

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
Minutes
October 16, 2019

MEMBERS PRESENT: Al Alessi, Byron Quinn, Bethany Powers Bo Gibbs, Cyndy Kozara,
Lynn Peterson
MEMBERS ABSENT: Howard Krum
OTHERS PRESENT: Eric Sandy, Jeff Kamuda, Sue Geenall, Todd Menees, Michael
Brands

I. OPENING OF MEETING

The meeting opened at 7:00 p.m.

II. MINUTES

The minutes of September 18, 2019 were approved as submitted.

III. NEW BUSINESS

A. V-3475-19 Joe & Sheri Fisch

The application is for Conditional Use approval to locate power pedestal and generator in wetland buffer. The property is located at Gaebert Road and zoned Residential Five Acre / Conservation.

Mr. Sandy and Mr. Kamuda, Birdseye contractors, presented the application.

The CC reviewed numerous photographs, a site plan and a cut sheet of the proposed generator.

The owners wish to place a power pedestal and propane generator within the 100' wetland buffer.

The most practical location was chosen to be close to the home with easy access from the driveway and to blend into the land.

The location is 14' off of the driveway after the turn up to the house. The last power pole is at the bend in the driveway. All service is under ground from this point to the house.

The landscape plan was reviewed, screening elements are a mix of vegetation (White Spruce, Eastern Hemlock, and Red Twig Dogwood). The plantings are on the driveway

side of the pedestal and generator. Behind this to the east is a stone wall and a heavily forested area, also a wetland.

The facilities are located outside of the 50' wetland buffer line. To be outside of the 100' buffer the items would have to be located in the open field, south of the bend in the driveway.

Ms. Kozara asked why can't the facilities be placed closer to the house, possibly behind the house. She is very concerned with the impact to the wetland.

The applicant noted the chosen location is a good fit. The area is well drained and would drain away from the wetlands and not into them. Screening the items works very well in this location. Placement closer to the home would require additional trenching into the bedrock.

The generator is not large, measuring only 28" x 21". It would be placed on a thin cement pad. The power pedestal would be affixed to two 4" x 4" posts. It would be 6' tall as GMP requires them to be placed at eye level.

It was noted the entire driveway is located within the 100' wetland buffer of the larger wetland. The house itself is located within the 100' buffer of the smaller wetland. It was approved as it is above the wetland with all drainage designed to go west away from the wetland.

The applicant stated the whole intent of the project is to blend in with the natural settings. The home is stepped into the hillside, preserving trees along its edges. Placing the facilities as proposed would have a minimum impact on this natural character.

Ms. Powers felt this should have been addressed during the first hearing for placement of the house.

The applicant stated they wanted approval of the house site before approaching GMP for line placement. Both elements of the application are dependent on the location of the power lines.

Chair Alessi felt if one used the 5% rule, whereby trails are allowed to occupy 5% of a buffer area, he sees no harm from the proposal. The footprint would be much less than 5% of the buffer area.

Ms. Gibbs agrees it is a good location, but suggested more plants to help mitigate the situation.

Mr. Peterson asked which is the major concern here, the aesthetic consideration or the impact to wetland.

The Town Planner suggested a Tesla-like battery backup system instead of propane generator.

The applicant noted this was discussed as the battery system has many pluses and minuses. However, the owners prefer the more reliable propane system. Propane is also used for heat, water heater and cooking within the house.

After additional discussion, Ms. Gibbs with a second by Mr. Quinn moved to recommend approval as presented.

The motion passed with a 5-1 vote. Ms. Kozara voted against.

B. Kedron Brook Water

Ms. Greenall, Watershed District Representative, and Mr. Menees, State River Engineer, presented a report on water testing of the Ottauquechee River and the Kedron Brook.

Mr. Menees has been conducting testing voluntarily for 8 years.

The water laboratory is now located in Randolph after years in Burlington and Waterbury. This should make it much easier to get water samples to the lab on time and for results to be calculated. The water sample needs to be tested with 5 hours after it is taken.

Mr. Menees has a volunteer group that needs funding to keep the water testing project alive. The amount is very small considering the importance of clean water, only \$500 per year. The group monitors 24 sites along the entire lengths of both the Kedron Brook and Ottauquechee River. He has worked with Ms. Kramers' class at Woodstock Union High School. In the past, he worked with Save the World Kids, but found them not to be reliable when needed. Summer months are key sample gathering times. Both safety and insurance are important components as well.

