

Exeter Conservation Commission
June 11, 2019 7 PM
Town Offices Nowak Room
Draft Minutes

Call To Order

1. Introduction of Members Present

Present at tonight's meeting were Carlos Guindon, Ginny Raub, Andrew Koff, Sally Ward, Todd Piskovitz, Andy Weeks, Alyson Eberhardt, Dave Short, , and Kristen Murphy. Bill Campbell, Lindsey White, Lucretia Ganley, Trevor Mattera, and Julie Gilman were not present. Mr. Piskovitz called the meeting to order at 7:03 PM. The full members plus Ms. Raub will be voting.

2. Public Comment

- a. There was no public comment at this meeting.

Action items

1. Request for Annual Acidotic Racing Exeter Trail Race (Sarah Sallade)

Sarah Sallade and Ray Fahnestock, co race directors, spoke about the 11th annual Exeter Trail Race, planned for Saturday June 22 at 10 AM. Ms. Sallade said there will be a 10 mile course and 4.5 mile course. The start/finish is at Commerce Way. Mr. Fahnestock said he goes out the night before and puts flags on trees and temporary markings, and he sweeps up after. There is minimal impact to the trails and the race doesn't interfere with other uses. The race is finished by 1 PM, and they're off the course by the end of the day.

Mr. Short said that the organizers of this race do a great job. Ms. Ward asked how many participants they are expecting, and Ms. Sallade said that they expect about 120 runners. She welcomed both the Conservation Commission and SELT to come and have a table at the race.

MOTION: Mr. Koff moved to approve the race. Ms. Ward seconded. All were in favor.

2. Request for discussion on tree planting (Eileen Flockhart)

Eileen Flockhart of 62 Jacks Court asked if there is a comprehensive tree planting and maintenance plan for the town. She has spoken with Jay Perkins, who acts as the town tree warden. He has worked with a software program called iTree for a few years, but not enough to give real data yet. She also spoke with Greg Bisson of Parks and Rec, who told her they have no money in the budget for trees this year. In contrast, Portsmouth has surveyed and documented every tree in the city, and Dover and Newmarket have participated in the Tree City USA program.

Ms. Raub said that after Ms. Flockhart came before the Commission in 2015, Ms. Raub went with her to meet Jay Perkins, and he seemed to have the tree planting and maintenance under control then. Lately there has been a lot of development going on with clear cutting. The Town Ordinances have a provision that any tree over 16 inches on a site of proposed

development has to be flagged, but the Commission has granted numerous waivers of that requirement lately. In response to the requests from the Conservation Commission and the Planning Board to plant vegetation, developers end up planting only a few shade trees.

Ms. Flockhart said that there are 40 trees going into Lincoln Street and they will need serious watering. The town doesn't have a watering truck or any way to get water into Gator bags. Ms. Ward asked who is responsible for maintaining trees that are planted. Ms. Flockhart said that Ironwood doing the planting, and will take charge of the daily watering, but asked what commitment the town has to them.

Mr. Short said that Jay Perkins has some watering device he's been using, and the place to start is with him. Ms. Ward said that each situation shouldn't be dealt with as a one-off. Mr. Short suggested they join the Tree City program as a way of working towards a plan. It would give them a structure to approach the budget committee with.

Mr. Weeks asked why they're not flagging trees over a certain size. Ms. Murphy said that there's a zoning ordinance that requires 16"+ trees to be documented, but there's no provision to compensate for the loss of the tree. A landowner has the ability to log their property. The state is supportive of forestry. Exeter had a town ordinance that required the Planning Department to review timber tax forms and they got a strong backlash. State reps came down and talked with the Town Manager, saying the town had no authority to do that. On Thursday the Planning Board will consider the purpose and intent of this regulation, and how to balance that with the property owner's right to clear cut.

Ms. Murphy continued by saying that Jay Perkins does have a tree budget. The iTree program is used to document the economic resource in street trees. The town does have a "Water Buffalo," and they have no problem filling the Gator bags. The trees on Lincoln Street are large trees, and she assumes there's a plan in place to maintain them. She suggested to the Commission that the Planning Board would be a good place to start, as well as supporting Jay Perkins with the iTree efforts.

Ms. Flockhart asked if there were any coordination between Unitil and the town; she felt that the tree removal along the power lines had happened fast. She contacted Unitil's arborist, who would be willing to meet with the Commission. Ms. Murphy said that Unitil provides a list of each tree they plant or remove to Jay Perkins. He determines if he agrees with the health assessment, and he can negotiate to keep trees. He has a lot of other things on his plate.

