

Atkinson Conservation Commission Minutes
Wednesday, August 24, 2022, 7:00 PM
Atkinson Town Hall

Approved September 28, 2022

Members Present:

Paul Wainwright, Chair
Bill Steele, Vice Chair
John Fournier, Secretary
Scott Kukshtel
Jeff Nenart
Monique Chrétien, Alternate (voting)
Hannah Fried, Alternate (voting)

Others Present:

Bob Worden, Selectman Liaison
Julie LaBranche, Planning Consultant

1. Call to Order, and Attendance:

Chair Paul Wainwright called the meeting to order in person at Atkinson Town Hall at 7:01PM on Wednesday, August 24th, 2022. Chair Wainwright took attendance and all members are present except for Members McVay and Newman. Therefore, Alternates Chrétien and Fried will be voting.

2. Review & Approval of Minutes

a. June 29, 2022

Discussion: Chair Wainwright presented the regular meeting minutes from June 29th, 2022 and asked for comments or corrections, there were none.

Vice Chair Steele made a motion to approve the regular meeting minutes from 06/29/2022, as written. Member Nenart seconded the motion.

Alternate Chrétien abstained because she was not present on June 29.

Vote: 5/0/1, the motion carried.

Alternate Fried entered the meeting at this time.

b. July 27, 2022

Discussion: Chair Wainwright presented the regular meeting minutes from July 27th, 2022 and asked for comments or corrections; Member Kukshtel noted a missing word on Page 7, Line 14.

Secretary Fournier made a motion to approve the regular meeting minutes from 07/27/2022, as amended. Member Nenart seconded the motion.

Member Kukshel and Alternates Chrétien and Fried abstained because they were not present on July 27. Vote: 4/0/3, the motion carried.

3. 2022 Spending Status & Proposed Budget for 2023

Chair Wainwright stated that he is proposing a level-funded budget for 2023 with the possible exception that any approved pay raises for recording clerks should be reflected in the budget. Chair Wainwright continued that, in his opinion, the recording clerk deserves a pay raise. Mr. Worden asked what the current pay rate is; Chair Wainwright responded \$19.00 per hour. Chair Wainwright stated that he will be presenting this budget to the Selectmen next week and subsequently to the Budget Committee. Mr. Worden asked some prompting questions to see if there were any other expenses that should be accounted for and stated that he does not see any problem with this budget being approved by the Selectmen.

Chair Wainwright stated that year-to-date, the Commission has spent just under \$4,000.00 which leaves just under \$6,000.00 left, which is typical of this time of year. Chair Wainwright continued that the fields have not yet been mowed, the dues have not yet been paid to the New Hampshire Association of Conservation Commissions, and the Recording Clerk still needs to be paid through the rest of the year, and some signs will need to be printed for the tree-cutting work. Chair Wainwright stated that he may have enough money in this year's budget to pay Julie LaBranche's second invoice rather than take the funds from the Conservation Fund.

4. The "Worden Report"

Mr. Worden stated that the Town is working on preparations for the next election on September 13th. Mr. Worden continued that the Selectmen are trying to have the Department Heads meet with the Select Board once and the Budget Committee once to be respectful of everyone's time. Mr. Worden stated that the American Rescue Plan Act (ARPA) Committee will be meeting next week to discuss upcoming projects, as the Town just received the second tranche of funding of \$376,000.00. Mr. Worden continued that he will be pushing for approval of the wheelchair accessible trail because it is the only proposed project which addresses people with physical challenges. Mr. Worden stated that the next step is to get the proposal executed by Steve Keach so the Town can apply for the LCHIP grant funding.

5. Review of LCP Conclusions & Recommendation – Julie LaBranche

Chair Wainwright stated that Julie LaBranche has been working on the last few sections of the Land Conservation Plan, which include conclusions and recommendations. Ms. LaBranche stated that she went through section six of

the Plan and reorganized the section with topic headings and added numbers to each recommendation so they can be referred to throughout the Plan. Member Kukshtel offered some updates which included discussion of flora in addition to the fauna that has already been covered elsewhere in the plan. Member Kukshtel continued that it is important to provide the residents some more information about the wildlife corridors. Member Kukshtel submitted a marked up copy with other corrections and edits.

Alternate Fried stated that she is new to all of this and asked for some clarifications. Alternate Fried continued that the recommendations seem more hypothetical rather than concrete. Alternate Fried cited where it says “the Commission will coordinate permit compliance with the Town Administrator,” but stated that it does not mention which permits. Alternate Fried continued that there is no action plan against which the Commission can measure its success. Vice Chair Steele stated that, unfortunately, the Plan cannot be too specific because it is to be used moving forward into the future. Ms. LaBranche stated that the next step after this Plan is complete will be to create an implementation plan for each of the recommendations if approved.