The Town Planner suggested asking the Selectboard to add a \$500 line item to the CC's annual budget.

Ms. Gibbs felt the Town of Killington would be very interested in the water results as they control the headwaters of the Ottauquechee and therefore may be willing to pay into the fund.

Ms. Greenall noted Woodstock has the only stressed data areas. Teagle Park is an area of concern, showing high levels of ecoli. Woodstceck is also the most populated community along the river. The Kedron Brook is totally located in Woodstock.

Mr. Menees apologized for not including a map of the sample sites. He will send this to Chair Alessi.

The Town Planner will write a letter to the Selectboard noting Kedron Brook is a key area of water testing.

C. Killington Wetland

The Town Planner emailed an article in the Rutland Herald that addressed the Town of Killington's removal of a number of beaver ponds. The removal has generated a lot of discussion by citizens and users of the nearby Appalachian Trail.

The Town Officials in Killington determined that a number of beaver dams are causing problems, and have hired beaver trappers to remove the animals. Beaver trapping is an allowed activity and the Killington is not breaking any State laws.

Mr. Menees stated he had read the article, but knows no more on this particular issue. However he did discuss, the State's beaver reintroduction program. Other states don't have Vermont's beaver issues due to topography. Beaver dams bring all kinds of wildlife with them due to the availability of water. He will email a power point presentation on beavers to Chair Alessi for distribution.

Ms. Gibbs recommend a book, Eager Beaver.

The CC then discussed dam removal briefly. Mr. Menees works on the Vermont Dam Task Force.

All agreed the removal of the Billings Dam on Barnard Brook will be a hard nut to crack. It will depend on who's in control of the Billings Farm Foundation. The dam has a lot of history.

IV. OLD BUSINESS

A. Town Plan Update

The Energy Chapter of the Town Plan received final Town/Village approval on September 17, 2019. The plan is currently under review by the TRORC for the State municipal plan review process and for an Act 174 review, which would allow the municipality to participate the PSC reviews of proposed solar farms and other +50 kw facilities. A final decision should be made at the TRORC October 30, 2019 meeting.

B. Carbon Sequestration

Mr. Peterson presented an update following the monthly Monday night meeting of the Carbon Sequestration group. The value of trees in removing carbon was the main topic. One tree can remove 4 tons of carbon in one year. The CC discussed what type trees would have better sequestration results.

C. Plastic Bag Ban

Mr. Caduto was not present. There was no update on the plastic bag ban.

V. OTHER BUSINESS

A. Kedron Valley Farm

The owner of Kedron Valley Farm built a parking lot and driveway within the 100' wetland buffer and encapsulated a stream leading from the wetland to Route 106. Photographs and an orthophoto map of the area were shown to the CC. The owner will be submitting an application to resolve the issue. The parking lot is to encourage public visits to a farm. The area to the south of parking lot has been used to grow vegetables this summer. A moveable chicken house is also located nearby.

B. Pearson Knotweed Removal

The owners placed thick sheets of black plastic over areas of Japanese Knotweed infestation. Photographs of this were shown to the CC. The Town Planner has been in conversation with the owner. The plastic will be removed shortly, before winter sets in. An issue is that the roots of the knotweed will seek light at the edges of the plastic sheet and therefore spread well beyond the control site.

C. Upper Valley Land Trust

A trail passing along the south side of the Kedron Brook, just south of the South Woodstock Fire House is eroding. The trail is on property owned by Tom Debevoise and his wife Laurie Livingston. Under an Upper Valley Land Trust agreement the trail is maintained and operated by both VAST and GHMA and open to the public.

The Town Planner showed photographs of a culvert under a trail crossing located on the Kedron Brook bank. The culvert is exposed as the brook has been eroding around its edges. Scott Jensen, State Stream Bank Engineer, viewed the site with the Town Planner and Mr. Debevoise. Mr. Jensen suggested adding additional stone to the face of the culvert to fill in the eroded area. This should then be planted with the appropriate vegetation to hold both the stone and soil in place. An application is forthcoming.

VI. NEXT MEETING

The next meeting is scheduled for November 20, 2019.
Town Planner noted he would not be present for the December meeting.

VII. ADJOURNMENT

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

Submitted by,

Michael Brands, AICP
Town Planner