

**Washington Conservation Commission
Public Hearing Minutes**

October 10, 2012

Conservation Commission Public Hearing on spending up to \$20,000 from the conservation fund for the Farnsworth Hill Forest land conservation project, for transaction costs related to the project.

Members present: Jed Schwartz, Carol Andrews, Sandy Robinson, Don Richard, Ken Eastman and Nan Schwartz

Public present: Jim Crandall, Bill Shannon, Dennis O'Malley, Carl Moore, Bob Bachand, Tom Marshall, Donald Revane, Charley Eastman, Shawn Atkins, Brian Moser, Kitty West and Kathy West

At 7:00 PM, Jed Schwartz called the hearing to order.

Jed opened the hearing and talked about the expenditure of the conservation fund money and the project.

Carl Moore spoke and said he lives on Valley Rd. He has a strong background in engineering and felt that the article in the Villager talked a lot about runoff and infiltration of silt, washing into the ponds. He wanted to know what did we did when that very thing happened, during the logging. Jed explained that we did go up there to check on the situation because we were informed there was a problem. When we got there the loggers were putting up silt fence and hay bales. It did not happen again. The Selectmen handled any further problems with the loggers. He was concerned that the town would have liability for any future problem that happens with this property.

Jed explained this is a Forest Society project and the land is being purchased through privately raised funds. The Forest Society will own the land and hold it as a reservation, open to the public for passive recreation.

Don Revane commented that, with regrowth of trees on the property, this will take care of the problem and that development is far worse for storm runoff.

Schwartz said that our purpose in helping to get this project going was

to protect the property from development and to protect the water bodies. The land will stay in current use, as it is now.

Jim Crandall commented that the total cost of the project is over \$400 thousand and the \$20 thousand they are getting from the Conservation Commission is a small percentage of that total. Schwartz explained that the money we are expending for transaction costs for the project, come from the conservation fund. The conservation fund is funded by land use change taxes. He explained that when land is taken out of current use there is a penalty charged by the town and this money goes into our conservation fund.

Moore said we already have a lot of land in conservation and we need some land to develop and build on.

Sandy Robinson said that Washington has a lot of buildable lots currently available (over 400), and Washington also has a lot of very high value land for conservation.

Moore stated he thinks we are against development.

Schwartz explained that we are not against development but feel that there are areas that are better for developing than others. He explained that we use the Natural Resource Inventory and criteria to look at the land for its best uses.

Moore sees Lake Ashuelot Estates as a big plus for the town, he sees big tax dollars out there. Nan Schwartz commented that as a rule open space is always cheaper for a town than developed lots, because no services are required.

Dennis O'Malley commented that the support we have had in town and beyond for this project has been tremendous. Sandy said that we thought it was a remote possibility that the required funding could be raised. Kitty West asked if they would meet the goal. Sandy stated she believes they will.

Bill Shannon asked about how the property fits in to the big picture of the Natural Resource Inventory. Nan said that the property abuts a town forest and is in a Conservation Priority Area. Jed explained that the property has also been identified as important for conservation by the Quabbin to Cardigan initiative (Q2C) and showed several maps.

Tom Marshall said he wanted to speak for the local snowmobile club and wanted to know if the existing snowmobile trail will continue to be

open to them. He wants to see something in writing or possibly an easement to protect the trail. Don Revane said they usually get a signed landowner agreement to protect their trails. Jed stated that the Forest Society would own the land after purchase, so he will put the club in touch with Brian Hotz, from SPNHF, about the trail agreement as soon as they close. Carol said it is the Forest Society's usual policy to keep open existing trails. Tom said they would like to get in there as soon as possible to do maintenance and reestablish the trail. Jed said he would speak to Brian in the next few days and get back to Tom about it. Tom wanted to state for the record that he thinks we are doing a great job and that this project is a good one.

Shawn Atkins said he disagrees with what we are doing. He feels that the existing lots in town are not the most desirable and we need to allow growth and development. He thinks regulations are being put in that discourages growth. There are no jobs in town and things are becoming stagnant. He feels there are too many regulations and rules. Jed agreed that a town needs growth to stay vital.

Carol Andrews stated that we (the Conservation Commission) don't regulate anything, nor do we enact any regulations.

Jed stated that the support for this project is not arbitrary. Nan said that we don't go around grabbing land to protect it; we are working with willing landowners who desire to protect their own property. Shawn feels those would be great second home lots and wouldn't cost the town much.

Jim Crandall said that because of the Conservation Commission's involvement, the Farnsworth Hill Forest land, that they are buying, will remain open to the public for recreational use. If they just bought the land and held it privately it would be closed to all but the owners.

Charley Eastman wanted to thank the Conservation Commission for our involvement from the beginning and our help in getting the project going.

Sandy thanked all those individuals involved for doing such a great job.

There being no further questions or comments from the public, the hearing was adjourned at 7:35 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Nan Schwartz
Conservation Commission Secretary

The Forest Society is still accepting donations for this project and information on how to donate can be found here:
<http://www.forestsociety.org/howyoucanhelp/special-projects.asp#sp40>