Alternate Fried stated that there are a few items in the Plan that should really be handled by the Atkinson Water Resource Committee (AWRC). Vice Chair Steele stated that the goals of the Commission should be in harmony with the goals of the AWRC. Alternate Fried stated that the AWRC is still forming and isn't quite ready to take on much responsibility. Chair Wainwright stated that this is one of the items that will be included in the recommendations although they are not necessarily the intention of the Plan. Ms. LaBranche stated that water quality needs to be on every Committee's priority list; the Commission agreed. Ms. LaBranche welcomes any feedback so she can incorporate the Commission's thoughts and ideas in the next revision. Secretary Fournier suggested one edit to “RC02” by adding “and/or” at the end of the first line because there are some homeowners who are welcoming to wildlife but not welcoming to people on their property for recreational purposes.

Chair Wainwright stated that he has been working on Sections 4 & 5 to talk about the fourteen maps from Rockingham Planning Commission and about how the co-occurrence map was made and how it can be used. Chair Wainwright reiterated for the viewers that:

- Section 1 is an Introduction
- Section 2 is the reasons for conserving and
- Section 3 is methods for conserving land
- Section 4 is conservation attributes in the town
- Section 5 is how to analyze the maps and attributes to understand where the Commission's priorities should be

- Section 6 is Conclusions & Recommendations

Chair Wainwright stated that the Plan is very close to being finalized after a few more reviews and edits. Chair Wainwright continued that he will also be looking to put this Plan, once complete, on the new town website.

Chair Wainwright asked Ms. LaBranche about the conclusions portion of the Plan. Ms. LaBranche stated that she currently has a blurb for the conclusion but looks to the Commission for what should be added. Chair Wainwright suggested taking the plan's goals from the beginning of the Plan and writing conclusions that show how the plan has addressed the plan's goals. Vice Chair Steele read the last sentence of the Plan's conclusion, which he stated summed up the Plan well, "The Conservation Commission will use this Plan to guide land conservation in the coming years." Secretary Fournier stated, about the goals, that all residents who read the Plan must resonate with at least one of the goals.

The Members had a brief discussion about the merits of the work the Commission does, Chair Wainwright stated that the Planning Board is to thank as well with all their efforts to keep the Town beautiful. Alternate Chrétien stated that sometimes she struggles with the lack of community involvement, but she hopes to find new ways of engaging the community. Member Kukshtel stated that the best way to gain community involvement in Commission activities is to make it easy and fun for people to participate and advertise the event well. Alternate Fried suggested putting some fact sheets or other small conservation-based pieces in the Carriage Towne News. Alternate Chrétien stated that her contact at the Carriage Towne News will take any and all content that folks want to give her. Alternates Chrétien & Fried agreed to work together on forming a committee to potentially produce content for the Carriage Towne News. Ms. LaBranche recommended utilizing the new Commission website to post some of this content as well.

Ms. LaBranche stated that conclusions are things like "facilitating engagement within the community" or "exploring funding to implement the recommendations of the Plan." Ms. LaBranche continued that another conclusion is that there is a high value to community character due to conservation efforts. Ms. LaBranche stated that another conclusion is the importance of maintaining open space and fostering land conservation. Ms. LaBranche continued that publishing this Plan will hopefully advertise how residents can get involved.

The Commission thanked Julie LaBranche for her time and work towards this Plan.

6. Short Reports & Discussions

a. Update on the Rockingham County Conservation District (RCCD) Invasive Plant Mitigation on the Sawyer Town Forest

Chair Wainwright stated that he received an email from Ariana Spear from RCCD which stated the following:

We have almost completed treatment at Sawyer Forest (the weather has been forcing some delays). I believe that we will likely complete treatment in one, maybe two more days. Due to drought conditions we have shifted our treatment area slightly to focus on areas typically too wet to treat such as the edges of Foote Brook and adjacent wetlands.

We will re-treat portions of what was sprayed last year including the path edges, and some areas with the densest regrowth, however I do not believe we will be able to re-treat the entire field. I think that the field actually looks very good considering the density of invasives that were present and the seed source surrounding the field. She even noted some milkweed growing in areas that were previously inundated with bittersweet (see attached). The portion of field/mowed area that is closest to the trail appears to have the heaviest regrowth of invasives, particularly bittersweet, a portion of which she will try to target tomorrow.

Once we have completed treatment, she will send us a map of what was targeted in 2022.

