

CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Minutes

September 18, 2019

MEMBERS PRESENT: Al Alessi, Bo Gibbs, Lynn Peterson, Cyndy Kozara, Howard Krum
MEMBERS ABSENT: Byron Quinn, Bethany Powers
OTHERS PRESENT: Jack Rossi, Joby Thompson, Barbara Barry, Mary McVey, Emma Lyford, Michael Caduto, Jessica Richter, Carole Pickett, Shawn Audsley, Michael Brands

I. OPENING OF MEETING

The meeting opened at 7:00 p.m.

II. MINUTES

The minutes of June 19, 2019 were approved as submitted.

III. NEW BUSINESS

A. V-3475-19 Sustainable Woodstock

The application is for Site Plan and Conditional Use approval to construct an amphitheater. The property is located at Maxham Meadow Way and zoned Community / Conservation / Flood Hazard.

Ms. Lyford, engineer, presented the application. Mr. Rossi, Ms. Barry and Ms. Thompson, members of Sustainable Woodstock, aided the presentation.

The CC reviewed the site plan and renderings of the proposed structure.

The East End park is owned by the Village of Woodstock. Sustainable Woodstock, with Board of Trustees approval, has been very active in creating the park from a former snow dump site.

The current proposal is to place a 3800 square foot stone amphitheater on site for use as a public event space. Seating would be five 2' foot tall stone walls spaced 7' feet apart. Maximum seating within the structure would be 85-90 persons.

The site plan noting flood plain, flood way, sewer line, and stormwater drainage was reviewed. The map also noted the 50' or 100' riparian buffer areas.

The site plan includes a "geoblock" driveway to the river, that is not part of the application.

The State officials noted no concerns with either flood issues or riparian impacts.

The State's riparian review covers a 50' buffer from river's edge and not the 100' Town buffer. The structure is mostly outside of the 50' buffer. However, almost the entire property is within the 100' riparian buffer.

An additional underground drainage system (perforated pipe with gravel on top) is proposed to handle excess stormwater. These would be added to the existing rain garden system built into the west side of the property.

In the VDRB review, parking was a big issue. The new site plan shows 45 onsite parking spaces, all of which are located directly off Maxham Meadow Way. The proposed parking area encroaches the 100' riparian buffer by just a few feet at its western most terminus.

With Sustainable Woodstock involvement, numerous trees and other vegetation have been planted over the past two years. This has substantially improved the riparian functions of the site.

A 36' diameter labyrinth would be built of rings of stone placed flush to the ground surface with grass planted between. The labyrinth is already in place between the river and the amphitheater. Due to its location it would serve as the stage.

In addition, an 11' tall, 36' long 10' wide pergola is planned to be placed at the top of the amphitheater near Maxham Meadow Way. The pergola would be built of cedar and have vines planted to create natural shade.

It was noted a large amount of soil would be removed as the amphitheater would be built into the hill side. The intent is to remove the soil from the site.

A portion of an existing stone wall would be removed as it lies in line with the first row of proposed seating.

After discussion, Mr. Peterson motioned with a second by Mr. Krum to approve the request as presented. It was noted the work, mainly numerous plantings, conducted thus far has improved the riparian area. The motion was approved with a 5-0 vote.

B. T-4955-19 Carole Pickett

The application is for Conditional Use approval to stabilize Kedron Brook located behind home. The property is located at 4632 South Road and zoned Residential Low Density / Conservation / Flood Hazard.

Ms. Pickett presented the application.

The CC reviewed photographs and a rough site plan of the stream bank.

The applicant bought her home, a former Grist Mill, in 1980. Erosion is occurring along 80' of the bank along the rear lawn of her home. This area is mowed right to the water's edge. The applicant wishes to reduce erosion. Over the years the bank has been receding.

Photographs show numerous stones exposed along the bank and the mowed lawn.

The applicant had State stream bank engineers, Todd Menees and Scott Jensen, review the site. Both agreed the addition of small stones along the bank would help reduce erosion.

John Cameron, local excavator, looked at the site and drew up a work plan. The project area measures 10' - 12' from the water's edge and is 80' long.

Ms. Gibbs asked about planting along the bank to help reduce erosion and to enhance riparian functions.

Ms. Pickett stated she hopes to do so but doesn't want to plant anything tall like trees and/or shrubs, as they would block the view. She is amenable to planting smaller plants like Hostas and Irises.

The Town Planner gave her a list of potential riparian plants from the Champlain Valley Nursery.

Mr. Cameron is also known to advocate plants in addition to placement of small stones for erosion control.

The CC emphasized that the roots of plants are very important to hold the soil in place. The eroded area along the bank is the area without any trees or other substantial riverbank vegetation. Without strong root systems the area continues to erode.

The CC recommended the erosion control should be a system of riparian plantings and stones. A common method is to plant between the stones.

Ms. Kozara noted plants known for their roots and soil retention need to be prioritized over those that produce beautiful flowers.

After discussion, Ms. Gibbs with a second by Mr. Krum, recommended approval of the application as discussed above. The motion passed with a 5-0 vote.

