

## Conservation Commission – Land Protection Committee

July 2, 2014

7:00 PM

Town Hall

Attending: Carol Andrews, Jed Schwartz, Nan Schwartz and Arin Mills

Visitor: None

The Land Protection Committee met to discuss several possible land protection projects in Washington.

We shared the Chutes' letter to the Commission with Carol, who was not at our recent meeting. The Chutes shared their desire to have the town buy their property and protect it under a conservation easement. Unfortunately, the Conservation Commission is not in the position to buy the property and hope that they can find a suitable buyer who shares their vision for the future of the property.

We next discussed the Camp Morgan Town Forest property and the recent events pressing us to take on this project. We feel supportive of the project but think the time may not be right. We are committed to protecting all the Town Forests and are supportive of the assessment process of all the Town Forests that the Forestry Committee is currently in the middle of carrying out. We think that Ken Eastman, as an abutter to the property should recuse himself from any votes taken by the Select board on this issue. Carol suggested that we might propose a conceptual vote for Town Meeting to place all or some of the Town Forests into conservation easements at a future date. We all felt this might be a good idea, it would help gauge the interest of the town and give us a chance to explain what a conservation easement would and would not accomplish for the forest properties. We discussed what grants and other monies might be used to help with the cost of protecting the forests in different parts of town. There are ARM funds available for certain watersheds, Q2C and maybe other grants available at different times and for different areas of town. Arin asked if the town could hold the easement but Carol explained it would be a conflict of interest for the town to oversee an easement on their own property, you need an outside land trust to hold it. Arin asked who would hold the easement? Carol said there are a few possibilities – SPNHF is already working in Washington but there are other land trusts on our doorstep. NEFF holds the easement on the Oak Hill property, Ausbon Sargent holds property in Bradford and Goshen, there is Five Rivers holds property in Hillsboro and Monadnock Conservancy with property in Stoddard and Windsor. She said each land trust has a different personality and different interests. Some are into public access and recreation and others have different focus and needs. Arin said questions would be asked at Town Meeting about what all of this means, we need to be prepared to answer those questions. Jed feels we could answer the questions that come up. Carol mentioned the idea of establishing a reserve fund for land protection in the CIP for the Town Forests. Then when grants come up we could take advantage of them if we had the vote to protect the Town Forests permanently. The protected properties could still be sold in the future with an easement on them, if the town so decided. Jed said there has not been a formal vote from the Selectmen to bring the Camp Morgan Town Forest project forward to the town. We would like the Forestry Committee and the Conservation Commission should carefully consider the situation and work through the process. We would like to see this happen but we have concentrated our

protection work in the Millen Pond area recently and we have to consider the need to work in different parts of town. We don't see this is as the biggest threat in town at this time.

Nan asked Carol about the experience that Lempster had when they went to Town Meeting this year to protect their Town Forest. Carol said that Lempster's Town Forest abuts the Forest Society's Ashuelot Headwaters tract. It was an extremely expensive project with hundreds of acres to survey and a lot of deed work to be done. They pulled out 10 acres for municipal use, received a lot of private donations and SPNHF was involved. They got the warrant article passed but there is still a lot of on going work to be done before it is finished.

Jed said that our conservation fund is small and we would support a CIP fund for conservation that could be tapped for projects. We think using the funds we have for one Town Forest project would leave more vulnerable properties at risk, we need to leverage what we have.

We talked about the Cook property in East Washington, Lynn has a strong desire to protect her property with a land trust. She is willing to donate the easement. Carol said she has talked to Brian and SPNHF would hold the easement, but Lynn needs to decide which organization best aligns with what she wants for her property. Carol is happy to speak with her about it and Jed will give Lynn Carol's number.

Jed is reaching out to a few other individuals that we have spoken to about protecting their property to gauge their ongoing interest.

We discussed the current fundraising numbers for the MacNeil Family Forest project that we received from Brian, they are continuing to do fundraising and are sending a mailing out soon.

Arin spoke about our ongoing work on updating the NRI and she wants us to add goals to the document. We discussed updating the maps. Arin said that DRA now has a map service with current tax parcels on it, but it is not generally available to the public.

Arin wants us to partner with the Forestry Committee to get people out on more of our Town Forest properties for hikes and recreational events. The more they are used the more people will care about them. We talked about protection of trails and Carol said there is Q2C and state monies available for this purpose.

Adjourned: 8:45 PM