



Canterbury Conservation Commission
Canterbury, NH 03224

May 9, 2011

Minutes of the Meeting

Present: Galen Beale, Jen Taylor, Bob and Linda Fife, Teresa Wyman, Jim Bassett, Tom Osmer, Kelly Short, Ken Stern

Absent: Fred Ficken

Guest, Steve Seron, Ty Miller, Selectman

1. Ty Miller - Sod Farm

Ty summed up the situation with the Gold Star Sod Farm: they own the town \$180,000 in rent. Because the tenants haven't paid, the Lease has been terminated and they have been asked to leave; currently the Selectmen are in legal negotiations about the tenant's exit.

Tyson saw three possible solutions for the Gold Star Property:

Lease land again

Sell land with existing easement

Lease land with an option to buy

Tyson has met with the Forest Society, and will meet with LCHIP this week. He is also calling people to see their interest in the property.

Tyson has familiarized himself with the Gold Star property and Easement and feels that it has not been well kept up. He is a bit daunted by the idea of the Town having to continuously lease this farm in the future. No doubt a farmer would like to live on the land which may be possible.

Jen and others expressed a desire for the land to be used this year for something to earn a little money. Ty said he felt that because the tenant has not left, and negotiations are underway, it may not be

possible to do anything this year.

Tyson discussed the option of selling the land with the easement in place. He asked, "What would be the disadvantage to selling, if the conservation easement continues to protect the land"? While it might be very complicated to sell with so many interests in the property, Farm and Ranchland, NOAA, Forest Society, etc., a new business would tend to be more committed to succeeding if they owned it.

Tyson has talked with a Turf Farm from Massachusetts who were interested. They felt the trees were a separate business and needed to be sold. The 10,000 trees, a sticking point with the tenants, are worth about \$20 each and should be put on the market gradually. Ty has also talked with Brookfield Farm, an organic dairy, Glines family, Miles Smith Farm and Crete Farm.

Commission members felt selling the land would mean losing control over what was grown there and how it was grown. This is great agricultural land, and an asset to the town they felt.

Ken Stern: town should hold on to it. It was presented at Town Meeting as a long term commitment, maybe the crops will change. It is possible to have a long term lease and to make money.

Tom Osmer: once we pay off the bond it should be making money. Open space forever, and access, which would continue in either case. Maybe even though sod/nursery stock is a high rent enterprise, we may have learned a lesson here about the risk involved in working with such operations. While a successful tenant growing these crops could result in higher annual returns for the town, we could free ourselves from the seeing current problem we face repeating itself in the future by renting to a tenant who produces annual crops (like corn) who could harvest the crop and leave at the end of the season (if we needed to terminate the lease), or by owning the crop such as hay and being paid by an operator for the right to harvest the crop.

Kelly Short: If we sell it, we could get a 99 year lease for the recreational area.

Jen asked for a show of hands for those who would like to sell the Gold Star Sod Farm. There were none raised.

Ken Stern: felt that the previous owner got out because he could not afford to own the land and farm; another owner might have the same problem and we should investigate their finances well. A new deed for the property could restrict agriculture.

The new owners were hampered because they had to pay a large mortgage at a time when the housing market collapsed. This will continue to be a problem, but like the Store, there are solutions, we may not make lots of money, but we could continue to own and steward this land with a reasonable mortgage.

It might be possible to have several tenants on the land.

Jen expressed the Commission's desire not to find ourselves in the same position we were this year, and we would like to help find a solution. We want to offer our assistance, but we want the situation to change. Last year the Commission spent most of its money on the interest for the property and Tyson said he felt there would be no income this year, so we will probably be on the hook as well next year.

Jen asked, can we have some farming this year. Open it up to the taxpayers?

Commission members expressed some frustration, feeling the town was being held hostage, and a solution was too slow in happening.

Jim Bassett: if you can work out a deal, it's the quickest way to get them out. Their deal is half a loaf but their Bank is ahead of us as a creditor, If they go into bankruptcy, we loose control.

Jen asked Ty if he saw the benefit of forming a committee to help him deal with the property. Ty said he did, but just not yet. The Agricultural Commission is interested as well, and he will ask the Planning Board.

Tyson has asked Jeff Lettienger to give us a value for the land. The problem here is that there are very few comparables. The Easement lowers the value of the land. It may not be worth selling.

