

FINAL

**LEBANON CONSERVATION COMMISSION
CITY COUNCIL CHAMBERS, CITY HALL OR
REMOTE VIA VIRTUAL PLATFORM
6:30PM THURSDAY OCTOBER 12, 2023**

MEMBERS PRESENT: Sarah Riley (Chair), Erling Heistad (City Council Rep.), Donald Lacey, Susan Almy, Ernst Oidtmann, Bruce James (Vice Chair), Chris Johnson, Barbara Hirai (Alt.)

MEMBERS ABSENT: Sean Dittrich (Alt.)

STAFF PRESENT: Mark Goodwin (GIS Coordinator), Shaun Mulholland (City Manager), Brian Vincent (Lebanon City Engineer)

OTHERS PRESENT: Weston & Sampson Engineering Services:
- Jeffrey Santacruce, PE, PTOE (REMOTE)
GM2:
- Jennifer Reardon, Environmental Permitting Specialist (REMOTE)

1. CALL TO ORDER

Chair Riley called the meeting to order at 6:31pm.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES September 13, 2023 Site Walk
September 14, 2023 Public Hearing
September 14, 2023 Meeting

Amendments:

Public Hearing Minutes – Heading: Change “WEDNESDAY” to “THURSDAY”
Page 2, Line 6&7: Change “Upper Valley News” to “Valley News”

Regular Meeting - Heading: Change “WEDNESDAY” to “THURSDAY”
Page 2 Line 26: Add “approve” after “must”
Page 3, Line 10: Change “mitigation area would have to be within a five-mile perimeter” to “mitigation area could not be within a five-mile perimeter”
Page 6, Line 33: Remove “Greenway”

A MOTION was made by Susan Almy to approve the September 13, 2023 Site Walk minutes, September 14, 2023 Public Hearing Minutes, and the September 14, 2023 Meeting Minutes as amended. The Motion was seconded by Erling Heistad.

**** The Vote on the MOTION was approved (7-0).***

3. OPEN TO THE PUBLIC

No members of the public were present.

4. PERMIT REVIEW

A. Review and Comment to NH DES and the Lebanon Zoning Board of Adjustment: City right-of-way at the intersection of Lahaye Drive and Mt. Support Road: Review and Comment on NHDES Wetland Permit application (major impact) for improvements to the intersection of Mt. Support Road and Lahaye Drive. Proposed work includes the construction of a roundabout, drainage infrastructure improvements, reconstruction/extension of a paved pedestrian/bike path along Mt. Support Road, and relocation of overhead utilities. The improvements result in approx. 16,665 sq ft of wetland impact. (DES No 2023-02602) CC2023-04.

City Engineer Brian Vincent gave an overview of the project (using presentation materials included in the Meeting Agenda materials). He said the wetland application has been submitted to NH DES and it is currently under technical review. He said after the DES reviews it, it will go to the Army Corps of Engineers for review.

He said the intersection is considered failing (Level of Service F) and improvements need to be made for all modes of transportation (vehicular and pedestrian/bicycle). He said there is projected growth in population in the area, which will result in an increase in use of the intersection. He said the roundabout design was deemed to be the best solution.

Impacts to Wetlands and Minimization Efforts

Mr. Vincent outlined the plan's proposed impacts to wetlands:

- 8,306 sq ft for the roundabout and roadway
- 8,359 sq ft for tree maintenance in the utilities' areas
- 400-500 rare plants will be affected

He said the design team made changes to minimize the impact to more wetlands:

- Introduction of steeper side slopes
- Guardrail with 2:1 slopes
- Reduced lane and shoulder widths
- Removal of superelevation on Lahaye Drive

Mr. Vincent discussed the mitigation options for the permanent wetland impacts and said the team determined that the ARM Fund payment option was the best and preferred option by the City and the Army Corps of Engineers.

Chair Riley explained that ARM fund payments are not made directly to Lebanon. She said the City only receives these funds if it submits an application for a project and is awarded the funding. She said it is a very competitive process.

