

Falmouth Conservation Commission Minutes of May 13, 2008

Meeting convened at 7:05 PM

Members Present: Lissa Robinson, Chair, Caleb Hemphill, Mel Dickenson, Willie Audet, Frank Ruch

Members Absent: Sean Mahoney

Liaisons: Lissa Robinson (CPAC), Caleb Hemphill (FTAC, FLT), Willie Audet (FEDC)

Staff: Gary Fogg (consultant)

Monthly Meeting Leader: Frank Ruch

Guests: Pat Ianni (Board Member of Friends of Casco Bay and Master Gardener)

Minutes

The minutes for the meeting of April 7, 2008 were approved as written.

Presentation on Yardscaping by Pat Ianni

Frank invited Pat to the meeting to help the FCC gain new perspectives and understanding on the relationship between lawn and garden practices and the water quality of Casco Bay. He began with a map of Falmouth's surface water features and building footprints. Streams permeate the topography of the community, including areas heavily developed for residential and commercial uses. The distance between the top of watersheds and the Presumpscot River or Casco Bay in Falmouth is so short that contaminants carried into a stream by runoff will make their way from a lawn or garden to the ocean in only a few hours, at most, during a major storm.

Pat began by explaining that better yardscaping practices became of interest to the Friends of Casco Bay (FOCB) more than 15 years ago, when they first started water quality sampling in Casco Bay and detected nitrogen, phosphorus and pesticides, almost certainly from yard and garden sources. Since that time, residential pesticide and fertilizer use in Maine has increased dramatically as a result of urban sprawl and the selling of these products by big box retailers. The FOCB yardscaping program is an attempt to counteract the environmental effect of this trend by encouraging homeowners to use low impact landscape maintenance practices.

Pat then reviewed the basic tenets of low impact yardscaping, which can be summarized as follows:

1. Select the right plants for the soil and other site conditions to reduce maintenance effort and cost.
2. Use native species that thrive naturally in the area, thereby eliminating or greatly reducing the need for fertilizers and pesticides.
3. Avoid invasive species that crowd out native plants and wildlife.
4. Use a diversity of well-adapted grass species in a lawn in order to reduce the effect of disease or drought on any one species.
5. Create multiple canopy layers using ground covers, shrubs and trees in order to diversify landscape plantings, provide year round color and texture and improve wildlife habitat.
6. Reduce lawn area in order to reduce the mowing, air pollution, fertilizing, watering, weeding, and pesticide use associated with maintaining a lawn.

7. Maintain a lawn by frequent mowing (cutting high to keep grass plants strong), hand picking weeds, dressing with compost and overseeding rather than relying on watering, chemical fertilizers and the use of pesticides.
8. Use finely decomposed compost (and organic fertilizers, if necessary) rather than inorganic fertilizers and pesticides.
9. Reduce the amount of impervious surfaces, such as roof tops, pavement and gravel, which conduct contaminants in runoff directly to water bodies, by increasing the space on the property devoted to landscaped areas or natural woodland.
10. Use vegetated buffers between water bodies and developed areas in order to increase infiltration of runoff and the removal of contaminants before they reach streams and other surface waters.

In the discussion that followed, FCC members decided that these principles were a natural complement to the Commission's existing invasive species control program and ought to be incorporated into the Commission's work. A first step was to include a web page on yardscaping, with references for further information, at the Conservation Commission web site.

Subcommittee Discussions and Reports

Open Space – Mel Dickenson

- The annual \$500,000 budget allocation for potential financing of open space was approved by the Town Council. This constitutes the first year of the ten-year commitment proposed by the Open Space Committee to appropriate the five million dollars approved by the Open Space Referendum a year ago.
- Two opportunities for wetland mitigation on Town property are being considered. One is for impacts to wetlands at the Portland Jetport. The other concerns a project brought to the attention of the OS Committee by an area consulting firm.
- A subcommittee has been formed to handle the planning of the proposed Transfer of Development Rights Program and work is underway.
- There has been no word yet from LMF regarding the funding request for the central and northern greenbelt project.
- Falmouth's Project Canopy grant has been approved by the Maine Forest Service. This will provide \$10,000 to begin timber stand improvement and sustainable harvesting practices on certain Town properties.
- The Town has received a \$30,000 grant from the Casco Bay Estuary Project to assist in the purchase of the Buck Property, which is located in the relatively undeveloped northwest corner of the community near other conservation lands.

Vernal Pools – Caleb Hemphill

- The vernal pool mapping, monitoring and protection seminar held at the Maine Audubon Society on April 30 was attended by about 30 people. Caleb and Sally Stockwell took the group out to VP 35B at Ridgewood Estates and then conducted two classroom sessions at Gillsland Farm. Sally gave a talk on vernal pool biology and Caleb described the history and lessons learned from the Falmouth program.

- Caleb reported on the number of egg masses counted at VP 35B and a control pond (VP 122) at the Blackstrap Preserve for 2007 and 2008. The total number of egg masses dropped from last year in both pools. Caleb said that the numbers so far do not appear to show a clear trend.

Natural Resource Ordinances Review – Lissa Robinson

- About 52 people attended a Town Council meeting regarding the findings and proposed policy recommendations for wetlands and vernal pools. In addition to the usual public notices, large landowners in town were notified in advance of the meeting by postcard. Joe Wroblewski gave an overview of the policy recommendations. Jeff Simmons of Normandeau Associates discussed the science underlying the policies. Aram Calhoun, Maine's vernal pool expert from the University of Maine, provided intelligent and impassioned support for vernal pool protection in discussions with the audience. FCC members who attended the meeting said that the proposed rules would be more flexible than many people in the audience seemed to realize.

Energy – Mel Dickenson

- The first meeting of the newly authorized energy conservation committee is scheduled for June 4.
- About 15 people will be appointed to serve out of the 22 who have applied so far.
- Mel has agreed to sit on the new committee due to his supportive role in helping to organize it and his connections with the FCC.

Liaison Discussions and Reports

FTAC – Caleb Hemphill

- Peter Biegel of SYTDesign has indicated that Joe Caron, of Caron Landscaping, has completed the trail hardening on the trails at Ridgewood Estates.

FEDC – Willie Audet

- The FEDC has encouraged people from the business community to participate in the Natural Resource Ordinance review process, but Willie said that a letter in the Falmouth Forecaster by Tom Greer, an engineer with Pinkham and Greer, may have made a number of inaccurate statements about Falmouth's program.

Membership

Willie Audet announced that he will run for the Town Council again in June. If he is elected, he will need to step down from the Conservation Commission this summer. The FCC also needs to find a replacement for Wing Goodale, who stepped down in February because of his heavy workload.

Next Steps

- Gary Fogg will prepare an estimate for preparing a one-page summary and online resources for Yardscaping to be linked to the Conservation Commission web page.
- Sean Mahoney will lead the next regular meeting on Monday, June 2.

Meeting adjourned at 9:15 PM

Submitted by Gary Fogg