

MINUTES

Canterbury Conservation Commission, March 11, 2013

Present: Kelly Short, chair; Jen Taylor, vice chair; Fred Ficken, treasurer; Bob Fife, Tom Osmer, Ken Stern, Teresa Wyman, Steve Seron, Linda Fife.

Absent: Galen Beale, secretary; Faith Berry.

Guests: Win Thomas, Beth McGuinn, Selectmen Ty Miller and Bob Steenson; Steve Blackmer, Mark Hopkins.

1. Public input on potential uses of Robert S. Fife Conservation Area field

Win Thomas is an abutter to the RSFCA (house set back off Center Road). He said he had no particular concern, came to hear discussion, and also said he thinks the best (or possibly only) access to the back half of his property, which is bisected by a brook, would be through the field. He might someday need to ask permission to cross the field with a vehicle.

Beth McGuinn, a former CCC member, said grazing was one of the things discussed during the active acquisition phase and believes it is an appropriate use. (Beth currently serves on the Agriculture Commission and clarified that she was speaking only for herself, not the Commission.)

Selectman Ty Miller said he would like to see animal pasturing going on in the field. Grazers can maintain the field in the long-term without having to arrange mowing every year.

Win: cows don't necessarily eat the bad stuff.

Ty: ask the Ag Comm which types of animals would be most helpful as grazers. Talked to Miles Smith; uses intensive grazing system, small patches fenced, cows eat the field down low, then move to new patch. The field needs a heavy duty clearing along the edges. Suggested perhaps the Ag Comm could, at some point, figure way to feature prize winning animals in the field.

Selectman Bob Steenson: Said the CCC's list of uses and timing looks good. If he were a neighbor, he would be concerned about use of rifles due to proximity of houses. Selectmen don't have a specific agenda for the field. The Town clearly purchased it to conserve it as open land.

Linda Fife: has any research been done about which animals would eat more of the problem species?

Beth: goats eat woody debris, but don't graze. As you cut things over time, the roots deplete and they sprout less. Then cows can take care of it. Could be done by hand.

Ken Stern: if there's a way to control the thorns, then I'm open. But the rose bushes have to be brought under control.

Bob Fife: would like to at least keep a portion of the field without grazing to get rid of roses.

Ty suggested talking to Carol Sewell at Miles Smith about intensive grazing.

Tom Osmer: once the field is in good shape, fence doesn't have to be moved for mowing.

Bob Steenson: maybe the field needs a few years of mowing, herbicide, trimming to eradicate the invasive species, then we could have animals back. Selectmen heard many positive comments about animals in the field.

Tom: There were many other views too. CCC spent a lot of time on the cow issue last year. Let's remember the problems we had.

Ty: would be glad to turn the selection process, etc. over to the CCC or Ag Commission.

Bob Steenson: the Selectmen remain open to all possibilities.

Next Step: Kelly Short said she would request input from the Ag Commission about the potential uses of the field as well as best practices for improving and managing the pasture.

2. Fish & Game request for access to Town Property

Fish & Game requested access to Town-owned property to survey Blanding's Turtles. Committee discussed properties likely to host turtles, including: Schoodac, Big Meadow on 132 (partly town and partly private). Brook on west side of Shaker road (on Shaker Village and Meehs (across from Shell Mtg Hse Road), "Meadow Brook". Short brook, full of Cardinal Flower.

Ken Stern moved that the the CCC recommend that the Selectmen approve F&G request. Jen Taylor seconded. All approved.

3. Information presentation by new owners of easement land on Foster Road

Kelly Short recused herself from participating in the discussion as a CCC member, and asked Jen Taylor, vice chair, to chair the discussion. Kelly and her husband Steve Blackmer purchased the land on Foster Road on which the town holds a 90-acres easement.

Property owners introduced themselves. Steve Blackmer has 30 year's history in conservation in New England. Steve is in the process of ordination as an Episcopal priest. He wants to use to make explicit connection between conservation and spiritual

practice. Charlie Marino has agreed to work with as the forester on the woods restoration project. The concept is to put in woods roads for forest management and which can also be used for spiritual, contemplative practice. Steve said he foresees using the property for forest management, wildlife habitat, non-commercial recreation, spiritual and contemplative purposes.

