



Town of Stowe Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes January 22, 2024

A regular meeting of the Conservation Commission was held on Monday January 22, 2024, at 5:30 pm in the Memorial Room of the Stowe Town Office.

Members in Attendance: Jacquie Mauer, Kay Barrett, Catherine Gott, Seb Sweatman, Colleen McGovern, Phillip Branton, and Zach Lewis.

Staff in Attendance: Sarah McShane

Others in Attendance: Ryan Percy, Jeff Sanders, and Mark Leach.

Call to Order – The meeting was called to order by Chair J.Mauer at approximately 5:30 PM.

The meeting began with introductions. Jeff Sanders from UVM Extension and Ryan Percy were both present. Mark Leach, a neighbor and Stowe resident, was also in attendance.

Public Comments & Adjustments to the Agenda – No public comments.

Review of Meeting Minutes - On a motion by C.McGovern, seconded by P.Branton, the meeting minutes were approved as submitted. The motion passed unanimously.

Review Mayo Farm Agricultural Lease & Leased Area

Both Ryan Percy and Jeff Sanders were in attendance to discuss the Mayo Farm leased agricultural lands. Ryan Percy explained that his family started using the land around 1990, a few years prior to the town owning it. The fields are centrally located and nearby other fields they use. J.Sanders described the practices implemented over the years. They currently grow corn silage which is chopped and feed to cows (opposed to being processed into grain). Hay for cows is also grown on the lands. He described the productivity of Kentucky Bluegrass and explained that it loses its productivity after the first cut. He described the difference between CFO, MFO, and LFO and the related standards/requirements. He described the elements of a nutrient management plan and the VT-590. He mentioned how nutrient management plans were once a conservation planning document and are now a regulatory document to implement the TMDL restrictions for Lake Champlain. He explained that the land is monitored with soil testing completed every three years. He explained that the soil tests evaluate the chemical properties of the soil as it relates to nutrients. Phosphorus, potassium, and micro-nutrients are all tested. In addition, there are also soil health tests that are collected- soil fertility relates to the chemical aspects. Members inquired and discussed soil health. J.Sanders discussed how Nutrient Management Plans must demonstrate they can manage the amount of manure generated by the farming operation. The plans identify the sources of manure and test nutrient levels of the manure. These measurements are collected every year using a software designed for Vermont farmers. Nutrient management plans also contain a field inventory, identify fields and associated acreage, assign a 'Russell 2' number. The plans also contain a phosphorus index which assesses the risk of phosphorus entering waterways as well as the VT 'P Index'. J.Sanders described the Environmental Concerns Risk Assessment which documents various activities and characteristics, and considerations. He also described the 'P Index' and how it applies to the application of phosphorus. He explained that all of the Mayo agricultural fields are primarily listed as being low and medium, with one field listed as being high in phosphorus. He

explained how phosphorus binds with the soil very quickly and how if manure was once stored on a field, the phosphorus levels may remain high for many years/decades. He explained that on fields measuring high, the farmer must spread less manure. He also explained that one way phosphorus enters into Vermont is by grain and that phosphorus is in nearly everything. He explained that in the 60s & 70s the state gave phosphorus to farmers to apply before fully understanding its impacts. Members discussed the 'P Index' and how it measures surface runoff, subsurface runoff, and tile-line (subsurface drainage to help fields drain faster). He explained that when soil moves into the water through streambank erosion phosphorus enters the waterways. He described the accuracy of soil testing. Members discussed the previous application of spreading bio-solids on Mayo Farm and noted that the treatment plant had been updated since bio-solids were last spread. C.Gott inquired about manure spreading, cover cropping, and water quality training. J.Sanders explained that nutrient management plans must be updated every year. R.Percy described his cover cropping over the last few years, he mentioned that there are incentives to do cover cropping and pay for the seeds. He explained that he prefers to have it completed by October 15th as soon as corn is harvested. Winter Rye is the cover crop used the last few years- it will start growing at a low temperature and is used in colder climates. J.Sanders noted that implementing reduced tillage and cover crops are both climate smart practices that the USDA is pivoting towards. He added that not leaving the soil dormant is important. R.Percy mentioned the 'no till drill' and described other grant programs to incentivize/subsidize these activities. R.Percy reported that the silage corn grown on Mayo Farm is used to feed their cows locally and their operation contains just under 650 head of cows, with about 280 of those milking. K.Barrett inquired about the wastewater disposal easement shown on a plan. R.Percy was not entirely sure the details but thought it may be for a leachfield easement and/or related to Weeks Hill Meadows. C.McGovern mentioned the streambank erosion by the Quiet Path. J.Sanders mentioned that the state will not allow all streambanks to be rip-rapped, he shared his thoughts about streambank erosion. R.Percy mentioned the nutrient management plan requirements are stringent and the state comes out at random every several years to inspect the fields. C.Gott shared some off her recent findings and inquired whether the streambank has legacy level of phosphorus. Members discussed the height of the streambank and whether its contributing to phosphorus levels in the waterway. J.Sanders described the 'Tolerable Soil Loss' which is the allowable amount of soil lost and the variables that go into the calculations. Members discussed the Quiet Path and riparian buffer. J.Sanders mentioned that the Percy's are required to maintain the riparian buffer and adjust it accordingly. J.Sanders suggested that there are a ton of government programs to help fund remediation and improvements and suggested talking with the Conservation District regarding program and funding assistance. The Commission thanked J.Sanders and R.Percy for the attendance and informative conversations.

Conservationist of the Year

S.McShane provided an overview of the Conservationist of the Year and explained that each year the Conservation Commission recognizes a person or organization for their conservation efforts. The award is given out at Town Meeting Day. Members discussed possible nominees. P. Branton recommended the Commission recognize Kristen Sharpless as Conservationist of the Year. C.McGovern seconded. The Commission agreed. P.Branton and S.McShane will prepare the award information.

Sterling Forest Management Plan

Members discussed the next steps for to update the plan. During the next meeting the Commission will review and refine the survey questions and decide who and how to distribute them.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on February 12th.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:04 PM

Submitted by,

Sarah McShane