Ms. Raub said that she printed out the requirements for the Tree City USA program, and Exeter is already halfway there. It requires a tree board or department; a tree care ordinance; a community forestry program with an annual budget of at least \$2 per capita; and an Arbor Day observance and proclamation.

Ms. Flockhart said there are dying trees at Great Bay Kids Company. Ms. Murphy said if anyone sees planted trees that are dying to call the Town Planner and he can meet with the owner. Owners are required to maintain for three or five years. Mr. Short added that he doesn't believe those locust trees were ever watered, and they were also planted too deep.

Ms. Flockhart informed them that there is a program called Tree Tenders, made up of volunteers, school kids, and families, who attend a workshop and commit to caring for certain trees. There are ways to take ownership of the trees, it doesn't have to cost a lot of money.

Mr. Piskovitz thanked Ms. Flockhart for bringing this up.

3. Request to set a date for a tour of the Water Trail with Rockingham Planning Commission

Ms. Murphy said that the RPC is very open to days/times. The Water Trail is a series of interpretative kiosks from Lincoln Street School to Main Street school to Swasey Parkway. The Commission could do a walk, and perhaps invite the public too. Mr. Guindon suggested it be part of the Parks and Rec “Exploring Exeter” program. Ms. Raub said EXTV could come along. Ms. Murphy said that the next Exploring Exeter without a location isn’t until September 21st, but it’s an option. Mr. Piskovitz asked if they could do an Exploring Exeter before September, and Ms. Murphy said it’s up to Parks and Rec, who are shuttling people to the events. Dates are picked out in advance. Ms. Raub said it would be nice to have the trail walk in summer. Mr. Piskovitz suggested doing it in the evening so it’s not so hot/humid. Ms. Murphy said maybe at 5 before a Conservation Commission meeting, either July 9 or Aug 13th, and she will propose those two dates to RPC.

4. Committee Reports

a. Planning and Property Management

i. Intern Start Date 6/17

Ms. Murphy said that two interns are starting June 17. Maya was doing work with Portland Water Works and has an impressive resume; she wants to explore this end of conservation, including invasive plant removal. She participated in the PEA Garlic Mustard Challenge, and met with Mr. Guindon about removing invasives. The second intern is Forest Hayden, who started with a wildlife policy degree and is now at UNH for a conservation program. Both are very eager to start tasks and develop their own focus as well. She wants to give them as broad an experience as possible, so she’s taking suggestions for further tasks.

ii. Master Plan Action Agenda

Ms. Murphy said there needs to be a connection between the Commission’s planning dashboard and the Master Plan. She’d like to look at how to achieve short term projects and plant some seeds for midterm.

For the support action “Identify new facilities or programming...”, Ms. Murphy said they’re doing a great job of partnering with Parks and Rec with the quarterly program “Exploring Exeter,” and potential senior forest walks. UNH has a downtown and trails program which would be a great collaborative project, should put it in the budget this year. Mr. Piskovitz suggested the program could incorporate the “Conservation Center at Raynes Farm” concept.

She then discussed the support action “Develop a public awareness campaign to educate residents and businesses about water quality and state and federal mandates that require the town to improve and monitor it.” They’re trying to find more ways to share information, such as creating one place that people can go to learn about Conservation things that are happening. Ms. Raub suggested that creating such a site would be a great collaboration for the new Sustainability Committee and Conservation Commission.

Under Prepare, Item 2a is “inventory properties most vulnerable to sea level rise...Develop outreach methods to educate property owners about the risks and ways they can minimize impacts to their properties.” Ms. Murphy has submitted a request to Lisa Wise and Amanda Stone for support around education for climate change and sea level rise.

Also under Prepare, Item 2c is “Based on findings of land use policies evaluation, implement new land use policies and regulations to reduce risks from sea level rise.” Ms. Murphy said that a consultant updated our floodplain regulations, but that’s something the Commission should be involved in. Much of the flood area is in Conservation Land already. Lindsay White is working on the GIS analysis of properties in town that would meet criteria for ARM. The Commission should evaluate conservation land criteria; the recommendation is to include sea level rise.

Mr. Piskovitz said that it would be nice if they had a budget to buy property. Ms. Murphy said that at one time, Exeter tried to get a portion of the land use change tax, that’s how most communities bolster the Conservation Fund. Mr. Koff said that Don Clement had told them the town used to have it and it was taken away. Mr. Piskovitz asked if the Commission should try to get that on the ballot next year. Ms. Murphy said that the CIP used to have \$50,000 a year put into the Conservation Fund. It stopped when they passed a Conservation Bond in 2003, but that was paid off in 2015 and the money was not reinstated. Mr. Short said that in Stratham, all the money from land use change went to conservation, and it was also a CIP line item. They dropped the CIP item but put into place a conservation bond of \$5 million, which gave them the ability to move quickly and not wait for town meeting to talk about property.