Types of Wetlands Impacted

Ms. Jennifer Reardon explained that the types of wetlands impacted are mostly scrub shrub / forested areas. She said no streams are located in the area. She said the rare plants affected are the Appalachian Barren Strawberry. She said the Natural Heritage Bureau reviewed the plan and determined that transplanting the Barren Strawberry plants is not required.

Ms. Reardon said the NHB recommended the team use compost socks instead of silt fences, which need to be buried. She said the NHB also suggested that tree clearing be done under frozen conditions; if that were not possible, then timber mats should be used.

Proposed Drainage Plans

Ms. Almy asked, if the proposed drainage solutions are adequate for 25-year event storms, will the drainage for this project have to be rebuilt soon after it is completed. Mr. Jeff Santacruce said the design meets the City's requirements and the requirements of the NH DOT. He said drainage solutions include a major culvert that directs roadside rainwater toward a forested area and not toward a flat area (like a parking lot) where the water might cause flooding.

Mr. Heistad asked about the capacity of the 30" drainage pipe under the roadway. Mr. Santacruce said the capacity of the pipe is adequate and does not need to be increased. Chair Riley noted that the City's requirements for 25-year storms may not be adequate for today's storms. Mr. Goodwin suggested the Commission include in its motion a suggestion to encourage the DES to pay attention to the proposed design to ensure the drainage solutions are adequate. Ms. Hirai asked if there was any way to ensure the forested area would not become a flat area, such as a parking lot.

Project Scope Appropriateness

Chair Riley said she questions whether a project of this scope is truly needed. She said the City has many initiatives that should result in less typical vehicle traffic: more EVs, encouraging ridesharing, bicycle and pedestrian opportunities. Dr. Oidtmann said the traffic study is conjecture and does not consider that less traffic may be experienced because of trends such as working from home, telemedicine, and more use of public transport.

Mr. Santacruce said his team reviewed a DHMC 2021 study that showed a projected increase in traffic. He said the regional and statewide trend over the next 10 years is that lanes will need to be added to existing roadways to accommodate increased traffic.

He said the roundabout solution results in:

- No need to add lanes, which increases the area covered in impervious surface
- During peak traffic times, a decrease in the need to stop, which decreases idling, which is better for the environment

- During off-peak traffic times, a decrease in the need to stop when no crossing traffic is actually present
- Roundabout construction can last much longer than roadways and the City should not have to rebuild soon

Ms. Almy said, near the hospital, large numbers of patients and visitors are coming from outside the Lebanon area and it can't be assumed they're going to be able to use bikes and buses. With the addition of the new tower, these numbers are going to be increasing.

Mr. James asked whether the TAP project (which involves the pedestrian/bicycle path) could be expanded to connect from Mount Support Road to DHMC, so employees living in the area could walk or bike to work. Mr. Vincent said the plan does include an extension of the path from Centerra to DHMC so employees can walk or bike to work.

Mr. James noted that the area of wetlands being impacted by this project is small by comparison to the acres of wetlands still in that area. Ms. Hirai stated that a lot of projects that impact "small" wetlands areas can add up to a lot of wetlands lost. Mr. James said it is the Commission's job to make sure that does not happen. Chair Riley said she has realized that the Commission is the only group advocating for the wetlands and natural resources.

Mr. Heistad said if lanes were added to the road (instead of the roundabout), the impact would be much greater. He said, historically, engineers' projections that traffic will increase have borne out over the years, so he said he feels the Commission should accept the roundabout.

Chair Riley said a lot can be done with signalization to help navigate through the existing intersection for cars and bikes. Dr. Oidtmann said the next thing will be a roundabout at Centerra Parkway and more wetlands will be lost. He said the City needs to encourage residents to use different options that result in less traffic, such as staggered work shifts or ride share situations. Mr. James said there have been some amazing changes with EVs and people using other modes of transportation. He said that will be projection over the next 20 years. He said the proposed roundabout plan will accommodate that kind of change in modes of transportation.

