FINAL

LEBANON CONSERVATION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
Remote Via Microsoft Teams
LebanonNH.gov/Live
Thursday, March 11th, 2021
6:30 PM

MEMBERS PRESENT: **Ernst Oidtmann (Chair), Sarah Riley (Vice Chair), Erling Heistad, Bruce James, Donald Lacey, Susan Almy, Barbara Hirai (Alt.), Darla Bruno (Alt.)**

MEMBERS ABSENT: **Chris Johnson, Suellen Balestra (Alt.)**

STAFF PRESENT: **Mark Goodwin (GIS Coordinator)**

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1. CALL TO ORDER – Chair Oidtmann called the meeting to order at 6:33 PM

- Mr. Mark Goodwin reviewed the meeting procedures for remote meetings and NH RSA 91-A "Right to Know" requirements. A Roll Call of Commission Members who participated remotely are listed above.
- Chair Oidtmann appointed Barbara Hirai as a regular voting member in place of Christopher Johnson.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: February 11th, 2021

Mr. Heistad MOVED **to approve the February 11th, 2021 Minutes as amended and presented in the March 11th, 2021 agenda packet.**
Seconded by Ms. Riley.

Amendments: The Commission would like the minutes to reflect that the agenda was taken out of order due to the presenter for a permit review arriving late.

Roll Call Vote:
Ernst Oidtmann, Erling Heistad, Sarah Riley, Donald Lacey, Susan Almy, Bruce James, and Barbara Hirai all voting Yea.
None voted Nay.

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

3. ELECTION OF OFFICERS:

A. Election of Officers-Annual Election of Officers-Chair and Vice Chair: Chair Oidtmann asked if the election of officers could take place in April? Mr. Goodwin said there was some confusion over this. One document said it should take place during the annual meeting and then the Commission started to do the vote in March when the council representative was appointed to the Commission. Chair Oidtmann said his document said it should be done in April. Mr. Goodwin suggested that they hold the election this evening and that he would work with staff to have the procedures updated to have the elections take place in January. Vice Chair Riley said she looked back in past minutes and saw that the elections of officers had taken place in the past in March.

Ms. Hirai asked City Manager Mulholland if he knew when the election of officers should take place? City Manager Mulholland said it was up to the Commission to decide that. The City did not have a policy on the election of officers.

Mr. Goodwin agreed to skip the election of officers until April. The Commission discussed when to hold the elections from now on and they all agreed to hold the elections in April. Mr. Goodwin will change the Rules of Procedures to reflect the election of officers will take place in April.

4. PERMIT REVIEW: None

5. STUDY ITEMS:

A. Proposed Recreation Use for Two Rivers Conservation Area-Mr. Paul Coats from the Recreation, Arts, and Parks Department gave a presentation to add recreational fields to the Two Rivers Conservation Area. He explained that the Department has been a steady partner with the Conservation Commission in the past. Examples he gave were the Annual Cleanup Day as well as being involved in tree protection and plantings in various locations. They have also helped to maintain park trails and been involved in education projects such as Wild About Lebanon.

Mr. Coats was hoping, in this presentation, to address a city-wide issue and hoped to achieve a mutual benefit at Two Rivers Conservation Area. A screen share of an aerial view of the Park with a rough sketch of proposed playing fields was shown. The sketch showed three new playing fields plus a small parking lot being built on the property. He explained that currently the City of Lebanon had run out of fields to play on and the fields that they do use never have a chance to rest because they must be used every season, all season long. When the fields are overused it breaks down the turf which forces the Recreation Department to find ways to control weeds and grubs in the grass. That makes it unhealthy for the users of the fields. The Recreation Department would like to create a healthy grass root system without using any chemicals.

The sketch showed 3 playing fields concentrated near where development and impact have already been present. There was already a lot of pollution within Two Rivers Conservation Area from asphalt dumping that was going on, unwanted invasive species, and other pollutants. In the design he showed the Recreation Department wanted to stay away from both rivers. They would like to build recreational fields and work to cleanup the property by getting rid of invasive species plant life, reestablishing the trail system, and promoting native plant growth.

Mr. Coats explained that he investigated the deed for the property and one of the suggested uses in the deed was a playing field. He also saw that in some old Conservation Commission minutes such a project was suggested a while ago.

Mr. Goodwin explained that the first hurdle that would need to be overcome was to look at the deed and see what it said about the kind of project that was being proposed. He noted that the deed for the property was a very permissive easement. Mr. Goodwin said he had spoken with Mr. Jim Kennedy from Hanover to see what his thoughts were on the project. Mr. Kennedy told him that he would not say no to the concept that was being proposed by the Recreation, Arts, and Parks Department. The project could be contingent on improvements to the rest of the property.

Mr. Coats also mentioned that back in 2003 the Rotary Club presented a String of Pearls project to the City Council and working on Two Rivers Conservation Area was one of the specific parks they proposed to work on. It was proposed that it would be a natural conservation area as well as a place for people to come and enjoy. Mr. Goodwin pointed out that Two Rivers Conservation Area was a wetland mitigation for the Powerhouse Plaza and therefore he was not sure what that meant in relation to the use of the property.

