Orford Conservation Commission

Minutes of Meeting on January 21, 2016

Commissioners Present: Harry Pease, Craig Putnam, Carl Cassel, Tom Bubolz, Carl Schmidt, Jeff MacQueen; Alternate Present: Emily Bryant; Selectboard Representative: Anne Duncan Cooley

The meeting was called to order at 7:03 p.m.

Harry asked Emily to serve as Commissioner for the vacant position.

Minutes from the January 7, 2016 meeting were unanimously approved following a motion by Carl Cassel and a second by Emily.

Mason Pond Project: Harry reported that fundraising is within $610 of the total needed which includes the $20,000 original goal plus $2,500 toward the shortfall in the LCHIP grant. Therefore, we only need to raise an additional $305 and get the matching donation from the anonymous donor to reach the total.

Commissioners discussed the Journal Opinion article on Selectboard discussion of having a warrant article on changing the allocation of the land use change tax (LUCT) to the Conservation Fund. The Commissioners reaffirmed their opposition to any such petition. Harry said that the statement in the JO article that $150,000 in LUCT has been deposited into the Conservation Fund is incorrect. What he said at the Selectboard Meeting was that about $170,000 had been deposited up through 2013, and that additional deposits have been made since then. The Commission will report on deposits and expenditures in the near future.

There was a discussion of letting the Lyme Conservation Commission know of the Mason Pond Project and the possibility of meeting or discussing conserved lands with neighboring towns. It might be useful to know where conserved lands are in other towns for the Natural Resources Inventory.

There was a discussion of whether any donated funds could be put in a stewardship fund for the barn. There were concerns that it wasn’t what the funds were raised for, but we could try to raise funds for the barns in another way if needed.

Harry has been working on documents for the project with LCHIP and UVLT. The Town of Orford will have the primary executory interest in the project with LCHIP second in line. What that means is that if UVLT ever went out of business, ownership of the property would go to the Town. LCHIP requires that the project be completed by June 30, 2017. The Conservation Commission will be responsible for monitoring the property each year under the LCHIP agreement. LCHIP and Conservation Commission funds will go directly to a closing agent for the closing. UVLT will have a stewardship fund to maintain the property for trails, parking etc.

Carl Cassel and Carl Schmidt wondered if the project agreement between the Conservation Commission and LCHIP needs to go to the Town for approval. Harry said he didn’t think so, but agreed to ask UVLT and the Town Attorney. Closing is projected to take place by April 15, 2016. (NOTE: On January 22, 2016, Harry confirmed with UVLT and Bernie Waugh that the Conservation Commission has the authority to sign the Project Agreement with LCHIP.)

We still needed to decide if the Commission will formally commit another $10,000 from the Conservation Fund to the project as discussed at our January 7, 2016 meeting. Craig moved that the Commission propose to contribute an additional $10,000 from the Conservation Fund to fund the Mason Pond Project, making a total contribution of $60,000. Carl Schmidt seconded the motion and it passed unanimously.

Discussion ensued about when to hold a public hearing about the additional $10,000 contribution. It was agreed that the public hearing would be held at the beginning of our next regularly scheduled meeting on February 18, followed by consideration of the public input and the rest of our regular meeting. Harry will take care of getting the public hearing notices out.

Invasive Plant Control at the Orford Conservation Land: Harry reported that there is a lot of invasive plant removal work that needs to be completed by September 30, 2016. The work that Mike Bald did in August 2015 was not complete. NRCS is willing to go down with whoever is going to do rest of the work, walk the land, and discuss requirements. Harry contacted Ron Rhodes of the Connecticut River Watershed Council to see if he and his crew could help. Ron uses a crew from Northwoods Center and they normally charge $650 per day for a 3 man crew. Ron Rhodes and Fritz Gerhardt are willing to help as well at no cost. Ron may be able to get other volunteers and maybe some Commissioners could help. Nate Tullar said he could come with his tractor again to pull larger plants. Commissioners thought it is such a big project that it needs a couple of days of the Northwoods crew working on it.