As far as field mowing is concerned, it will really depend on what our long-term goals are for the mowed areas and field. It might be a good idea to consult with UNH Extension and/or the County Forester.

b. Fall Mowing of Fields

Chair Wainwright stated that when he spoke with County Forester Greg Jordan, his response was that if the goal was to make the field more grass-like it should be mowed annually in early August. Chair Wainwright continued that Mr. Jordan went on to say that, on the other hand, if trying to maintain an old-field condition, the mowing should be reduced to every two to three years in the late autumn. Chair Wainwright asked the Commission how they felt about this matter. Member Nenart suggested letting the field get back to an old-field condition. Vice Chair Steele stated that it is nice when the field is short enough to walk through but that is not necessarily the intent of the field. The Commission generally agreed to let the field go back to the old-field condition. Chair Wainwright stated that he will let Jim Lavoie know to cut the just the field area once in late October.

c. Update on the Selective Cut on Stickney, Beckhorn, & Marshall (View 4-minute video by Matt Tarr)

Chair Wainwright stated that he walked the Marshall & Beckhorn lands with Charlie Moreno's assistant, Nick Lanzer to mark the boundaries of the selective cut. Chair Wainwright continued that the boundaries have been marked but the trees have not because Nick Lanzer wanted to consult with the logging contractor first. Chair Wainwright stated that the logging contractor Nick Lanzer was consulting with is Scott Le Clair, whose father Fred Le Clair was the logger who logged the Marshall Town Forest 35 years ago. Chair Wainwright continued that Nick Lanzer wanted to make sure that the Le Clairs were able to take on this work, which they are. Chair Wainwright stated that now either Charlie Moreno or Nick Lanzer will need to go mark the trees. Chair Wainwright stated that there are still some trees that need to be marked on the Stickney Town Forest as well.

Chair Wainwright introduced a video by Matt Tarr about selective timber cuts and how cutting down trees can actually be beneficial for the health and variety of wildlife and plants. Chair Wainwright stated that although the video is geared towards homeowners, the Commission is conducting a selective timber harvest for a lot of the reasons Matt Tarr mentioned in the video. Chair Wainwright urged residents to go to the trails on the Caroline Orr Town Forest that was logged seven years ago, to see the beautiful diversity of wildlife habitat present. Chair Wainwright continued that the Commission's long-term goal is to improve things even though it will not look pretty at first. Chair Wainwright stated that the Commission will need to post signage and should likely do a mailing to let residents know about the logging activities.

d. Review of Encroachments: 4 Stickney Road, and Boulder Cove Road

Chair Wainwright stated that Town Administrator John Apple has a contact on Boulder Cove Road and he will follow up on this encroachment. Chair Wainwright continued that he has asked the Code Enforcement Officer to follow up on the fence on 4 Stickney Road to see if there is a schedule to remove it.

e. Any Items for the September Town Newsletter?

Chair Wainwright asked if there were any items to add to the September Town Newsletter. Alternate Chrétien stated that the Commission should participate in the BioBlitz this year although she won't be able to commit to leading the effort. Chair Wainwright stated that maybe the Commission can do their homework this year and plan for an event next year. The

Commission agreed that they can just state they are working on the Land Conservation Plan, the selective cut, and a potential land deal that should be coming up.

f. Troop 9 News?

Vice Chair Steele stated that the Troop has adjourned for the summer but he will reach out to the Troop Leader to see if there is any news.

g. Other Business

Secretary Fournier stated that a resident emailed the Commission asking if he would be allowed to use a fat-tire e-bike on the trails in Town. Chair Wainwright confirmed that this is permitted as long as it is a pedal-assisted e-bike.

Vice Chair Steele stated that he often sees commercial trucks and vehicles parked at the entrance to the Sawyer Town Forest. Vice Chair Steele continued that he understands it is a convenient spot to pull off the road but their large vehicles block potential trail visitors. Chair Wainwright suggested that signage may be required at some point to curb this behavior.

Alternate Chrétien stated that she started helping turtles a few years back, and she'd like to help the turtles cross the road at the northern part of Maple Avenue near the Sawmill Swamp. Alternate Chrétien continued that too many turtles are being hit by cars, and this town is the home to two beautiful species of turtle. Alternate Chrétien stated that she is recommending posting signs to warn drivers of the potential presence of turtles in that vicinity. Alternate Chrétien suggested making the signs hinged so they could be folded down in times when they are not necessary.

7. Next Regular Meetings: September 28 and October 26, 2022, at 7:00PM

8. Hold the Date: NH ACC Annual Conference will be Saturday, November 5, 2022

9. Non-Public Session Under NH RSA 91-A:3, II (d), for consideration of the acquisition of land

Member Nenart made a motion to go into a non-public session under NH RSA 91-A:3, II (d), for the consideration of the acquisition of land. Vice Chair Steele seconded the motion. Vote: 7/0/0, the motion carried.

The minutes of the non-public portion of this meeting are contained in a separate document.

Vice Chair Steele made a motion to exit non-public session. Member Kukshtel seconded. Vote: 7/0/0, the motion carried.

Member Nenart made a motion to seal the minutes from the non-public portion of the August 24, 2022 meeting of the Atkinson Conservation Commission, to be reconsidered at the June 2023 meeting of the Commission unless the matters discussed are resolved and the minutes are unsealed sooner than that. Alternate Fried seconded the motion. The vote: 7/0/0, the motion carried.

10. Adjournment

Vice Chair Steele made a motion to adjourn the meeting. Member Kukshtel seconded the motion. Vote: Approved by Consensus

The meeting adjourned at 8:45 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Zachary Gilberti, Recording Clerk

Attachments:

- None