C. Shawn Audsely

Mr. Audsely requested an informal review of a proposal to extend an existing building located at 18 Mill Road within the required 50' riparian buffer. Mr. Audsely will be moving his plumbing business to the former Rupert Leonard plumbing shop on Mill Road.

Two site maps were presented showing the property lines, stream, and buildings. A 15' long addition would be added (west) to the rear of the former Rupert Leonard plumbing shop building. The building has driveways/parking areas on north and south sides. The area west of the building, proposed building site, is a lawn which is mowed to the brook.

The CC suggested building an ell onto the building to avoid additional impact on the riparian buffer area. The building currently sits 11' into the buffer.

The owner felt snow loads and efficient use of the building would be compromised if he constructed an ell.

After realizing reduction of the riparian buffer would be difficult, the owner stated he would rebuild the back section of the building in the same footprint but gain space by going taller. Building within the existing footprint should not require a riparian review, as the building is currently grandfathered.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

A. Town Plan Update

The Town Planner noted the Energy Chapter of the Town Plan received final Town/Village approval on September 17, 2019. It will be sent to TRORC for the regional review process. At the same time, the plan will be submitted for an Act 174 review, which would allow the

municipality to participate the PSC reviews of proposed solar farms and other +50 kw facilities. The CC will have a large part in the review process as most constraints are of a natural kind: ridgelines, wetlands, steep slopes, etc.

B. Carbon Sequestration

Mr. Peterson presented an update following the Monday night meeting of the Carbon Sequestration group.

Up to now California and the stock market have been areas of funding for carbon sequestration. In England, a new movement is under way to have regular people donate to a fund that plants trees specifically for carbon storage purposes.

The US should allow funding for tree plantings as well. The public could be involved without having to wait on government to act.

When a tree grows carbon is absorbed. Tree planting is a great event for children and schools to provide a positive aspect on climate change and to watch their tree grow.

Mr. Caduto noted the State is warming to the use of the Calvin Coolidge forest and others for carbon storage.

Large forest owners need to be brought into the equation, as 3000 acres is considered a threshold size to have a significant impact. The group is looking at a 3200 acre parcel within 30 miles of Woodstock.

Another perspective is to have numerous smaller landowners' band together, 200 - 15 acre parcels would equal 3000 acres.

Ms. Gibbs asked if Vermont Coverts (vtcoverts.org), a wildlife habitat protection group, has shown an interest.

Mr. Peterson, a Coverts member, noted they are starting to come around on the concept.

Chair Alessi noted wildlife corridors and forest blocks encourage maintenance of large connected forest. This too could be used to support carbon storage.

Ms. Gibbs mentioned Current Use reverses this thought by encouraging forest cutting. All CU landowners need a forestry plan with specified cuttings over time. This needs to be rethought at the State level, to allow less cutting and more carbon storage.

Mr. Peterson noted thinning trees to allow larger growth trees may benefit carbon storage as certain trees would be allowed to grow larger. One would assume larger trees would hold more carbon.

Chair Alessi suggested the CC could schedule an event on forest use, similar to the invasive plant event held.

Town Planner read a Green Mountain Power proposal to plant 40 trees for carbon storage. This offered to the town that writes the best essay regarding carbon storage

The CC volunteered Mr. Caduto for the task.

Mr. Caduto noted he is working with Pentangle to sponsor the child's play The LORAX about trees.

"The Man who Planted Trees" a 1953 French children's book about replanting a devastated valley with trees was mentioned as a great source of inspiration for children.

C. Plastic Bag Ban

Due to the State's recent passage of a ban of plastic bags, emphasis is being placed on providing information to the local stores and educating the public. The State ban starts 18 months from bill passage. Mr. Caduto spoke with the Mac's Market staff who have noted the store is ready to participate.

V. OTHER BUSINESS

A. Kedron Brook

Mr. Caduto, Sustainable Woodstock, and Ms. Richter, TRORC, presented information on the forthcoming removal of dams discussion schedule for the October 16, 2019 CC meeting.

To improve fish habitat and improve water flow a group of individuals is proposing removal of three cement structures in the Kedron Brook. One is located along the Frost Mills lot, another just north of the Village Post Office and the third just north of the Sports Center on Route 106.

Strategic placement of stone boulders on top of the stone structures could allow fish to navigate certain areas where the cement barriers are placed.

Additional members of the group including State River Engineer Todd Menees are scheduled to attend the October meeting.

The discussion brought up the possibility of removing the Billings Farm dam along Route 12. The Army Corps of Engineers is doing a flood control study in the Town of Woodstock. Removal of the dam was one item discussed. An issue with removal of the dam is that all the gathered sediment will wash down stream.

An aside: the US Fish and Wildlife with the Town's highway crew and equipment removed numerous pieces of mostly ancient metal debris from the river today at the East End park.

B. Climate Change Week

On Friday September 20, 2019, Climate Change Week kicks off. There are numerous events scheduled to take place. Locally, the WUHS plans an event at the Town Hall that evening.

VI. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for October 16, 2019.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting was adjourned at 9:00 p.m.

Submitted by,

Michael Brands, AICP
Town Planner