

**CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MINUTES
November 15, 2017**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Byron Quinn, Al Alessi, Bethany Powers, Lea Kachadorian, Lynn Peterson, Cyndy Kozara
MEMBERS ABSENT: Bo Gibbs
OTHERS PRESENT: Jack Rossi, Jack Facey, Howard Klum, Michael Brands

I. OPENING OF MEETING

Chair Quinn opened the meeting at 7:05 p.m..

II. MINUTES

The September 20, 2017 minutes were approved as submitted.

III. NEW BUSINESS

A. T-4758-17 Stacie and Keith Pearson

The application is for Conditional Use & Conservation District Overlay approval to replant riparian vegetation. The property is located on River Road and is zoned Residential 5 Acres / Conservation District.

Mr. Rossi, landscape architect, and Mr. Facey, attorney, presented the application.

The application had been continued from the September 20th meeting to allow time for a landscaping plan to be developed.

The Town Planner showed the CC numerous photographs of tree stumps on the west portion of the property, which is steeper with a severe bank to the river. Along the east portion of the property, the land has less of a grade and is prone to the invasive Japanese Knotweed.

Mr. Rossi submitted the landscaping plan and a list of plants.

The plan includes a line denoting the Town's 100' riparian buffer. The intent is to plant shrubs along the middle portion of the property. The easternmost section is uncut mature box elders. The western section has numerous box elder and bass wood stumps that will regenerate as the roots have not been cut.

All proposed plants are shrub types. The list includes: 40 Red Osier Dogwood, 40 Winterberry and 80 Gro-Low Sumac.

The Town Planner stated that the State experts he has contacted have recommended planting more trees.

Mr. Rossi stated there are numerous box elder and bass wood tree stumps that when left alone will re-sprout suckers. The re-sprouting process is already started. These in turn will regrow the trees that had been cut.

Along the eastern portion of the site is a heavy infestation of Japanese Knotweed. The owner had the Knotweed mowed in October, in some places to the water's edge.

Mr. Rossi stated the owner was trying to keep the Knotweed in check by mowing it.

The CC noted mowing Knotweed is a very bad practice, especially near a water body. The cut particles of Knotweed regenerate rapidly. The particles are transported, down the river in this case, and will infest other properties along the river.

The CC recommended that any mowing of the knot weed be prohibited. There are better methods of removal such as hand cutting and stacking on pallets to dry out. Goat herds have also been used to eat the Knotweed.

To avoid cutting close to the river the Town Planner recommended the RAP 25' buffer standard be used but with no cutting allowed within the 25' edge of the water. The owners, per Bill Emmons' September 20th testimony, intend to cut hay as an agricultural use and would fall under the State Department of Agriculture rules.

The pre-cut buffer area ranged up to 50' in places, determined from a 2011 orthophoto of the site.

Chair Quinn noted that if the suckers of the box elder and bass wood stumps are properly managed (trimmed), the chance for a more substantial tree increases significantly. If the suckers are not trimmed, the result will be more bush than tree.

The plantings would take place next spring as the weather has turned too cold to plant.

After additional discussion, Ms. Powers motioned with a second by Mr. Alessi to recommend approval of the replanting plan with the following conditions:

- 1. An uncut buffer area shall remain 25' in from water's edge for the entire length of the property.**
- 2. There shall be no mowing of Japanese Knotweed.**
- 3. Removal of Japanese Knotweed shall be accomplished by best practice methods.**
- 4. The Box Elder and Bass Wood stumps shall be allowed to regenerate.**
- 5. The sprouts of the Box Elder and Bass Wood shall be trimmed by a professional to enhance selected tree growth.**

The motion passed with a 6-0 vote.

B. Kevin & Diane Dugan

Ms. Washburn, realtor, presented a request to the CC to remove a nonexistent vernal pool from the Critical Areas Inventory Map.

Numerous maps of the property were presented. The Critical Areas Inventory Map shows a wetland on the Dugan property. On the property directly west of the Dugan property a vernal pool is shown. A wetland is shown on the property due south of Dugan's as well. Per Section 403 of the Town Zoning Regulations, whenever a wetland and or vernal pool are within 1500' of one another, a 100' wide amphibian corridor is required. The corridor would allow amphibians to travel between the various wetlands and vernal pools.

Per the current map, the wetland and vernal pool are located within 1500' of each other thus creating a need for an amphibian corridor. Future owners wish to construct between the vernal pool and wetland.

Michael Lew-Smith, wetland biologist, was contracted to view the property in order to layout the 100' amphibian corridor. Mr. Lew-Smith searched but could not find the mapped vernal pool.

Mr. Lew-Smith is the same biologist who mapped the Town's wetlands in 2002. The process used infra-red enhanced ortho-photo maps which determined wetlands and vernal pools by the color of the vegetation. Not all sites were visited due to time and resource limitations. Visiting a site to confirm the presence of a wetland or vernal pool is known as "ground truthing".

The Dugan site was never "ground truthed" for the 2002 Town mapping project.

A letter and a map from Michael Lew-Smith were read and discussed. Mr. Lew-Smith stated there is no vernal pool at the mapped site. He also noted that the wetland is actually a few feet further east than that shown on the official map.

The Town Planner walked the site and could not find evidence of a vernal pool. The site in question is very hummocky and full of ferns but did not have the characteristics of a vernal pool.

