Mason Pond Project

Public Hearing

August 20, 2015

Minutes

Commissioners Present: Harry Pease, Carl Schmidt, Carl Cassel, Tom Bubolz and Jeff MacQueen; Alternates Present: Fran Plaisted, Emily Bryant and Craig Putnam; Selectboard Representative: Anne Duncan Cooley; Guest: John Roe from Upper Valley Land Trust; Public
Attendees: Kathy Baker, Eva Daniels, Ann Green and John O’Brien

* Chair called the Public Hearing into session at 7:10 p.m.
* Chair asked Conservation Commissioners and UVLT attendee to introduce themselves.
* Chair asked public attendees to introduce themselves.
* Chair explained the purpose of the Hearing and reviewed the agenda for the Hearing. Agenda includes: explain the Conservation Commission’s proposal, explain the Conservation Fund, discuss the specifics of the Mason Pond Project and the project budget, receive public comments and questions, and discuss next steps in the process.
* Chair explained that the Town voted to establish the Conservation Fund at Town Meeting on March 14, 2000, to be funded with 100% of land use change tax collections. Current balance in the Conservation Fund is about $206,000. Funds can only be expended by a majority vote of Commissioners, and prior to spending any funds for the purchase of any interest in real property or for a contribution to a qualified organization for the purchase of property interests (in this case the UVLT) a public hearing must be held.
* Chair presented information about the Mason Pond Project (see page 2 for details), the Mason Pond Budget (see page 3 for details) and the Conservation Commission’s proposal to contribute $50,000 from the Conservation Fund and conduct a local fund raising campaign to raise an additional $20,000 for the project.
* Chair solicited input from the public regarding the Conservation Commission’s proposal to contribute $50,000 from the Conservation Fund for the project.

Ann Green asked what project expenses have been incurred to date. John Roe stated that $2,000 for the appraisal and some UVLT staff time has been incurred so far. Ann then asked what will be done about preserving the buildings, and Kathy Baker asked if there are any funds to preserve the buildings. Harry explained that the Conservation Commission intends to work with the UVLT and the Orford Historical Society to find a way to make some repairs to the buildings to slow their natural demise, but there are no funds currently allocated for that purpose. Kathy Baker suggested establishing a Billy Brown Barn Preservation Fund. Ann Green noted that the proposal was consistent with provisions of Orford’s Master Plan that encourage land conservation. All four public attendees spoke very favorably about the property and the project.

* Chair discussed next steps for the project, including the upcoming fund raising campaign, the LCHIP grant decision expected by Thanksgiving, and the purchase and sale contract expiration on March 31, 2016.
* Chair adjourned the Hearing at 7:30 p.m. after a motion by Tom, a second by Emily and unanimous agreement by the Commissioners.

MASON POND PROJECT

* How many of you have been up to the property?
* Current owners, David and John Bischoff approached UVLT and OCC over a year ago when they began thinking about selling their property. They recognized the importance of its natural and historic features and wanted it preserved.
* Held 2 site visits in early November 2014
* Project is a joint effort by current owners David and John Bischoff, the Conservation Commission and UVLT
* Fee acquisition by UVLT, will remain in Current Use, UVLT will pay property taxes
* UVLT is nonprofit land conservancy working in 45 Upper Valley communities, has conserved over 475 projects, more than 45,000 acres
* Land is the former Billy Brown farm, and the only remaining open farmland in Quinttown
* 149 acres, cabin, barn and shed
* Two-thirds of acreage classified as highest ranked wildlife habitat in NH
* 43 acres hay and pasture farmed by Tullando Farm, will continue
* Forests have been sustainably managed and provide exceptional wildlife habitat and critical buffer to Mason Pond
* Mason Pond is one of four “great ponds” in Orford, and the only completely undeveloped one
* Property includes 850 feet of frontage on Mason Pond
* Is part of the Jacobs Brook and Connecticut River watershed
* Provides extensive views of Mt Cube and surrounding ridgeline
* Abuts Stone House Mountain conserved land and close to Appalachian Trail corridor
* Once conserved, will provide opportunities for conservation and stewardship education, hiking, cross country skiing, fishing, and public use of the cabin
* Part of annual Fall Walking Tour conducted annually by the Orford Historical Society, and this year co-sponsored by the Conservation Commission
* HAND OUT BUDGET
* Discuss budget
* Purchase and sale contract expires at end of March 2016

|  |  |
| --- | --- |
| **Mason Pond Project Budget** |  |
|  |  |
| **Expenses** |  |
| Land fair market value | 300,000 |
| Appraisal | 2,000 |
| Survey | 7,000 |
| Legal/Environmental Due Diligence and Closing | 3,300 |
| Stewardship Fund | 20,000 |
| Printing & Mailing | 2,000 |
| UVLT Staff (proj manage, fundraising, mapping) | 9,250 |
| Basic signage, gates | 450 |
|  |  |
| Total |  $ 344,000  |
|  |  |
|  |  |
| **Income** |  |
| David and John Bischoff's contribution - reduced sale price | 61,000 |
| Quabbin to Cardigan - grant approved | 4,500 |
| Moose Plate - grant approved | 20,000 |
| Orford Conservation Fund | 50,000 |
| Local Fundraising | 20,000 |
| LCHIP - pending grant | 125,000 |
| UVLT Non-local Fundraising | 63,500  |
|  |  |
| Total |  $ 344,000  |