No Streams Impacted

Chair Riley asked Ms. Reardon to confirm that no streams are present on the site. She said the USGS Stream Stats map, and the DES Aquatic Resource map show water flowing through the central wetland between Rte 120 and Mt. Support Rd and another along the west side of the northern section of Mt. Support Rd. Ms. Reardon said, after she reviewed the whole project area, she did not find any streams in the project area. She said the bodies of water on the maps may be the drainage swale. Mr. Goodwin said the state data

is not very detailed and that's why the City requires a certified wetland scientist to review the area in person.

Plans for Center and Medians of Roundabout

Dr. Oidtmann asked what is planned for the center of the roundabout and medians. Mr. Vincent said landscaping and planting will be done. He said they are also designing a sign and a decorative block wall.

Alternatives to Rip Rap

Chair Riley asked whether rip rap would be used. Mr. Santacruce said it would be used on one area of steep slope to maintain the slope. Chair Riley asked if the rip rap could be covered with wildlife friendly fabric.

Power Lines and Mowing Plans

Dr. Oidtmann asked what is planned to deal with light pollution and if the power lines are going to be buried. Mr. Vincent said they will use the lighting that is currently installed and follow the Dark Sky requirements. He said it is very expensive to bury power lines. Chair Riley said the recommendation in the Wetlands Best Practices handbook is about horizontal drilling to bury power lines.

Chair Riley also asked whether the team considered alternatives to mowing around the power lines. Mr. Vincent said mowing activity is driven by the PUC and not the City. Chair Riley said the Wetland Best Practices handbook suggests that low-growing shrubs be maintained. She said mowing leads to the spread of invasive species. Ms. Reardon noted that glossy buckthorn is already growing in the area and Mr. Lacey said there is also Autumn Olive growing there.

Barren Strawberry Transplanting

Mr. Lacey said the Barren Strawberry grows well in shaded areas, so clearing the area will reduce the shade and affect the plants. Mr. Heistad asked if the plants could be moved, and Mr. Lacey said the NHB would have to be consulted. He said Barren Strawberry seems to grow very well in Lebanon.

Impaired Waters

Chair Riley said the northern part of the project is located in the Mink Brook watershed, which is considered impaired waters by the Army Corps of Engineers. Ms. Reardon said the impairments are not driven by roadway runoff. She said all waterways in NH are considered impaired for mercury due to atmospheric deposition and E coli. She said any changes in runoff from the roadway will not affect the mercury or E Coli in the watershed. Ms. Almay noted the impaired area of Mink Brook is the part in Hanover where it connects to the Connecticut River, and everybody walks their dogs there.

Mitigation \$\$ Not Being Used in Lebanon

Ms. Hirai said it has been an issue that mitigation funds in the form of ARM payments wind up lost to the City. She asked if there is a list of projects elsewhere in the City where these funds can be used. Mr. Vincent said he was not aware of such a list of projects. He said the City does not track potential mitigation projects.

Chair Riley said the 2016 Wildlife Corridor study recommended that the City secure development rights to some parcels, including a parcel near the SW quadrant of project area (which is owned by Dartmouth College). Ms. Almy said the Army Corps of Engineers has specific kinds of mitigation that they want, and it makes the process a lot harder. Mr. James said there are Dartmouth College landmark lands that have a lot of wetlands that are not preserved. He said preserving these lands could be a good use for mitigation funds.

Ms. Hirai suggested the City form a committee of stakeholders to find ways to better take advantage of funds that arise from mitigation for wetlands lost.

Pedestrian Safety

Mr. James asked about pedestrian safety in and near the roundabout site. Mr. Santacrucce said the plan follows the NHDOT's policies for pedestrian hybrid beacons, which are triangle-shaped signal patterns that use a series of light flashes to warn drivers and ensure pedestrians can cross safely.

