

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MINUTES
May 15, 2019

MEMBERS PRESENT: Byron Quinn, Al Alessi, Bo Gibbs, Lynn Peterson, Cyndy Kozara, Howard Krum, Bethany Powers
MEMBERS ABSENT: None
OTHERS PRESENT: Ellen LeFever, Brad Ruderman, Shep Butler, Liza Deignan, Mark Thompson, Matt Closter, Alison Thompson, Jack Rossi, George Wohlgemuth, Sally Miller, Tom Weschler, Michael Brands

I. OPENING OF MEETING

Chair Quinn opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m.

II. MINUTES

The April 17, 2019 minutes were approved as submitted.

III. APPLICATION REVIEW

A. T-4906-19 Ellen LeFever & Anthony Wood

Application is for Conditional Use approval to modify porch, remove invasive plants & replant with native species in the riparian buffer. The land is located at 61 Academy Circle and is zoned Residential Low Density.

Ms. LeFever presented the application.

The CC reviewed a site plan of the riparian area and a list of proposed plants.

Ms. LeFever and her husband Mr. Wood purchased the Hyacinth House Bed and Breakfast.

The owners wish to remove invasive plants and would replant with riparian species.

The modification of the porch issue will be heard by the South Woodstock Design Review Board on May 21, 2019.

Honeysuckle, Japanese Knotweed, and Sumac would be removed from the site.

A list of riparian plants from the Champlain Valley Nursery was shown. Blue Flag Iris, Nodding Onion, Spicebush, Silky Dogwood, Elderberry, Virginia Rose were selected as replacement plants. A site map was submitted showing planned locations.

The CC viewed a site map with a color key noting placement of plants.

The Spice Bushes would grow to 6' - 12'.

Ms. Kozara asked if removing the Honeysuckle might create more erosion. The root system is somewhat complex and serves well to hold the soil and the riverbank together. Removing too many plants all at once may create undesired erosion issues.

Ms. Gibbs agreed that a massive removal of the roots would cause undue erosion. She recommended removing and replanting on a longer timetable and not do all the work at one time.

The CC agreed the Honeysuckle plant, although a known invasive, also does a decent job of holding stream banks and other prone-to-erode areas together via their root systems. Removal of these plants should be done with extreme care.

Ms. LeFever noted she had pulled out some plants before realizing a permit is required.

After discussion, Ms. Powers motioned with a second by Mr. Peterson to recommend approval of the riparian plantings with a suggestion that the owner, in order to limit erosion, contact a riparian plant expert to suggest a proper timetable for removing and replanting. The motion passed with a 7-0 vote.

B. T-4910-19 Alex & Sarah Rozek

Application is for Conditional Use approval to construct terrace, a temporary access road & permanent wetlands crossing with culvert. The land is located at 1731 Prosper Road and is zoned Residential Five Acre/Conservation.

Ms. Gibbs stepped down.

Mr. Ruderman, engineer, and Mr. Butler, landscape architect, presented the application.

The CC reviewed a site plan of the riparian area and a list of proposed plants.

The site has a large complex of wetlands, Class II. An application has been made to the State for work within the buffer area. State buffers are 50' and Town buffers are 100'.

The wetlands are mainly to the south and west of the home. A stream runs along the southeast portion of the property within the south wetland area.

The intent is to create a patio area within a triangular area south of the home. The area is outside of the State 50' buffer but within the Town 100' buffer.

The process will involve 4 steps: 1. construct exterior patio, 2. construct temporary construction 10' wide access along the stream, 3. create access via an 8" culvert to the upper meadow, and 4. enhance existing wetlands to the north with the planting of 800 wetland plants.

The parcel was a farm 50 years ago, the fields have been kept mowed over the years.

The 1,824 square foot patio will eventually have a gas fire pit, pool, and pool shed. This would be built in the future under a separate application.

The patio is proposed for an "upland" area (outside of the State 50' wetland buffer). The site is 200' west of the home. Midway between home and patio is a +/- 55' wide half-moon shaped wetland which ties into the larger wetland to the west.