The specific removal of mapped vernal pools is not addressed in the Town Zoning Regulations. The Town Planner noted the issue is similar to the use of a survey instead of a site plan or tax map citation. A survey is generally recognized as the true rendition of a property. The same holds when a professional wetland delineator determines the existence of a wetland or vernal pool.

After discussion, Ms. Powers motioned with a second by Ms. Kachadorian to recommend that the vernal pool located next to the Dugan property be removed from the Critical Areas Inventory Map. The motion passed with a 6-0 vote.

C. Sequestered Carbon Via Forestry

Mr. Peterson continued his September 20, 2017 discussion of sequestered carbon and forestry.

A 6-page technical paper on Climate Change and Carbon Sequestration, entitled “Natural Climate Solutions” from the Proceedings of the National Academy of Sciences had been emailed earlier to members. Over 30 authors from around the world contributed to the article.

Zach Ralph, Sustainable Woodstock, and Mr. Peterson are developing a course for adult education on the subject will start in January. Ten topics have been selected. Twenty-three people have signed up thus far.

The intent is to create recommendations that can be used by municipalities and organizations to follow up on in the future. The overall goal is to use nature wisely. In this instance, use of one’s forest to help control carbon.

Mr. Alessi felt the community could show support for the issue, possibly via a municipal vote at the Town or Village meetings.

It was added that forest management creates needed job opportunities, especially in Vermont.

D. Invasives

1. Roadside Invasives - Al Alessi

Mr. Alessi felt the CC should be doing more work on controlling roadside invasives.

This has been a banner year for the increasing spread of invasive plants. Wild Parsnip in particular, has made a very strong showing along Routes 106 and 12. Wild Chervil, the white flowered plant, continues to spread into private property. It has been a roadside issue for numerous years, most likely spread by roadside mowers.

A few weeks ago, a full page article in the Valley News addressed the efforts of the Hartford CC. The article was mainly educational, but did include a few remedies.

The CC should develop a community plan to better prepare land owners for roadside invasives. This starts first with education, as the landowner needs to know what invasive plants are and the negative issues surrounding them.

Mr. Alessi suggested forming a discussion group that would include other groups as well. An ad in the paper could get things started.

Experts need to be invited, such as Mike Bald and Gerry Hawkes, whom have met with the CC on numerous occasions. Tina Barr has goats that have been used to remove Japanese Knotweed from the East End Village Park.

The meeting needs to take place before high weed season. March and April CC meetings were considered as potential dates.

The issue will be continued for further organization in December.

2. High Meadows/WUHS Project

Michael Storage, TRORC Planner, is working with High Meadows, a nonprofit funding organization from Stowe, Vermont, on riparian issues.

On Tuesday November 14, High Meadows held a workshop for the four regional watersheds (Ottauquechee, Memphremagog, Otter Creek and Broad Brook) that have been awarded a 2018 watershed grant.

The project to replant riparian vegetation along the Woodstock Union High School river bank is just one piece of a larger puzzle. The grant intent is to have multiple communities, in our case - Woodstock, Bridgewater and Hartford involved in the process. Enhancement of the watershed is the intended goal. This will involve educating both landowners and users.

Mr. Storage will attend the December CC meeting to educate the CC on the process and intended goals.

D. Town Zoning Rewrite

The Town Planner noted the Town Zoning Regulations have recently been amended to include an Integrated Agriculture section. This would allow agricultural related events to occur after a Conditional Use review. For the moment, only one property has been added to the recently created district which is Kelly Way Gardens and is located off of Route 106. The property will be used for weddings, dinners, food tastings etc. for up to 200 persons.

A second property, Kedron Valley Farms, an 80 acre parcel located in South Woodstock, has noted interest. It was recently purchased by an individual who wishes to place "Vermont" greenhouses that would grow winter vegetables. The PC felt that increasing the number of properties slowly over time would better address potential neighborhood concerns of traffic and noise. The uses work better when located off of paved roads than if located on dirt roads where the residents are typically used to peace and quiet.

E. Village Zoning Update

The PC is currently rewriting the Village Zoning Regulations. The 100' riparian buffer in the Village is being addressed. Numerous properties are impacted by the buffer as almost all river and stream banks are developed in the Village. One school of thought is to reduce the buffer area to 50'. Another thought is to allow a certain amount of development in the areas that are already built on but hold undeveloped areas to the higher 100' buffer standard. The Town Planner will keep the CC up-to-date as progress is made.

F. Village Tree Report

The Village Tree Warden applied for funding from the Economic Development Committee's 1% tax program to replant 15 trees around The Green and in front of the St. James Church. The EDC money is intended to be used to enhance the community economic well being. The grant is quarterly, the EDC will review the grant early next year. The Select Board will review EDC recommendations, most likely in March. Although the various boards, PC, VDRB, and DR, support the expenditure, they all recommended that the Select Board and Board of Trustees budget accordingly to include tree planting and other required maintenance in their annual budgets.

G. Riparian Buffer Violations

The Farmhouse Pottery riparian vegetation replanting is essentially completed. All plants are in place. The access road has been removed and grass seed and mulch have been applied.

IV. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for December 20, 2017.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Submitted by,

Michael Brands, AICP
Town Planner