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Canterbury Conservation Commission

Canterbury, NH

FINAL MINTUES of April 13, 2023

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Present: Ken Stern, Kelly Short, Audra Klumb, Steve Seron (Zoom), Bob Steenson, Teresa Wyman

Absent: All present.

Guests: Leah Hart, Forest Society (Via Zoom); Nicole Martin – VHB; Brad Newell – Eversource; Alex Green – Eversource; Ashley Friend – Eversource; Lance Messenger, resident.

Kelly chaired the meeting. Items were recorded in the order in which they were discussed.
Meeting called to order at 7 pm.

1. Conservation project funding public hearing

Kelly opened the public hearing regarding the Conservation Commission’ intent to contribute funds to a qualified organization to facilitate conservation of forestland in Canterbury.

Member Ken Stern recused himself from this agenda item as he and wife Ilene Stern initiated the conservation project.

Kelly provided an introduction and summary of the project for the public hearing:

Residents Ken and Ilene Stern are working with the Forest Society to conserve almost 400 acres off Bean Hill Road (mostly in Canterbury, with some acreage across the town line in Northfield) for the benefit of wildlife and enjoyment of residents.

The project is in a large area of undeveloped land, surrounded by other conservation areas, and identified by the Merrimack Conservation Partnership and the NHF&G Wildlife Action Plan as a high priority area, and by The Nature Conservancy as part of a climate resilience corridor.

The property has high quality soils, rich diversity of plants and animals, at least 37 vernal pools, and black gum trees -- some of which may be more than 400 years old. Some species noted on property include eastern coyote, fox, bobcat, mink, fisher, and 43 breeding bird species.

The Commission voted at its December 2022 meeting to provide \$36,943 from the Town’s Land Use Change Tax fund to the Forest Society to cover expenses related to the project and long-term stewardship of the property. The Forest Society is a qualified organization under IRS code.

Total project cost is \$286,943, making the town’s share less than 13% of total expenses. This project is possible in part due to the Stern’s generosity in selling the easement for \$145,000 less than its market value.

Kelly opened the floor for public comment or questions. No comments were made.

Kelly spoke in favor of the project and thanked Ken and Ilene Stern for their generosity and dedication to conservation.

Ken Stern was recognized and expressed his thanks to the town for supporting conservation of the land, noting that it is very expensive to complete a conservation easement project and it is very helpful for the town to help cover some of the project expenses. Ken said they hope to host a gathering on the property for a walk after the project closes.

Leah Hart, project manager at the Forest Society, was recognized and thanked Ken and Ilene for seeing the potential for the land, and for going “above and beyond to figure out what is special on the property and inviting the public to enjoy it now and in the future.” She also thanked the Conservation Commission for supporting the project.

Kelly thanked the Sterns again for initiating the project and thanked the Forest Society for undertaking the conservation easement and managing the project.

Kelly closed the public hearing.

2. Eversource V182 and F139 pole replacement wetlands permit application.

Four representatives from Eversource and its consulting environmental firm, VHB, presented their project and wetlands application. They will be replacing all remaining wooden poles with weathered steel poles. The project route has more than 100 wetlands along the power lines. Eversource will avoid and minimize impacts as much as possible within a maintained right of way. A team of 7 or 8 walked the line to choose best stream crossing locations. They will use mostly existing, narrowest crossing when possible. Eversource held a pre-application meeting with DES to get their input on where to cross.

The project will require temporary wetland crossings of a number of wetlands. Eversource will use bridges and mats to reduce adverse impacts. The project will begin this summer and extend to winter 2024, which will require mats in some locations for two growing seasons. The length of time triggers necessity for a Standard Dredge and Fill permit from DES. Eversource will try to minimize the length of time by removing the mats ASAP. To the greatest extent possible, Eversource will use the existing access roads and prior crossing locations.

Nicole Martin from VHB, the wetlands consultant for the project, presented the general overview and explained the details. CCC member Audra Klumb (who is a certified wetlands scientist) asked several detailed questions about the application, wetlands functions and values, and procedures. Nicole provided answers to her questions. The Commission understands the necessity of the pole replacement and that Eversource is following best management practices to reduce adverse impacts to the wetlands.

