

Minutes

Exeter Conservation Commission Visioning Session

9:00 am Saturday, February 19, 2011
Ridge Room at The Boulders

Present: *Pete Richardson, Don Briselden, Kevin Keaveney, Carlos Guindon, Maggie Matick, Ginny Raub, Bobby Aldrich, Chairman and Kristen Murphy, Town Natural Resource Planner.*

Guest: *Carol Andrews, Executive Director
NH Association of Conservation Commissions*

Mr. Aldrich opened the session welcoming Ms Andrews to the Exeter Conservation Visioning Session. Ms. Andrews agreed to meet with the Commission to help guide the structure of the present Commission and to participate in a discussion of some of the issues with which we are presented.

Ms. Andrews, who also serves as chairman of the Conservation Commission in Washington, NH, replied she was pleased to be of any assistance she could in helping the group focus and prioritize their responsibilities and offer insight on how other CC were dealing with the tasks.

The Conservation Commissions are guided by the NH RSA 36-A which allows the establishment of a municipal conservation commission to pursue "...the proper utilization and protection of the natural resources and the protection of the watershed resources" within their community.

Stewardship is a must for the commissions. Discussion focused on the number of easements held by the ECC and the responsibility for monitoring such parcels. The lack of monuments and the time spent on establishing the boundaries were cited. The location, number of and size of the parcels are also factors in the monitoring. Ms. Andrews offered suggestions for addressing the task and suggested Stewardship become a line item in the ECC budget to engage outside resources to aid in the monitoring.

Commenting on the Natural Resource Inventory (NRI) the ECC is currently undertaking, Ms. Andrews stated it is a must have. In identifying what you have, it becomes the first step to planning. Discussion focused on what should be included and the "weight" of each resource in the document.

Wetland permits were addressed and the importance of conservation commissions' vote when the permit application goes on to DES. It was noted commissions have the right to not rule on a permit application if the group does not feel the information is timely or inconclusive.

In response to a query Ms. Andrews said water is a natural resource and water quantity and quality is within the CC scope of responsibility. Bring the issue to the group and

decide what amount of time and energy the group wishes to expend. It is the responsibility of each group to prioritize their areas of focus and the resources to carry out the tasks.

Other topics of discussion were formation and role of subcommittees, educating the public on what we do, recruitment of new members, the Raynes barn and land. On the Raynes barn, referring to the RSA and the protection of natural resources, she asked if we needed to be involved in the maintenance and upkeep of the barn as it was a stretch of the intention of the RSA to expend conservations funds on a structure. Could it not be appropriately administered through another Town entity such as the Heritage Commission. And for the land, if we have ownership, we have right to manage. Town Forests, trails and their maintenance, community gardens, reaching out to public for assistance in a certain area of interest and getting the commission involved in the planning (developments) early on in the process were also topics of discussion.

With regard to trail management Ms. Andrews recommended a formal agreement be signed between the Commission and the mountain bike enthusiasts to define the roles without hindering their support. There was also a discussion that on March 15 of this year, there is a new requirement pertaining to ADA accessibility on trail use. It was recommended the Commission review the new legislation as it will have implications on what vehicles can be permitted on trails.

For forestry she recommends the Commission research the designation of the Town Forest. If it is an official designation there are additional requirements under RSA 31.112 that we need to be sure we are meeting such as establishing a Forest Maintenance Fund.

It was also recommended an initial review of development projects before the developer draws up plans so as to incorporate the Commission's concerns early. It might be the Natural Resource Planner that represents the ECC and represents their views of the project.

After a morning of discussion on numerous issues of importance to the Commission, Mr. Aldrich thanked Ms. Andrews for her willingness to come to Exeter and take an active role in the session. Ideas, comments had been listed by Mr. Aldrich during the discussion and he said they would be referenced at the April meeting. (It was noted we voted not to have March meeting because of the municipal election being held on March 8, 2011.) In the interim, it was suggested the members list their interests and priorities to help focus our energies for the coming year.

In summary, the four main action items from the meeting were emphasized as follows:

- Research the Town Forest designation
- Establish a Stewardship Committee
- Involve the ECC early in the planning process
- Initiate discussion on role of ECC and Raynes barn

Meeting adjourned 12:15 pm.

Ginny Raub