A MOTION was made by Erling Heistad that,

For the NHDES Wetland Permit application (major impact) for improvements to the intersection of Mt. Support Road and Lahaye Drive. Proposed work includes the construction of a roundabout, drainage infrastructure improvements, reconstruction/extension of a paved pedestrian/bike path along Mt. Support Road, and relocation of overhead utilities. The improvements result in approx. 16,665 sq ft of wetland impact. (DES No 2023-02602) CC2023-04;

The Conservation Commission asks that the following be considered:

- 1. Pay particular attention to the drainage and stormwater sizing. Culverts should be sized for future storm events to avoid future flooding and to minimize wetland impacts.***
- 2. Don't leave bare riprap – cover with fabric with the goal of a vegetated slope.***
- 3. Pay close attention to controlling the spread of invasives – follow Best Management Practices (BMPs) for upland plants, wetland plants, and jumping worms.***
- 4. Act on the recommendations of the NHB with respect to the Appalachian Barren Strawberry (Geum fragarioides).***

5. Minimize impervious surfaces in the center of the roundabout and in the medians. Plant with natives.

The Motion was seconded by Don Lacey.

**** The Vote on the MOTION was approved (7-0).***

City Manager Mulholland, City Engineer Vincent, Mr. Santacruce, and Ms. Reardon left the meeting at 8:45pm.

5. STUDY ITEMS

A. Boston Lot Management Plan

Chair Riley said this discussion will be postponed to a future meeting.

B. Public GIS MapGeo Tool – Web Training

Chair Riley said this training will be rescheduled to a future meeting.

A MOTION was made by Sarah Riley to extend the meeting to 9:15pm. The Motion was seconded by Chris Johnson.

**** The Vote on the MOTION was approved (7-0).***

6. COMMITTEE REPORTS

A. Biodiversity Group (Invasives)

The group discussed the issue of jumping worms, which are often tracked from one place to another on people's shoes. Ms. Hirai said boot brushes were left near the Connecticut River in another community to protect the trails from jumping worms. Ms. Almy said a list of best practices to protect trails could be posted on the Internet. Chair Riley agreed they could be added to listserv and other sites.

B. Stewardship

Mr. James said Ranger John is still patrolling conservation areas, even though school has started again. He said he, Ranger John, and Mr. Goodwin are working together as a team to collect field data. Ms. Hirai said the new signs Ranger John has put up are nice.

Mr. James said Boston Lot experienced catastrophic storm damage on the north part of the lot where huge trees came down and piled on top of each other. He said Hypertherm volunteers with chainsaw experience are going to tackle the mess next week. He said the lakeside trail is still closed because of downed trees.

Mr. James said an Eagle Scout candidate is working on a historic identification/ memorial project at the cellar hole on the Ticknor property. He said City Historian Nicole Ford

Burley has been providing the human history of the area to add to the project. He said the project involves the installation of a mini kiosk and plaque.

Mr. Goodwin said he was notified that the Nature Conservancy is ready for its annual Elm Tree Assessment.

Mr. Lacey said trail mowing at 2 Rivers is more difficult in late summer when the trails experience extensive vegetative growth. He said a volunteer needs to commit to going onto the trails frequently and remove the vegetation. Dr. Oidtmann said he could ask the Rotarians to volunteer for trail maintenance.

Mr. Johnson said he went to 2 Rivers and cut down some vegetation, but he said there is more work to do in that area. He also said he went to Boston Lot this week and some residents did not know the trail was closed. He said he saw the signs that are posted, but perhaps more or others are needed. He also noted that he found and destroyed a large fire pit on the path near the dam. Chair Riley suggested the Commission have a monthly workday to tackle some of these simpler projects.

Ms. Almy said near the old timber trail on the north side of Boston Lot, there is only one sign about where the roads are that is very hard to interpret. She said there probably needs to be more guidance about the trails for hikers in that area.

C. Wild About Lebanon

No update

D. Amphibian Crossings

No update

E. LUCT/Current Use

No update

F. Other Subcommittees

7. OTHER BUSINESS

A. FYIs

None

B. Follow Ups

C. Workshops and Educational Opportunities

Dr. Oidtmann said the NH Association of Conservation Commissions (NHACC)'s Annual Meeting is November 4.

Chair Riley said the American Chestnut Society is having a meeting at Salt hill Pub in Lebanon on Saturday, October 14.

Chair Riley alerted the group to a future agenda item about the proposed zoning amendments, one of which will change the zoning for the Campion property (Lot 26-17).

8. ADJOURNMENT

The meeting adjourned at 9:15pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Paula Roux
Recording Secretary