studies resulting from Tropical Storm Irene's aftermath are starting to generate a number of projects with agencies that in the recent past did not think along ecological lines such as the AOT and Department of Agriculture. Road culvert, sizes for example, are being increased in stressed areas to accommodate potential higher runoff rates.

Mr. Fellows encouraged the Conservation Commission to download the forest overlay maps via ANR's atlases.

Mr. Alessi asked what the Town could do to be more proactive with these issues.

Mr. Fellows noted similar to Ridgeline, Wetland and Vernal Pool review processes, the

Zoning Regulations could grant the Conservation Commission more advisory roles. In subdivision processes for example, the Conservation Commission could review the impacts on forest block fragmentation and habitat linkages.

The Town Planner added that an overlay zone could be created noting areas where these issues are a concern. Appropriate criteria would have to be established to give an applicant elements to review. The project would take a lot of thought but could be accomplished.

E. Vernal Pool Workshop

The Town Planner has been in contact with Steve Faccio of the Vermont Eco Study Center located in Wilder, VT. In 2013, working with Arrowwood Associates, the center created a map of the entire state with potential vernal pool locations noted.

In an effort to verify the 25 vernal pool sites mapped within Woodstock, the Town Planner is organizing a vernal pool identification workshop.

Mr. Faccio offered three dates to conduct the workshop: May 6, May 7 and May 11. The workshop would be conducted at the site of a vernal pool and would take about 3 hours.

The Conservation Commission will email the Town Planner as to which dates work best. At the moment it appears May 7th is a favorite. The Town Planner will email updates as details of the workshop become known.

F. New Member - Bethany Powers

Bethany Powers moved to Woodstock in May 2014 from St. Johnsbury. Her husband, Mathew, is the Director of the Woodstock Historical Society. They have two boys 9 and 12 years old. She attended both St. Lawrence University and Antioch (masters) with a focus on Environmental Education. She had been an environmental educator in Conway, NH for a number of years before family life took over. Now with the children somewhat older, she wishes to take time to contribute to the community. Her main interest is in rivers.

After a general discussion of the Conservation Commission goals and projects, Ms. Powers asked to be considered as a member of the Conservation Commission.

The Conservation Commission unanimously recommended that Bethany Powers be appointed by the Select Board to fill a current long term vacancy. Her appointment would bring the Commission up to a full board status.

G. Riparian Buffer /Wetland Items

The Town Planner noted there are two ongoing enforcement issues whereby owners have done work within either a riparian buffer or a wetland that still need to go through the

permit process. Now that the snow has melted letters will go out to both owners to move forward on a resolution.

H. Taftsville Solar Farm

Mr. Alessi asked about the presence of wetlands on the site proposed for use as a solar farm in Taftsville.

The Town Planner noted two 500 kw solar farms are planned for an open mowed field just west of Taftsville and south of Route 4. The upper portion of the field where the first 500 kw installation is proposed is a class III wetland. Solar installations are solely under the review of the Public Service Board. They are exempt from local review, no town permit is required. The Public Service Board review process does provide a 30-day comment period whereby local boards and abutters may respond to a developer's request.

Another piece of the puzzle is that the State does not recognize Class III wetlands. During a presentation to the Planning Commission the developer did indicate the wetlands would be viewed by Countryman, a wetland specialist. A State wetland expert was also expected to be involved.

Once the Town Planner receives the developer's letter of intent, the Town will have 30 days to respond. This will allow time for discussion of the issue with the three boards involved: Planning Commission, Conservation Commission and the Town Development Review Board. Each board's comments could be sent to the Public Service Board. However, it is the Public Service Board that makes the final decision.

V. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for May 20, 2015.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 pm.

Submitted by:

Michael Brands, AICP
Town Planner