The permit application identified potential habitat for hibernating turtles along the power line and Ms. Martin said that the mats in those areas would be in use only April through October and will have biological monitoring supervision. She said they will also conduct a rare plant survey from poles 26 - 46 on F139 line in Canterbury for upright false bindweed, which prefers sandy uplands. No work can occur in that section until the survey is completed. They will also be verifying some potential vernal pools where there could be impacts within 50 feet of pool. They will begin review next week to confirm if vernal pool and will coordinate with NHF&G and use BMPs regardless.

The Commission asked for a process clarification regarding the grouping of wetlands for the function and values assessment. Ms. Martin will follow-up with an explanation.

The Commission discussed the project and decided it had no objections to raise with DES.

Related to the project, Eversource Project Services coordinator Alex Green explained that Eversource would like to cross a small portion of town land at the Sawyer's Ferry Forest to minimize the necessity to cross a major wetland. They asked to use a 100-ft +/- section of existing access road on Town property to access Irene Noyes property which will allow them to avoid a wetland crossing during the utility project. The Commission said they will review it and get back to them.

There was some discussion by the commission about the location, which is at pole 186. The commission had no objection to allowing Eversource the right to cross this town property to minimize adverse impacts to the wetland and will inform the Board of Selectmen, which will make the final decision. If the town agrees, Eversource will draw up an agreement for Selectmen to sign.

3. Approval of minutes of the February 9, 2023 meeting.

Steve Seron moved approval of the minutes of Feb. 2023 meeting, seconded by Ken Stern. No discussion or corrections. Teresa abstained from voting because she had not been at the February meeting. All other members voted to approve the minutes. The March 2023 meeting was cancelled.

3. Membership and officers.

Bob Steenson is no longer a selectman and has agreed to serve on the Conservation Commission. Steve moved that the CCC recommend that the Board of Selectmen appoint Bob Steenson as a voting member. Teresa seconded. Vote was unanimous to submit Bob's name for appointment.

Resident Lance Messenger attended the meeting. He and his family have lived in Canterbury on Baptist Hill Road since the late 1970s. He expressed his interest in serving on the Conservation Commission. He is especially interested in the recreational trails throughout town. Ken moved that the CCC recommend that the Board of Selectmen appoint Lance Messenger as a voting member. The commission unanimously voted to submit Lance's name to the Selectmen for appointment.

The commission will discuss appointments to the officer positions at its May meeting.

4. Permits – there were no other permits needing action.

5. Master Plan

Kelly had provided members with the draft by Central NH Regional Planning Commission (the RPC) as well as an annotated copy of our draft and a compilation of items omitted from the RPC draft. Planning Board and RPC had said that omission could be re-incorporated. The Commission discussed how goals had been consolidated as well as specific issues, such as whether the Master Plan should include direction on objectively assessing Class VI roads, listing all conservation lands in the Master Plan, whether to list farms, and reinstating a section on forestry.

Kelly will propose edits for members to review before we send our input back to the Planning Board and the RPC. Ken and Bob Steenson offered to review the recommended changes.

6. Conservation property priority process discussion.

No action since the last meeting.

130 **7. Potential land gift on Rt. 106.**
131 30 acres near the racetrack. Owner wants to donate it to resolve inheritance issues. Commission will
132 discuss in May.
133
134 **8. NHACC** has sent out a survey about blue-green algae that they would like member input on.
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136 **9. Five Rivers Conservation Trust**
137 Five Rivers wants commission input on its conservation strategy. Commission will prepare collective
138 input at May meeting.
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140 **10. Property Maintenance.**
141 Riverland parking lot – boulder removal: Kevin Bragg said his equipment is not large enough to move all
142 the boulders. He suggested we check with John Carr.
143
144 Kelly announced that Bob Fife had put up the blue bird boxes in RS Fife Conservation Area field. He
145 mentioned that he had to rebuild one, which he thought might have been damaged by a bear. Members
146 send their thanks to Bob for all his field work.
147
148 **Next meeting**
149 The next meeting will be May 11, 2023
150
151 **Meeting adjourned at 8:30.**
152 Respectfully submitted by Ken Stern, Audra Klumb and Kelly Short.