The 12' wide access to the upper meadow would cross the wetland at a 90-degree angle to minimize impact. An 36" culvert would be placed to facilitate water movement.

The Town Planner noted the Town has allowed access across wetland areas. Minimizing wetland impacts is key. The access road should be placed at a 90-degree angle and go through the narrowest section possible. The flow of water through the wetland is not to be impeded. Removal of wetland vegetation shall be kept to a minimum.

A 10' wide gravel temporary construction road to the patio would be placed on the south side along the stream and would end at the circular driveway in front of house. A fabric liner would be placed and 8" of gravel would be added to create a passageway for trucks and heavy equipment. Masons' vehicles and one trip of a cement truck would use the access. The access would be removed once patio is completed. The area would be restored to previous soil and vegetation. No trees or large shrubs would be removed.

The owner wishes to enhance the wetlands running along the north side of the home. The enhancement would be the planting of 45 trees, 242 shrubs and 484 perennials. The area of enhancement is +/- 800' in total length. The width of the enhancement is variable from 0 to 35'. The enhanced plantings would form a buffer on the east side of this lengthy wetland.

The intent of the wetland plantings is to enhance the wetland and to add more permeable space to the property.

The applicant submitted the lengthy State wetland application for review. A State permit has not yet been issued. The State wetland specialist Rebecca Chalmers visited the site.

The CC thanked the applicant for a well-prepared application. The information provided is quite detailed, especially the entire lengthy State wetland application.

The CC reviewed each of the proposed steps individually. Each step was recommended for approval as presented with a unanimous 6-0 vote.

Ms. Gibbs returned to the CC.

C. T-4912-19 Woodstock Resort Corporation

Application is for Conditional Use approval to replace bridges and armor streambank in the Riparian Buffer and Flood Hazard Zone. The land is located at 1489 South Road and is zoned Residential Five Acre / Conservation / Flood Hazard.

Mr. Thompson, contractor, and Mr. Closter, golf course manager, presented the application.

The CC reviewed a site plan of the riparian area and renderings of proposed bridges.

The April 15th rain event caused a massive amount of water to flow through the Kedron Brook resulting in extensive damage to two small bridges, #11 and #12. In one case, a tree fell blocking the waters and causing the soil of the bridge abutments to fail. In the second case the force of the water dislodged the bridge causing the steel support beams to twist and the wood deck to buckle. Both bridges are unable to be used.

The 8' wide bridges are mainly for golf carts and pedestrian crossings.

Scott Jensen, River Management Engineer for the the State's Department of Environmental Conservation, viewed the site and made recommendations for repair. A Stream Bank Alteration application has not yet been filed.

Mr. Jensen recommended raising the bridge height and rebuilding the abutments so that they are flush with the stream bank and do not protrude into the water flow. This will provide additional capacity for increased water flow.

Mr. Thompson showed the CC a new bridge design which includes the Jensen recommendations.

Ms. Gibbs, concerning the armor to be placed on the streambank, asked about potential impacts to the riparian vegetation.

The stream banks proposed for additional stonework to armor the bank are near vertical. Red Twig Dogwood would be planted in the stone crevices to help restore the lost vegetation. Mr. Closter noted prior success with the use of Dogwood shrubs in maintaining stream bank stability.

The proposed bridge reconstructions will also require Flood Hazard approval which is pending.

After further discussion, Ms. Powers motioned with a second by Ms. Gibbs to recommend approval of the application as presented. The motion passed with a 7-0 vote.

V. OLD BUSINESS

A. 15 Hathorn Hill Street - Swimming Pool within a Wetland Buffer

This is an informal request; no application has been made.

Ms. Gibbs stepped down.

Mr. Rossi, landscape architect, and Mr. Wohlgemuth, landscaper, presented the request.