Chair Oidtmann asked what was happening with the Timken property? He thought it offered a lot of potential with all the flat land that was there. Mr. Coats replied that the Recreation Department had been actively pursuing evaluation of the property for the last 2 ½ years. Since then, they have all but walked away from that property to be used as playing fields. The most recent wetland survey updated the map for the whole parcel and the number of wetlands on the property was quite large. From both an ecological and a cost-effective standpoint it made no sense to continue with any pursuit of the property. The Recreation Department also would have had to create a driveway across the Mascoma River Greenway. He also explained that building a bridge would have cost about $1 million.

Mr. James said he liked the multiple use idea with young athletes and young families being brought together. There may be some educational opportunities for the families. He asked how much impermeable surface would be created and where it would be in the project? He was worried about runoff, soils, and wetland impact. Mr. Coats pointed out that the smaller, yellow rectangle on the picture was representative of the parking lot and would be about 40 spaces. He said it was the furthest point away from the river. He was not sure how many square feet that it was, though. They were also hoping to use some of the plaza's parking lot. There would be no additional impervious area.

Mr. James asked if there were going to be night games that needed to have lights? Mr. Coats said they were not envisioning needing lights; they were just looking at the fields being open from dawn to dusk.

Mr. Heistad asked what the situation was with the Bagley property? Mr. Coats replied that back in the 2000s the Recreation Department pursued development on the piece of property. At the time it was rejected for development for many reasons, one being access to the property and another being the residents along Spencer Street effectively killed the project. There are wetlands at Bagley to deal with as well.

Ms. Almy said she was looking at the park's founding documents, and she saw on Pages 2 and 3 of the deed that taking the land from the interstate project came with certain rights that were reserved in another document. In the middle of Page 3 it also said that reference should be made to the covenant that is in the Grafton County Register of Deeds and to look there for a more specific description of the covenants pertaining to the premises. She thought the documents should be looked at to see what would be allowed and not allowed before the project was investigated much further. She also wanted to make sure that fishing would still be allowed at Two Rivers along the riverbanks. She said that the fields making a buffer to trash and other pollution made the project attractive to her.

Mr. Lacey asked if Parcel 2, referenced in the deed, was the property on the other side of the interstate? Mr. Goodwin said he was not sure, but if it was, nothing was being proposed over there. Mr. Lacey asked if the Recreation Department was prepared to put money into the cleanup up of invasive species and pollution that was on the property? He also wondered if the snow removal would need to be changed for the plaza to allow access to the trail system in the wintertime. Mr. Coats said that he viewed the project as a three-way partnership with the Conservation Commission and the K-Mart property landowner. He was hoping they could work together to create a project that took into consideration the fields and conservation efforts. He would like to move quickly on the project because he would like to apply for a grant called the Land Water Conservation Fund. He believed the project could be very attractive for the grant. Mr. Lacey thought it was a good opportunity to take advantage of the limited deed restrictions on the piece of property.

Vice Chair Riley asked if the grant looked at just active recreation or if it looked at passive recreation as well? Mr. Coats said the grant focused on outdoor recreation but did not try to narrowly define what that would be. The City has been awarded other Land Water Conservation Funds for other recreational areas in Lebanon. Vice Chair Riley said that Two Rivers Conservation Area had been neglected for a long time but had a lot of potential. She said one of its most unique features was that it was in an uncommon location and that it was a recovering flood plain forest. There were a lot of tree and plant inventory in there. It provided habitat to a wide array of animals. She thought that there should be more human activity in Two Rivers Conservation Area, but more active management such as hikers, cross country skiers, and bird watchers. She said she would need to be convinced to use this land for recreational fields.

Mr. Lacey thought this was an opportunity to get the work done that needed to be done. He agreed that it was a great flood plain area but felt that this project was going to be a good trade off with the Recreation Department who could get a grant and help to restore at least part of the area. Vice Chair Riley said she thought that there was someone in the City who could help find grants. Mr. Lacey said there was a need to have a shovel ready project for a grant.

Ms. Hirai said that she has walked the property often and enjoyed exploring it. She said that when she was on LEAC there was a City employee who helped with grants. She thought that a City employee could help with a grant to protect the property as a conservation area with passive recreation and not with recreation fields being put in. More discussion took place among the Commission members about the property and what needed to be done with it.

Mr. Coats spoke to the Conservation Commission's concerns. He said he believed the efforts between the two parties were symbiotic. He thought this project would be a way to help keep the area clean and protect the land from un-wanted behaviors. He said that this was a big project and that grants were a lot of work and that he was able and willing to put the work into this project. He also said that there were matching dollars that would need to be put into the grant he was looking at, which the Recreation, Arts and Parks Department would be able to do.

Chair Oidtmann asked how involved the Upper Valley Land Trust was? Mr. Coats replied they would need to very involved in it, at the very least, to review the project and offer their blessings. He had not made them aware of the interest in the property at this time.

