



Town of Stowe Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes February 12, 2024

A regular meeting of the Conservation Commission was held on Monday February 12, 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, Evan Freund, Phillip Branton, and Zach Lewis.

Staff in Attendance: Sarah McShane

Others in Attendance: Mark Leach, Brooke Fleishman

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

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

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

Balsam Poplar Cuttings – Request from Intervale Conservation Nursery

Brooke Fleishman from Intervale Conservation Nursery was present. She explained that the Intervale Conservation Nursery is requesting permission to collect Balsam Poplar cuttings from Mayo Farm. She described the collection methods which utilize a pole hook to pull down the tree branches and remove a 6-9" cutting. She explained that they would only collect 20% of what is available and that the cuttings are propagated in greenhouse and used for restoration project across the state. She noted that the collection would be from the same area as last year along Mayo Farm Road. C.Gott inquired about how many cuttings were collected last year. B.Fleishman did not know the exact number of cuttings collected last year but explained that they were all propagated in spring and transplanted in the field. She mentioned that with last year's significant flooding some of the transplanted trees were drowned out. There are pros and cons associated with growing in floodplain area. S.Sweatman motioned to recommend approval of the request. K.Barrett seconded. Members agree to approve the request. Staff will work with the Town Manager to place the matter on the Selectboard agenda.

Mayo Farm Storage Barn Update

S.McShane explained that the barn collapsed in December and given the extent of damage and its current condition, it is not practical to reconstruct it. She noted that the Historic Preservation Commission (HPC) has granted its approval to remove the damaged building and she simply wanted to inform and update the Commission. The Department of Public Works hopes to replace the building on the existing foundation in the near future. S.Sweatman inquired about the foundation work that had been completed. S.McShane was unaware of the work that had already been completed. P.Branton inquired about the style of the replacement building. S.McShane noted that the HPC will need to review the plans and that the building was part of the Mayo Farm historic farmstead with a few agricultural barns still remaining.

Sterling Forest Management Plan

Commission members circulated a paper copy of the stakeholder survey questions and a list of possibly interested/impacted property owners. Members discussed advertising the survey broadly and the different forms of stakeholders (i.e., recreation users, nearby property owners, etc.). Members

discussed the different perspectives of living in Sterling versus visiting Sterling. Possible survey distribution mechanisms include direct mail, municipal website, directly contact related individual organizations, front porch forum, etc.]

S.Sweatman asked whether the Commission should include a question regarding forest management. C.Gott mentioned the recent community and regional discussions regarding the Worcester Management Plan and noted that forestry activities are completed for a variety of reasons... habitat, ecological, etc. Members discussed the purposes of the Sterling 'patch-cuts' and opportunities to create a more diverse forest through forest management and timber collection. C.Gott suggested that additional viewpoints should be considered such as the Department of Fish & Wildlife. K.Barrett inquired about the tools available to keep forest healthy. Members discussed broader policy issues involving forest management activities, creating bird and animal habitat, or leaving the forest alone. Mark Leach suggested the Commission consider asking a survey question regarding whether logging/timber harvesting has disrupted recreation use of the forest. E.Freund suggested preparing prompted questions to have a larger broader policy discussion during the May meeting. K.Barrett agreed to finalize the survey questions and P & Z staff agreed to upload the survey to an online survey platform. S.Sweatman suggested for the Commission's student representative Z.Lewis to coordinate the online survey and for all of the Commission members to have access to the online results. S.McShane recommended that since the Commission is a public body that acts as one, it is more appropriate for municipal staff to coordinate the online survey and for the results to be reviewed together as a public body during a public meeting. Members discussed process for trail maintenance and the different responsible parties for maintaining trails. C.Gott suggested that these groups should inform the Commission about maintenance projects to ensure they are in-keeping with the management plan. P.Branton mentioned it can be confusing to users to know whether the trail is on private or public property and who is responsible for trail maintenance. S.McShane suggested the Commission and staff work on preparing a trail inventory which list the condition of the trail, responsible parties for maintenance, and any needed improvements. The Commission could then assess and prioritize trail projects. J.Mauer asked whether we should invite VAST & Catamount to a meeting. Mark Leach suggested inviting STP.

Project Updates

J.Mauer shared the riparian suggestions provided by Peter Danforth and noted that the smaller watercourses/streams should include a 25 ft riparian buffer and the larger streams include a 50-100 ft buffer. She asked the Commission how the existing required buffer should be monitored on Mayo Farm. S.McShane can remind the leaseholder of the requirement. Members agreed to continue to discuss options to reduce river erosion. S.McShane asked the Commission if they were still interested in conducting water quality testing this summer. The Commission agreed. She asked whether the Commission would like for her reach out to the Alchemist to see if they would be willing to host Green Up Day again this year. Members agreed.

Next Meeting

The next meeting will be held on March 11th.

The meeting adjourned at approximately 7:10 PM

Submitted by,

Sarah McShane