Ken Stern: Fantastic idea. There is a growing body of knowledge about the connection between health and nature.

Linda Fife: What you're saying makes sense. How will you spread the word?

Steve Blackmer: we will design to keep in carrying capacity of woods, roads, neighborhood.

Bob Fife: I'm all for it.

Teresa Wyman: Think it's wonderful.

Jen Taylor: From an easement perspective, we're grateful to partner with landowner who knows there is an easement, especially with your background. At the end of the day, the land will far exceed what it's been, richer, more biodiverse.

Mark Hopkins: (Mark is working with the landowners). We're talking to neighbors. When initial land transfer happened, the neighbors got together, have strong sense of neighborhood. Will continue to talk with others, will forward any concerns to Steve and Kelly.

Steve Blackmer: considering possibility of offering firewood from improvement cutting to people in need.

Tom Osmer: He has wondered what should CCC do when we need to cut trees on conservation property. How can it be shared out or sold for benefit of town? A troubleshooting question: the potential sticking point is the definition of non-commercial use, ie. Tom suggests, for example, charge for services, program, room and board, but the woods is open to all, for free.

Jen Taylor: We need to try to create a process by which CCC gets notified when a property with a town-owned Conservation Easement changes hands. It is the seller's responsibility to notify the town, but maybe we can coordinate with the assessor's office to be notified of the change in ownership.

4. Update on easement for Robert S. Fife Conservation Area (RSFCA)

It's not clear Town can donate the easement without Town Meeting approval. Bob Steenson, chair of the board of Selectmen, said it's clear that the property was bought for

conservation, but we may have some conservation housekeeping items to take care of at a future TM.

Selectman Ty Miller raised a couple of questions regarding the Conservation Easement: Kimball Pond Rd is very narrow, utility poles and stonewall are right on edge of road. If state wanted to widen road, it would need to condemn property to do it. Would need to prove no better alternatives. CCC should discuss how we want the CE to accommodate possible road or utility or sidewalk improvements.

Ken: when highway built new interchange for new airport, it almost went onto Conservation land. SPNHF argued and DOT redesigned to avoid conservation area.

Tom Osmer: it's not the CCC's job to accommodate future infrastructure needs of town.

Ty Miller; property is right next to town Center, worth considering what might be necessary.

Bob Steenson: there are probably better routes for utilities to come into town. Widening road would require 50 feet of tow slope.

Jen Taylor: We could consider ways to improve goals on property, e.g, bury utilities, add sidewalk to improve access.

5. Town Meeting Preparation

Members discussed informational materials to provide at Town Meeting.

Tom: suggests using full Strategic Plan, great document.

6. Easement Monitoring

Tom Osmer: List of town-owned easements seems complete.

Question: how to treat properties that have been subdivided, e.g., the Booth's.

Ken Stern: suggest hiring help for the harder easements. Both the Booth and the Meeh easements have state interests.

Possible contractors or leads: Chris Kane, Dan Sperduto, Carol Andrews, Darrel Covell.

Review of easement properties identified the following:

- 2 Hoffman CE, 1 is for sale. Would be good to get a baseline on it.
- Foster Road – have basic info
- Metters – was a real problem; might be good to have 3rd party check it out.
- Dubois – seems lower priority, but we should get file established.
- Messer – for sale; baseline would be good.

Ken Stern suggested requesting a 2 part proposal from contractors. Get a price for monitoring each of the 4 suggested priorities, and get a separate proposal for helping with all properties.

7. Other

- Special Special Places conference is coming up; please register if interested.
- Gregg Meeh would like to come to a future meeting
- Posselt easement: Hal & Edie Posselt have been working with 5 Rivers Conservation Trust on an easement on their property. The CCC had begun working with the Posselts several years ago, but the project had stalled.
- Tom Osmer volunteered to set-up at Town Meeting to hand out materials (Kelly and Jen will provide materials.)

8. Minutes of Feb. Meeting

Ken Stern made a motion to accept minutes, seconded by Fred Ficken. Corrections were discussed. Vote on approval with corrections: unanimously approved.