Ms. Almy said she was not sure how the project could be up for a grant this year since all the covenants of the property would need to be reviewed and cleared first. She believed that would take enough time that the grant would not be able to be applied for this year.

Mr. James said he thought that this project was a very good opportunity for a disturbed ecosystem such as this one. He liked the multi-use concept. He gave an example of the hiking trails behind the Norwich, Vermont farmer's market. He reiterated his support for the concept at Two Rivers Conservation Area and thought that there could be many ecological and human benefits from the project.

A straw vote was taken of the Conservation Commission members. The question posed to the Conservation Commission was if the members thought they should keep talking about this project in the future or not?

Chair Oidtmann said he was interested in the project.

Vice Chair Riley said she would be interested in a much scaled down version with perhaps only one playing field and not a sport's field, but rather a natural playground.

Ms. Almy said she would like to see two fields on the site and in general she was open to the concept.

Mr. Heistad said would like to have the discussion continued but was not sure he could support the entire package as it stood. He thought there were a lot of options that had not been discussed yet.

Ms. Hirai was concerned about the proposal but was willing to continue discussing the project.

Mr. James said he was in favor on finding out more about the proposal and, if appropriate, would be interested in a joint meeting between the Conservation Commission and the Upper Valley Land Trust. He also wondered if some land could be acquired to add to the property to mitigate for the fields, perhaps some property across the Mascoma River?

Mr. Lacey felt the project was worth looking into. He would like to see a more detailed opinion from Jim Kennedy on the ecological possibilities of the project. He encouraged Mr. Coats to keep looking into the project.

Mr. Goodwin said that the next step that needed to be taken was to look at the restrictions on the property.

6. COMMITTEE REPORTS:

A. Conservation Land Monitors: Chair Oidtmann asked if the Commission members were still interested in building bog bridges at Boston Lot? He wanted to order the boards and needed to know if the project was still going forward and how much wood he needed to order. Mr. Goodwin said that the number of bog bridges was correct, but that the wood order needed to be corrected. He said that there was still interest in the project, but he needed to have an amount of money for the lumber order and that depending on how much it would cost, they might have to adjust the number of bridges that are put in.

B. Lebanon Biodiversity Group: Mr. Lacey said that a wonderful piece on the Big Night crossing was in the Lebanon newsletter. Vice Chair Riley said there was also a revamped page on the Lebanon Conservation Commission's website on the Big Night crossings, as well. She explained what a person would see when they went to the website such as tips for safety during the crossing and how to report their findings.

Ms. Darla Bruno arrived at 8:27 PM.

Vice Chair Riley told the group that Mr. Lacey, Ms. Hirai, and herself met with the Hanover group about removing garlic mustard. They are working on creating a draft outline of what needed to be done and where the work needed to be performed. This will be a topic of discussion during the Conservation Commission meeting in May.

Chair Oidtmann asked if the forms for the stewardship of the trails were on the website yet? Vice Chair Riley said that the forms were up and ready for use on the website. Mr. Goodwin suggested that the whole volunteer program overview could happen at the Commission's next meeting.

7. OTHER BUSINESS:

Vice Chair Riley asked if the Commission needed to talk about the Route 120 guardrail project at this meeting? It was not on the agenda for discussion. She said that Mr. Lacey pointed out that the guardrail project might be the time to have some invasive species removed from the side of the road. Mr. Goodwin said he conveyed to Rebecca Owen the 2 or 3 points that were made from the Conservation Commission's last meeting about invasive species and such. He said if the guardrail project impacted wetlands to the degree that it triggered mitigation, then DOT would come before the Commission for wetland impact review.

Mr. Goodwin talked about the Wilder Dam relicensing process. He said that there had been talk about the owner's making mitigation agreements with the area and he said that it would be helpful if the Conservation Commission encouraged the City Council to have a conversation to find out what opportunities may be had because of the Wilder Dam relicensing. It was decided that a memo would go to the City Council from the Commission asking them to investigate possible mitigation ideas for the relicensing process.

Mr. Heistad MOVED to extend the meeting by 15 minutes.
Seconded by Ms. Riley.

Roll Call Vote:
Ernst Oidtmann, Erling Heistad, Sarah Riley, Donald Lacey, Bruce James, Barbara Hirai, and Susan Almy all voting Yea.
None voted Nay.

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

8. FUTURE AGENDA ITEMS: Vice Chair Riley said that the Commission talked about dedicating a large amount of time to walk the members though the volunteer stewardship program. The next meeting would also be in the middle of amphibian crossing season so there may be time to talk about the crossings. There may also be a possible, further conversation about Two Rivers Conservation Area.

9. ADJOURNMENT:

Mr. Heistad MOVED to adjourn the meeting at 9:11 PM.
Seconded by Ms. Riley.

Roll Call Vote:
Ernst Oidtmann, Susan Almy, Donna Bruno, Erling Heistad, Sarah Riley, Don Lacey, Barbara Hirai, and Bruce James all voting Yea.
None voted Nay.

**** The Vote on the MOTION passed (8-0).***

The meeting was adjourned at 9:11 PM.

Respectfully submitted,
Barbara R. Higgins
Recording Secretary