

WESTMINSTER CONSERVATION COMMISSION meeting via Zoom

Thursday, 9/28/23, 7:15 pm

1. Tatiana called the meeting to order at 7:18. Present: Tatiana Schreiber, Chair Sarah Waldo, Kathy Kingston, Kestrel Craig. Absent, Rachael Shaw, Secretary.
2. Adjustments to Agenda - Added discussion of tree planting behind West West church to “Other Business”
3. Acceptance of Minutes: 8/3/23 – Sarah read the minutes. Kathy moved to accept the minutes. Sarah seconded. Accepted unanimously.
4. Communications and Public Comment: Susan Roman spoke to Tatiana about concerns with beaver activity and habitat on the Barnes Brook and its surrounding wetlands on the north end of Westminster West. Sarah will follow up to better understand concerns.
5. Unfinished Business (Discussion / Action) –
 - a) Website for Conservation Commission – status – Sarah attended Selectboard meeting on Sept 13th. She spoke up concerning the website situation. They had received her earlier letter. Susan Harlow also spoke to this. They did not commit to finding a person to build a new website, but listened to the comments. A new Town Manager will hopefully move forward with the process of creating a new website for the town. Sarah will continue to follow up with the Selectboard about this.
 - b) Beaver Working Group/BEEC program – status - Beaver working group has been formed in Westminster - members are Sarah Waldo, Kathy Kingston (representing Westminster Conservation Commission) Michael Daley (representing LEAG), Lisa Merton (representing Land Relations Coalition), and Patti Smith (representing BEEC, and running the program).

Patti Smith presented at the Westminster West church on Sept 10th which was well attended (approximately 30 people present) about beaver families she has known. Next program will be Oct 1, 3 PM at the fire station in Westminster with Denise Burchsted about history of Westminster waterways.

Tatiana raised question as to why Conservation Commission hasn't been mentioned in any of the publicity. Sarah will ask Patti to mention the name of the partners at the Oct 1 event, and see if CC can

be mentioned in future publicity as we have supported this project from its inception.

The site of the beaver deceiver installation is still to be determined.

There will be forum in late November when community people can come forward to talk about concerns and specifics about their properties, etc.

c) Report back- pollinator event. Rachael, Susie Peters, and Jim and Linda Paris attended on Kathy Kingston's land. It was peaceful, a beautiful day. They saw many insects, and everyone enjoyed themselves. Very few monarchs have been observed this year.

d) Continue comments on Natural Resources section of TP - Kathy has been working on comments that have already been made. None of us has yet made it to the end. Kestrel hopes to have more time shortly. Everyone will try to make comments on the rest of the document as soon as possible for review at next meeting.

e) Comments on Agriculture section of TP – postponed until Rachael, Sarah and Tatiana can do some editing at separate meeting.

6. New Business:

a) Report back – regional conservation commission meeting organized by Margo Ghia. Tatiana attended. Cory Ross, District Manager of Windham Country for Natural Resources Conservation, was there to update Conservation Commissions on role of Conservation Districts. Linda Corse, of Corse Farm, PieterVan Loon, forester with the Vermont Land Trust, and three others are on the Board. Board members are elected (if anyone wants to run) or appointed, if no one runs for election. They try to find out what conservationists and activists feel are important and make recommendations to the state technical committee for what projects should be funded. There is a \$300,000 pool for Windham County, but this money cannot be used by towns and therefore not Conservation Commissions directly. However, Conservation Commissions can become stewards of significant sites in a town and get money for projects for those specific lands. Speak to him about how to go about this. He also mentioned the Trees for Streams program that coordinates volunteers and resources for restoration projects such as repairing

riparian buffers or other areas that would benefit from trees. Might be very useful around the Henwood Hill Marsh.

The regional Conservation Commissions reported back. Dummerston has stewardship of a few sites in their town and submitted a proposal to the Selectboard to help them develop an ordinance preserving ridgelines. Brattleboro is working on forest ecology and pollinator pathways and developing a food forest in a flood zone. Vernon is a new group trying to prevent a waste dump zone and protect a wetland from new powerlines. Guilford worked with Patti Smith on a Natural Resources inventory and got a grant from Vermont Community Forest program to plant trees in public areas. They are also working with their Planning Commission on balancing conservation and housing needs. There's a handbook on how to run a conservation commission by the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions which they read and shared at their meetings. Marlboro has a new commission. Margo Ghia can help with language and maps for town plans. Rockingham says there's deference given to towns with an enhanced energy plan. There are financial benefits to having a town plan at all, especially if there is a flood resiliency section. Mary Ellen Copeland of the Green Mountain Conservancy spoke about the Canoe Brook Nature Reserve which has a lot of beautiful white oaks.

Mike Ghia is part of Vermont Farm and Forest Viability Program. Asks CC's if they know any farmers who would like help with succession planning, to contact him because they are hiring a full time person to assist with this.

b) Upcoming project ideas:

Kathy would like to do some tracking along roadways to help understand wildlife uses. Would like to maintain corridors that animals are using, especially along Rte 91.

Sarah would like to work on improving riparian buffers around Henwood marsh. But would require buy-in from private land-owners. Not sure how to get support for this. But maybe some of them would be amenable. We might consider working with Cory Ross on a program on just one section of the marsh.

c) Report back on VT energy listening session - no one was able to attend. Tatiana will look into how to provide comments.

7. Other Business:

a) Discuss tree planting behind West West church. Tatiana suggests elderberry and chokecherry. Sarah suggests viburnum, not sure which species. Chuck said road crew is willing to do the planting work. Kathy will check with Chuck concerning purchasing and planting. Tatiana will do a little more research into appropriate species, sizes, etc. Concern that they not grow into power line. We will suggest several different potential species.

8. Date of Next Meeting: October 26th, 7:15 PM 2023

9. Adjournment: Meeting adjourned at 8:38. Minutes submitted by Tatiana Schreiber.