

**Peterborough Conservation Commission minutes
January 20, 2022, 6:30 p.m, Town House**

Present: Swift Corwin, John Kerrick, John Patterson, Francie Von Mertens, Robert Wood; Tyler Ward, Select Board liaison; Bob Strong, Fremont Field neighbor

Approve minutes

November, 2021 draft minutes were approved (Von Mertens motion/Patterson second) conditional on Carr and Lundsted approval by email, and adding red osier dogwood and serviceberry/amelanchier as shrub options for revegetation at 32 Concord Street.

Fremont Conservation Land stewardship

Bob Strong, who was introduced to the ConCom at its October meeting as an abutter to the town's Fremont land, updated members on plans he and Fremont steward Francie Von Mertens have discussed. Bob would like to reinvigorate a Friends of Fremont group long dormant with workgangs in mind along with field trips with a natural history focus. Maintaining field or meadow habitat and combatting encroachment of invasive plants are top workgang priorities. He said a simple kiosk also is in the plans. Swift Corwin suggested the Cranberry Meadow trail kiosk as a good design, one that could bring some uniformity to town trail kiosks.

Subject to weather, an initial Friends field trip is planned for Sunday morning January 30 or February 6. (Several neighbors have RSVP'd.)

John Patterson asked how ConCom oversight would be maintained. Fremont steward Von Mertens said she and Bob are working together, and communication with the ConCom very likely would improve with Bob on board.

"Sawmill" lots (+/-24 acres) grant to Harris Center in exchange for eminent domain taking of Harris Center Elm Street lots (+/-3.6 acres) by the town for its proposed fire-safety complex.

After lengthy discussion, members supported the town's donation of the two "sawmill lots" off Rte 136 to the Harris Center in exchange for the town's eminent domain "taking" of the Harris Center's 3.6-acre Elm Street lots on which the ConCom holds a conservation easement. The sawmill lots have been considered town conservation land, but they lack documented protection. Members agreed that either fee ownership by the Harris Center, or a Harris Center conservation easement on the land (with town ownership maintained), would achieve the same formal conservation of important natural resources (linkage with other town conservation land, trail potential, as well as significant Hadley Brook frontage). The ConCom prefers Harris Center fee ownership, but supports either outcome (fee or easement) that the Harris Center and Town agree on.

Road salt application on downtown sidewalks

Members discussed photos of road salt chunks on downtown sidewalks, often clumped rather than applied evenly, a concern as it washes directly into the Contoocook without buffering. Robert Wood agreed that applications appear highly excessive. He said chlorides are the issue for water quality, not the sodium or the calcium portion of the ice-melt options. (Sodium binds to soil whereas chlorides go straight into waterways.) He

said the calcium chloride option "costs way more money." Its benefits: far less is needed as it melts ice at a lower temperature. He said Keene likely does a mix, one-third calcium chloride, and Keene's report of favorable cost comparisons would be helpful to know.

Wood said that the water quality testing results Matt Lundsted and the rivers advisory committee send around don't show levels of "specific conductivity" high enough to threaten aquatic life. "It's not to that point yet."

From his watershed protection experience in the Lake Sunapee area, he said that conversations about road salt usually end with those applying it citing public safety, whereas it shouldn't be "this against this," safety versus the environment, as both can be given consideration. Townspeople also expect clear sidewalks, with calls to the Town House to report icy conditions. Wood also mentioned a workshop years back when towns reported increased salting given real liability issues of towns being sued for injuries relating to icy sidewalks. Thrown into the mix is changing freeze-thaw-freeze weather patterns that quite possibly increase need for salt applications.

Members agreed that conversations with Seth MacLean and Tim Rose makes sense, with the goal of understanding DPW challenges, budgeting included, and whether some best or better management practices can be adopted.

Von Mertens, Wood and Lundsted will have a preliminary discussion with Seth MacLean.

Walden Eco Village

John Patterson notified members that as an individual, not a ConCom member, he intends to bring a Point of Order to the next Planning Board meeting, namely:

That only the Zoning Board of Adjustment can rule on whether three single-family primary residential structures and several other existing structures are permitted in the Wetland Protection Overlay Zone;

As a new use, primary residential not accessory housing for Well School staff, the cabins lack grandfather status and must conform to current town code;

Only the zoning board can grant that relief;

The Planning Board is "in limbo" until the zoning board grants (or denies) a variance that would allow single-family residential and other structures in the town's wetland protection overlay.

Patterson asked if members saw flaws in his reasoning. Members supported all points and the clarity with which he presented them. Tyler Ward suggested they be submitted to the Planning Board packet to give Planning Board members time to absorb the zoning points made, and Wood suggested he include his history of over 20 years' experience on the Planning Board.

Von Mertens added that the ConCom September letter of comment and Town Planner Danica Melone's staff reports, one dating back over a year, also have cited a need for a variance.

/fvm