Northwoods is not licensed to apply herbicides in NH, so if we want to use any herbicides we would need to find someone else licensed to do that. Harry is still working on options on this. There was a general sense that Mike Bald should be paid for what has been done, whether or not he helps finish the work.

Jeff said we should make sure that we use one method of control or another – with or without herbicide. The Commission needs to have a plan for follow-up to deal with plants that grow back. Craig motioned that the Conservation Commission commit to a work project annually for the next couple of years to follow up with natural methods to eradicate invasives at the Orford Conservation Land. Jeff seconded and the motion passed unanimously.

NH Fish and Game Proposed Bobcat Season: Harry asked the Commissioners whether they want to support the Stoddard Conservation Commission in its opposition to a bobcat hunting and trapping season. Carl Cassel said there will be two public hearings held by fish and game before a final ruling is made. He talked to Commissioner Todd Baldwin of Grafton County who said there would be a lot of opposition in Concord, but that he has received a lot of support for the proposal. One reason for the proposal is that the bobcat population has grown about 10% per year in recent years, and is currently about 1,400. Both hunting and trapping would be permitted in different timeframes, with 50 permits issued by lottery. Quotas would be set by region of the state. Parts of Orford are in two different regions.

Harry moved that he respond to Stoddard Conservation Commission and ask them to add Orford to the list of Commissions opposing the bobcat season. Tom seconded and all voted in favor except Carl Cassel, who was opposed. The Commissioners want a letter sent to the Stoddard Conservation Commission explaining why we are opposed, with a copy to Commissioner Baldwin at Fish and Game.

Carl Cassel explained he opposed the motion because the small hunt now would provide good data for the future. He sees some advantage to trimming the number of bobcats at the moment. There was discussion of the importance of predators to maintain a healthy ecosystem and keep other populations in control. Tom said he didn’t think there was an overpopulation issue, he is opposed to trapping on humane grounds, and does not support hunting for trophies.

March 8, 2016 Town Meeting: We will request two tables to use for the photo contest, Mason Pond Project display, information about invasive plants, and maybe the weed wrench. We will talk more about Town Meeting displays next month.

Carl Cassel is working on a report of deposits to and expenditures from the Conservation Fund and will send it around before the public hearing February 18, 2016. There was discussion of a possible petitioned warrant article to change the percentage of LUCT going into the Conservation Fund and our opposition to such a change.

Orford Boat Landing Property: Tullando Farm uses the field by the boat landing under a license agreement with the Conservation Commission. They are clearing brush and invasive plants from the hedgerow at the south end of the field. There is an old shack in the southwest corner of the field that hasn’t been used for years and is in disrepair. Nate Tullar asked if they could get rid of it and re-claim that part of the field. It was agreed that removing the building and reclaiming the field was a good idea. There was discussion of whether the Fire Department could burn it as a training exercise. Harry will discuss this with the Fire Chief and report back to the Commission and Selectboard.

Carl Schmidt mentioned the next Historical Society program on stone walls at 7:00 p.m. on January 28 in the Rivendell multipurpose room. He also mentioned the cement silo at the NH Barn Committee meeting and is making a plan with retired State architectural historian James Garvin to come up and see the silo. The Barn Committee thought they might be interested in doing an event there. If that happens Carl will suggest that they go and look at the Mason Pond project barns.

Jeff MacQueen walked the Richardson tract in late December for the required annual monitoring of that conserved land. He didn’t see anything unusual. Some logging had been done and the trees seemed carefully selected. Jeff also participated in the Baker River Valley Bird Count over the Christmas period, which includes part of Orford. He counted 35 different species.

Harry reported that the current terms for Carl Schmidt and Tom Bubolz will expire in March. Both agreed to be nominated for another term of 3 years as Commissioners. Harry will initiate the appointment paperwork with the Selectboard.

Tom Bubolz moved to adjourn, Carl Cassel seconded and the meeting adjourned at 8:59 p.m.

Respectively submitted,

Harry Pease