The request was placed on hold at the March 20th meeting awaiting a wetland determination. The property owner would like to build an 18' x 40' pool within a wetland buffer. Mr. Ruderman, surveyor, mapped the wetland. Two wetlands are shown. They are determined to be Class II wetlands which require a State permit.

Mr. Peterson, having visited the site, asked why the owners would want to do anything to the property, the wetland and pond are both pristine.

The pool would be built 18'-20' from the edge of the pond. The wetlands run along the edge of the pond, thereby reducing the setback significantly.

Mr. Wohlgemuth noted no chlorine would be used in the pool. A simpler less harmful salt solution would be used to maintain the purity of the pool water. The solution is designed to neutralize once the system is shut down for a period of time.

There is a strong possibility the site would require blasting to create the pool, due to the presence of ledge rock throughout the area. The owners are aware of this.

The CC agreed the blasting could cause irreparable harm to the wetland and its surrounding buffer areas.

The CC further agreed the pool as proposed is not compatible with a wetland or its buffer area.

After further discussion, Mr. Alessi moved with a second by Ms. Kozara to deny the request due to potential negative impacts to the wetland. The motion passed with a 6-0 vote.

Ms. Gibbs returned to the CC.

B. Plastic Bag Ban

Michael Caduto, director of Sustainable Woodstock, spoke of the current status of the proposed plastic bag ban. Sustainable Woodstock handles recycling and trash collection for numerous local events. In June, they will have more time to contact local businesses to both educate them and to gather information on acceptance of the ban.

Both Vermont House and Senate have overwhelmingly passed a bill to ban plastic bags. The ban should be effective within two years, once the governor signs the bill, ignores the bill or a potential veto is overridden.

It was suggested that hemp bags as a sustainable product could be a good material to use as long-term bags. A local businessman plans to process hemp. Sustainable Woodstock would like to do an immediate run of 1000 bags to start the process.

Small businesses may need help in getting up to speed. Bags could be donated to them. A Woodstock themed logo was suggested.

C. Carbon Sequestration

Mr. Caduto updated the CC on this month's carbon sequestration progress. A local group meets the third Monday of every month. Both Mr. Quinn and Mr. Peterson are active participants. Members are developing recommendations for the Coolidge State Forest that will be presented to the State foresters. Michael Cox, forest professor at Dartmouth, has engaged numerous students to gather information on carbon sequestration with a poster in the offing. Mr. Caduto hopes to find time to write a booklet on the subject that could be tied into the State's current use practices.

V. OTHER BUSINESS

A. River Loop

EDC representatives, Tom Weschler and Sally Miller, presented the River Loop. The Town Planner will email a copy of the site map to the CC. The River Loop runs about 3 miles starting at the EE park east along the river to the Audsley property and back to the park. A State grant was obtained last fall for an updated design. The original design was completed in 2000 but due to landowner resistance was set aside.

The first phase would be to provide a mowed path along the route. At the moment, this is all the landowner, Woodstock Resort Corporation, will allow. In the future there is hope for hard pack trails and bump outs for river viewing and access.

The path runs within the 100' riparian buffer and would require a conditional use permit with review by the CC.

The Town Planner noted that should the path stay within the 5' width category it would meet the riparian standards that allow a path and access to take up to 5% of the 100' riparian area.

There are flooding issues, where portions of the path may have to be rebuilt each spring. Currently a wet area on the east end supports a beaver population.

Wildlife habitat is a major concern. Riparian areas are well known to provide homes and nourishment for wildlife.

Additional concerns are parking, comfort stations, maintenance, trash, and dog use.

The EDC envisions parking taking place at the EE park.

Mr. Caduto mentioned that Charlestown, NH has a similar river trail and should be viewed for reference.

Ms. Powers noted the schools need to be involved as part of their outdoor curriculums. Wildlife and riparian management are key education components.

Once the trail location, etc. is finalized, an application will be submitted for formal review.

V. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for June 19, 2019.

VI. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:20 p.m.

Submitted by,

Michael Brands, AICP
Town Planner