Mr. Koff explained that a land use change tax is incurred when land is in a current use program, and they take it out of that use and pay back taxes on the new use according to a formula. The numbers are in Exeter’s annual reports, not huge, but in the thousands. Mr. Piskovitz said that having Raynes and a land use tax both on the ballot next year may not be a bad thing, since people who would vote for one will vote for the other. Mr. Short responded that people on the fence are the problem. Ms. Murphy said that the timeline for short term goals is 1 - 3 years, so it doesn’t all have to happen this year.

Ms. Murphy said that Item 6c involves reviewing and updating a trail maintenance plan. She’s updating the maps. There’s a dramatic increase in the number of trails in the town forest, so they should consider how to define a viable density of trails, and whether there should be some rest and rotation. Mr. Koff said this was a question for the Trails Committee. Dave Short said that years ago, a trail was closed down and people respected that. Other trails could benefit from being closed. Some new trails should be shut down.

Item 7 is to establish a “Friends” group, for Raynes Farm or the Conservation Commission in general. Ms. Ward said there could be value in being more general. Mr. Koff suggested that the interns could formalize the contacts database, and include events attended and other info. Ms. Eberhardt asked if there were a town-wide newsletter where they contribute, since it’s a big ask to have the Commission do regular communications. Mr. Piskovitz said that the Communications Committee was working on it. Mr. Koff added that Public Works offers construction updates, you sign up with your email on the website. Ms. Eberhardt suggested the interns could capture email info at events.

Item 8 is the management of invasive species. Mr. Guindon said progress is being made in this area. Ms. Murphy said that SCA was booked this year, so they should get in the queue early for next year.

Under Connect, Item 2a calls for a town-wide bike and pedestrian Master Plan. Ms. Murphy said that they do have some properties that lend themselves to that, and suggested they consider whether the Commission should be involved.

Relating to Communicate, Ms. Murphy said the town website is clunky in their area. She'd like to standardize the design and add a form to collect contacts.

Ms. Murphy concluded by saying the dashboard is overwhelming, and they need to find a way to prioritize and come up with a list of tasks for this year.

iii. Grassland Bird Survey Potential

Ms. Murphy attended a workshop hosted by Cooperative Extension on recording the presence or absence of birds for grassland bird surveys. Some properties in town would benefit from this survey. The only task is to identify bobolinks and document their behaviors. She would like to do a quick check of Raynes, the Stone-Layton property, and Morrissette, and is looking for volunteers. The data is entered into eBird and can be used in all sorts of research projects. Ms. Raub asked which season this should be done in, and Ms. Murphy responded this season. Soon the bobolinks will be nesting and fledging young. Ms. Murphy cautioned that there is a risk of ticks when walking through a hayfield. Mr. Guindon said he will go to Raynes, and Ms. Raub can do Morrissette. Mr. Guindon said that Stone-Layton doesn't have bobolinks, the area is too wet.

b. Trails

i. Luke Tyner's scout project update

Mr. Short said that the project is proceeding, and Luke's getting the final plans together. There's a potential that he might need to go and perform the project elsewhere, possibly a trail from the skatepark to Morrissette. Luke hasn't started building anything yet.

ii. Kiosk sign purchase request

Ms. Murphy said they approved up to \$600 for trail projects, and quite a bit has been used. They don't have enough in the money set aside to pay for the rest of the kiosks, \$236, but they do have it in the budget. In the combined outreach and trails budgets, they have \$720 remaining.

MOTION: Mr. Guindon moved to approve the spending of \$236 for trail kiosks. Ms. Ward seconded. All were in favor.

iii. Oaklands new trail adjacent to wetland

Mr. Short said he will do his best to address this rogue trail. Ms. Murphy suggested they should do marking on side trails, then people would be able to identify a rogue trail, which could trigger closure sooner. Mr. Guindon said this trail was reported, and added that it's on prime wetland.

c. Outreach Events

i. Update Exploring Exeter Walk, Coop Middle School Project

Mr. Guindon discussed the bird walk he led at the McDonald property with Parks & Rec. It was presented as introductory birding, but it was even more introductory than he expected. Few had binoculars. He talked about why the property is protected, and helped them identify basic birds, such as cardinals and blue jays. Nine people attended.

