

Minutes
Conservation Commission
October 10, 2023
(In-Person Meeting)

Attendance: David Miller, Chair, Steve Cohn, Tom Boulay, Reed Pugh, Elaine Vreeland, Administrator.

Minutes: It was moved, seconded, and approved by unanimous roll call vote to accept the Minutes of September 24, 2023, with changes.

Sachem Swamp: Discussion. Reed reported that Maeve Hammond had picked up stakes to mark the trail. She will map out the full trail and collect volunteers. Steve wanted to see a detailed layered plan to be submitted with her application. The plan should show the proposed rail and the viewing platform, location of the kiosk(s), and educational material. Elaine will send her a copy of the Commission requirements and a Request for Determination of Applicability.

Fall Cleanup Day: Discussion. October 21, 2023. Martha will send flyers and post information on community sites. No parking will be permitted in the Jenks Center area of the Jenks Parking Lot, and volunteers must sign waiver of liability forms.

18 Sunset Road: Con't. Public Hearing, Notice of Intent. It was moved, seconded, and approved by unanimous roll call vote to continue the hearing to October 24, 2023, per the request of the applicant.

23 Kenwin Road: Request for Extension Permit. Proposed addition to a single-family home. Gregory Sawicki, rep. The project had been delayed due to the COVID pandemic. It was moved, seconded, and approved by unanimous roll call vote to approve a three-year extension.

25 Cambridge Street: Request for Extension Permit and Certificate of Compliance. Project is construction of a single-family home. David Romero and Phyllis Etsell, reps. Phyllis reported that all work had been completed except final work on the driveway, and that she expected it to be completed by the end of the month. Some grading remains, as well as curbing, a sidewalk and handicap ramp, plus permeable pavers on the front walkway. Mass Highway must do a final inspection on the driveway. Continued to October 24, 2023.

Aberjona Initiative and Cultural District: Reed stated that he will no longer handle the Aberjona Initiative and the Cultural District due to time constraints and hopes that another member will assume those responsibilities. The replacement commissioner would need to explain the role of the commission to the Cultural District members, participate in the design of projects along the riverwalk, contribute to ideas for events to include the Chamber of Commerce, and build relationships. Reed noted that it is a considerable time commitment.

Town Forest: Discussion. Scout Leo Arone wanted to know if his project should include construction of another kiosk at the West Chardon entrance. Reed will walk the forest with him to make a decision. There followed further discussion about what information should be posted on conservation areas kiosks.

Associate Members/Volunteers: Discussion. David led a conversation in which he requested that members consider jobs that could be performed by volunteer members.

Davidson Park: Discussion. Members discussed the possibility of a new plan with landscaping and without dredging. A letter from neighbor Meredith Crowley was discussed, in which she stated that the plantings were too dense, encroached too far into the grassed area, and that vegetation will block views of the river. Elaine said that Eversource would cut a check to the Commission or to the town, and that she has an upcoming meeting with the town manager and the town's consultant to discuss the overall plan for restoration of the park.

Community Preservation Act: Discussion. David presented an overview of the Act and noted that the town is preparing a study group to present information to fall Town Meeting, explaining the Act, how it raises money, and project possibilities for active and passive recreation. He noted that the Commission would want trails at the Winning Farm and The Vale Conservation Areas, Borregaard Beach development, preservation of town ponds, and expansion of the Aberjona Initiative. He hopes to work with the Town Comptroller to establish an expanded Conservation Commission budget for FY25 and noted that the CPA could fund projects which would otherwise not be funded. There followed further discussion regarding how best to convince town meeting members of the value of conservation projects, including the value of natural spaces, amelioration of the effects of climate change, reducing our carbon footprint, and the appropriate use for waterways. Tom recommended a cost/benefit analysis and to rank the projects, and Reed added that we should note the sources of our money and guard it for future needs, that we should look at our priorities, their conservation values, their benefits, and identify the benefitted stakeholders. David will follow up with the Town Comptroller regarding a budget.

Winchester Ponds: Discussion. David stated that they are managed by ad hoc committees now, and that it would be more appropriate for the Commission to take over their management. Steve noted that we might approach promote the idea by looking at the benefits this management might give, such as suppression of cyanobacteria toxins if the pond were to be neglected, noting the increased temperatures, and the length of time water is warmer, and the overall impact on fish and other wildlife.

Submitted by:

Elaine Vreeland

