Orford Conservation Committee Minutes December 21, 2017

Present: Ted Cooley, Chair, Carl Schmidt, Tom Bubolz, Jeff MacQueen, Emily Bryant, Craig Putnam; Ron Rhodes (visitor, Connecticut River Conservancy steward), and Tom Thomson (citizen visitor).

The Chair opened the meeting at 7:00 PM; Craig volunteered to take minutes in the absence of our Secretary, Fran Plaisted

Ted invited Ron Rhodes to give his report on the work of the Connecticut River Conservancy (recently renamed from the former “Connecticut River Watershed Council”), which is now celebrating its 65th anniversary. We learned about this summer’s Source to Sea journey, and about the extensive work the Conservancy undertakes each year to enhance the health, cleanliness, and ecological viability of the Connecticut River (including the watershed’s tributaries).

At the end of his report, members of the OCC questioned Ron Rhodes about any help the Conservancy might be able to offer in strengthening the Town of Orford’s future resiliency (particularly in regard to our roads) in the face of extreme weather events, such as was experienced this year in the damaging heavy rains of July 1st. He was only able to suggest that we might have to hire professional engineers to design alternatives to State Department of Transportation strategies. He lightly touched on another possibility: down-stream plantings as pro-active mitigation to alleviate anticipated consequences. Ron left at 7:40.

The Chair brought forward the minutes of previous meetings: The minutes of 9/21/17 were approved after minor corrections by a motion by Ted, seconded by Tom. The minutes of 10/19/17 were similarly approved by motion of Ted seconded by Tom. The November minutes were tabled for the time being.

Reports:

Water testing: Tom reported that water testing has been wrapped up for the year.

Upper Valley Lake Sunapee Regional Planning Commission: Ted attended the most recent meeting as our representative of the OCC. Attention was given to the annual “Governor’s Report” which calls for increased tolls on the State’s toll road. This was a recommendation of the Department of Transportation. Regional Planning Commissions are asked to comment. Also mentioned was CMAC, with a focus on improving air quality. The third item in the report was a 10 Year Plan for state bridges and culverts.

Ted also reported that Amber (who has been helping with our Natural Resource Inventory) will be leaving at the UVLSRPC at the end of January.

Upper Valley Land Trust: We reviewed the suggestion received previously from the UVLT that the OCC consider transferring to the UVLT our interest in the Stonehouse Mountain property in order to facilitate relocating a trail that, it is hoped,will connect to Mountain View Farm, and beyond. OCC asked the Town attorney, Bernie Waugh, to review the matter. Ted reported that the answer is that OCC has the authority to *receive* interests in land, but does not have the authority to relinquish interests in land; only the Town, through a vote at town Meeting, could authorize that. Jeannie McIntyre of the UVLT has been informed of this outcome. OCC will work cooperatively with the Selectboard and the Land Trust to pursue a satisfactory outcome.

Natural Resource Inventory (NRI):

There is some confusion about whether re-writes submitted by Commission members to the on-line “Drop-Box” are in fact there, or have been “removed” by Amber of the UVLSRPC, and whether or not she has acted on the edits and formatting issues requested by Commission members.

Ted will send Amber a “punch list” of requested action.

Emily again expressed her willingness to work on providing fold-out maps for each chapter, highlighting the information relevant to that chapter, with an additional large map at the end of the whole document.

The Chair recognized visitor Tom Thomson, who expressed a concern that the maps printed in the NRI must accurately convey the correct status of all Class 5 Town Roads. In particular: Marsh Road, Cole Farm Road, Andrews Road, Town Road 107, and Quinttown Road all should be noted as “Class 5 Road Year-round”; this is recognized in State Highway designations, asserted Tom. In essence, the request is that the information we put in our maps reflect what the Town Tax Maps show.

A second concern of Tom’s relates to what information maps included in the NRI might convey to the public regarding “unique features and special sites” located on private holdings. There was general agreement that care should be taken to be sensitive about sharing information that private landowners may not want shared broadly. Craig offered the following motion: “We agree that we do not intend to identify or locate unique features and special features on private lands without owner permission.” Carl seconded the motion, and it was approved by all.

The minutes of November 16, 2017, were brought forward by the chair. A motion was made by Tom and seconded by Jeff that they be approved as amended; approval was unanimous.

In general discussion, Emily brought forward the concern mentioned earlier about some dredging and other streambed reworking in Jacobs Brook carried out by the State Highway Dept under DOT direction in response to the devastating effects of heavy rains in July 2017. There was a general consensus that Commission members are eager to turn attention to stream issues in 2018.

Tom made a motion to adjourn, seconded by Carl, to which all agreed.

Respectfully submitted,

Craig Putnam