Ms. Murphy spoke about the two day program at the middle school, which included six classes each day. On the first day, students learned about and measured wetlands; the teacher brought them to natural and man-made wetlands. On the second day, Mr. Guindon and Mr. Campbell joined, and she brought the VRAP equipment. Students collected samples from each type of wetland and tested it. The results of testing man made vs natural depended on the parameter and the class. However, there was some consistency with her expectations, unlike last year.

VRAP is going well, they have seven volunteers going Thursday and Friday. There will be a lot of slow sampling and training.

ii. Upcoming: Raynes Window Workshop 6/29, Exploring Exeter 7/20

Ms. Murphy discussed the Raynes Window Workshop on June 29. It has five registrants so far, and it maxes out at 10. She asked if anyone on the commission plans to attend but there was no affirmative response. She added that she needs help getting tables and chairs out there, and Dave Short volunteered help and a truck on the Friday before. Ms. Ward said that Ben from Word Barn may have tables to share.

Ms. Murphy said the next exploring Exeter is July 20th at the Little River Conservation Area. She would take a volunteer to lead it but could do it herself. Mr. Koff is a maybe.

5. Approval of Minutes: May 14th meeting

MOTION: Ms. Ward moved to approve the minutes as submitted. Mr. Short seconded. All were in favor.

6. Correspondence

- a. A proposal from David Ahearn for a banner page contest for the Conservation Commission Facebook page. Ms. Murphy or Ms. Raub are the ones who can update the FB page. Mr. Koff said an intern should take over the page for the summer.
- b. A memo from David Ahearn encouraging the Commission to budget to remove Autumn Olive from the perimeter of Raynes Field. This would need a contractor, and would be above current mowing budget. He volunteered to brush hog once a month to keep an open walking path for the public if they are interested. Ms. Raub said she would be concerned about its interference with the paid operation, and would like to follow up with the farmer. Mr. Guindon said this work should tie in with the proposed redirecting of the trail. Ms. Murphy was concerned this would be opening up paths for predators to get to nesting sites, and would like to see clearing only around the perimeter, from the parking lot to the barn and down to the trailhead, running parallel to the road and back along the northern boundary. Mr. Guindon has done trimming of autumn olives around the benches and access to trails, but not at the scale Mr. Ahearn is suggesting. Ms. Ward asked for a budget estimate for clearing invasives.

7. Other Business

Mr. Koff discussed the town's water sources. The town is undergoing a long term evaluation of current sources and potential future sources of drinking water. Through his work at DES and his role on the Conservation Commission, Mr. Koff had a conversation with two consultants on that assessment. The town has both surface water and groundwater sources, the Dearborn and Exeter Rivers, which are treated at the Surface Water Treatment Plant, and also a number of wells. There were disinfection byproducts in the drinking water resulting from chlorine reacting with dissolved organics, but now they're using monochloramine which doesn't react in the same way, so they should be in compliance in the future.

The town has had to rely more on the surface water after the dam removal and 2016 drought. Since the dam removal, the river goes down seven feet, and they've lost capacity in some of their wells. The loss in capacity was planned for but it was more than expected. They're looking at developing a new groundwater source. Some proposed sites are on private land they'd need to acquire. They could develop wells on existing town-owned land, but would need to know if the deed or easement allowed for that activity. Ms. Murphy added that the Smith-Page Conservation Area was the property they asked about. She reviewed the deed, and there was nothing to preclude that activity, but they would need to know more about what this would mean. This property has a very narrow access way.

Mr. Koff said that the town voted \$600,000 to develop groundwater resources. A consultant was hired on over the winter. The Conservation Commission should work with the Water Department. If they conserve new land, when looking at deed or use agreements, they could allow for development of groundwater resources as an acceptable use. Having a well there would protect the land.

He concluded by saying that this is not a water crisis, just long-term planning. It takes years to complete a major infrastructure project.

8. Next Meeting

- a. Date Scheduled 7/9/19, Submission Deadline 6/28/19

Non-Public session

MOTION: Ms. Ward moved to go into non-public session pursuant to RSA 91-A:3,II(d), for the consideration of the acquisition, sale, or lease of real or personal property. Ms. Raub seconded. By a roll call vote, all were in favor and the meeting entered non-public

Adjournment

Public session resumed at 9:30 pm. Ms. Ward made a motion to seal the minutes, seconded by Ms. Eberhardt. All were in favor.

Adjournment

9:30 pm Ms. Ward made a motion to adjourn the meeting, seconded by Ms. Raub. All were in favor.

Respectfully Submitted,
Joanna Bartell

Recording Secretary