Kelly: if Blackstone wants time to liquidate can we help them. Could we encourage them to sell turf to Tuckahoe, to help them to liquidate. We say to Tuckahoe: We'll help you by giving you time to get trees out, if you will get rid of the sod .

Ken; the bank lien worries him. If Blackstone takes turf and trees , buildings and irrigation system they only help themselves. Now the Town has less assets to secure its investment.. Tom and Jen agree.

Tom, worst outcome would be that people say we should have never have done this. We could rent it and pay off the bank and still achieve our goal. It may take longer but its doable.

Jen, repeated offer to work with Ag. Commission to identify possible renters for sod area. Ask Selectmen to put it in hay for the year, to get some kind of income.

Tom Osmer: The Easement is to preserve agricultural Soils. The land needs to be put into cover crops. Apparently they have not replenished the soils or put down a cover crop. If that portion is being violated, we have many friends.

Ken : The Farm Management Plan calls for compost to replace harvested sod – they have not done this, there is no cover crop on some of the land. Give them a cease and desist.

Ken felt the possibilities of a chicken farm etc. on the property, is restricted by permeable surfaces and limited building area.

Kelly reminded everyone that there is a recreational area carve-out on this property which must be kept in mind during these discussions.

Jim Bassett: check the limit of the mortgage. Ty thinks it's a million. Where has all this money gone? It would be good to gather all the creditors together for frank discussions, all the "secured creditors" ie the Bank should be there at a discussion.

Jen tells Ty that we would like to resolve the Riverland Gate. Ty leaves at 8:10.

2. Kelly Short – Open Space

Kelly would like to form an Open Space Sub Committee This will aid the Selectmen in their discussions of land ownership. Kelly has asked Ken to join the Committee, others welcome.

3. Tom Osmer – Stewardship Committee

Tom Reviewed recent working meetings. Work days decided. Still working on Kimball Pond Beaver Deceiver. Clinton is checking to see if oyster cage wire will work on this project. Tom said we had no budget for this project.

For a stream crossing across the Fife field, Ken suggested asking Ask Mike Lynch of NRCS for a design for crossing. Tom said the list of project undertaken is always open to input .

The large conservation Signs are thought to be upstairs of Sam Lake House. We will look for them and Jen would like to have the Merrimack River designated River signs go up.

Ken Stern noted that he had planted several crab apple trees in the "orchard" part of Kimball Pond.

Bob Fife would like to remove the large rocks in Fife Field to make the mowing easier. He suggested hiring a big excavator to dig up rocks and bury them. Bob got an estimate for \$120.00/hour . Will cost \$750. – 1,000. Field very rocky, hard to ask anyone to mow because of rocks. It was suggested that we get a second bid for the project.

Ken suggests putting in culvert as well if we get a big machine. Bob will get a culvert permit, consulting NRCS . Jen asked Bob to check in if this project runs over \$2,000. Jen will check with Roger about the established routine if spending big money. Bidding limits, what is the ceiling, etc. .

Bob noted that there are bluebirds in the nesting boxes.

Ken suggested the Commission walk the Town Forest on Briar Brush Road, July 11th meeting.

Bob : bluebird in box.

Jen said this Thursday, the 12th at 6:00 there is a walk about to see the Gold Course easements which we need to monitor. We will give them some easements signs to post there. All are invited to view these easements. Tom suggested photographing each easement as they are so small.

4. Minutes approved.

The minutes of the April meeting were approved with corrections on a motion by Kelly , seconded by Jim. All voted in favor

5. Other items

Ken noticed in Planning Board minutes they were consulting on a subdivision on Old Gilmanton Road. What is the status of this road, it has been blasted and widened – Ken will visit the road.

Bob said the beavers at Kimball Pond Dam are getting thicker. It takes constant attendance to clear the dam. He noted that people are driving their cars and parking on the dam. Bob reviewed that the large rocks were taken out last year for fire access, but the Fire Department agreed to put them back. Rocks taken out last year. A chain across the access was suggested, as well as a Fire Access sign. Jen will discuss this at the next Selectman's meeting.

Bob asked Jen to write Ellie Bezanson a letter from the Commission recognizing her contributions to the purchase of Hildreth Field.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:10 on a motion by Ken, seconded by Bob.

Respectfully submitted,

Galen Beale,

Acting Secretary

