Orford Conservation Commission

Minutes of June 19, 2014 Meeting

Members Present: Harry Pease, Carl Schmidt, Carl Cassel, Tom Bubolz; Alternates Present: Emily Bryant, Craig Putnam; Guests: Charlie Waterbury, Road Agent

The meeting was called to order at 7:08 p.m.

Alternates Emily Bryant and Craig Putnam filled in for absent members Kathy Baker and Jeff MacQueen.

Minutes of the May 15, 2014 meeting were reviewed. Revisions recommended by Carl Schmidt were accepted and the minutes were unanimously approved.

Old Business:

Solarize Orford Update: Carl Cassel and Emily gave an update on Solarize Orford.  They called people who had expressed interest in Solarize to notify them of an informational program on Solarize that was given by Vital Communities at the Montshire Museum on June 12.  Five people from Orford attended as well as people from Hanover, Bradford, Hartland, Norwich, Pomfret, Woodstock, West Lebanon, New London, Andover, Windsor, Cavendish, and Hartford.  Carl and Emily are in the process of assembling a "core team" to help organize the program.  Carl mentioned that figuring out how to make Solarize financially feasible for all is an important issue.  Proposals for Round Two are due July 21.  Next steps include having the core team meet and putting the proposal together.

Orford Conservation Land Project Update: A site visit with the US Department of Agriculture Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) was held on June 10 at 10:00 am at the Orford Conservation Land. Present were Harry Pease and Emily Bryant of the Conservation Commission; Sarah Schwaegler from Orford; Nate Tullar representing Tullando Farm; Beth Ann Finley, District Conservationist with NRCS; Ron Rhodes from the Connecticut River Watershed Council; and Fritz Gerhardt, Plant Scientist. We spent nearly two hours walking the land and discussing project opportunities. It was agreed that Tullando Farm, who farms the land under an agreement with the Conservation Commission, will apply for NRCS funding to remove invasive plants, plant trees and shrubs in the riparian buffer, and improve the farm road down the slope between the upper and lower meadows. The project application will be coordinated with the Conservation Commission and the Connecticut River Watershed Council. NRCS expects that a decision will be made by the end of July about whether or not the project will receive funding. The Galerucella Beetles arrived on June 17 and were released at 4:00 pm that day near the estuary. Present for the release were Harry Pease, Carl Cassel, Carl Schmidt, Emily Bryant, Jeff MacQueen and Craig Putnam from the Conservation Commission; Cicely Richardson with the Journal Opinion; Sarah Schwaegler from Orford; and Sara Cavin from the Upper Valley Land Trust. The release was advertised in the June 1 Friends of the Orford Libraries Newsletter and on the Orford listserv and Harry sent letters to nearby landowners. In addition, Harry notified the Upper Valley Land Trust and the Connecticut River Commission. Sarah Schwaegler and Jeff MacQueen had previously identified areas with purple loosestrife to release the beetles in.

Long Term Capital Investment Advisory Committee Update: There was nothing new to report this month.

Ray Clark Subdivision: Carl Schmidt reported that, as requested at the May Conservation Commission meeting, he had talked with Ray Clark regarding the possibility of conserving the 1.1 acre lot on the river that Ray intends to create by subdividing it from the house and lot for sale on Main Street. Ray said his intention by creating and selling the new lot is to help recover some of his investment in the entire property, including the extensive renovation of the historic house. This was despite his general preference for conserving land, which he has done with more than a dozen properties in the area. In this instance, he recalled having talked inconclusively with the Land Trust at some time in the past; there may have been uncertainty as to whether it could justify funding a purchase of the development rights, or a question about the Orford Conservation Commission’s priorities. In any case, Ray said he would be delighted if the Conservation Commission now has a specific interest in conserving the new lot. At the same time, he said, the Commission should be aware that his subdivision application continues to move ahead and that the Zoning Board of Adjustment for Flood Plains hearing is scheduled for June 26. Following a brief discussion, Commission members asked Carl to follow up with the Land Trust and with Ray Clark, indicating that we would like to know the asking price for the new lot.

New Business:

Conservation Fund and Budget: Harry reported that he has talked to Louise Mack, Tax Collector, Calvina Reznek, Town Treasurer, and Sheri Clifford, Town Administrator and they will provide copies monthly of the Tax Collector’s Report, Conservation Fund bank statement from Mascoma Savings Bank, and Conservation Commission budget report, respectively. Beginning in July, we will review those reports at our monthly meetings.

Water Testing Program and June Results: Water test results for June showed normal levels of e-Coli at Mousely Brook Bridge, Creamery Road Bridge and Dublin Road on Jacobs Brook and High Bridge on Archertown Brook. The e-Coli level across from Paragon on Jacobs Brook in Orfordville was 131 colonies per 100 ml of water, exceeding the State of NH threshold of 88 colonies considered safe for swimming. Harry provided the water test results to Kirsten Glass, Town Health Officer and the Selectboard members on June 15 for any further action or public notification.

Fisher Shoreland and Wetland Permit Applications: The Conservation Commission reviewed an application for a new dock, stairs, and funicular rail system for canoes and kayaks on a riverfront property opposite the State Garage on NH Route 10. Carl Schmidt summarized comments and questions about the application, as well as on a related Shoreland Protection permit application that had recently both been submitted to NH DES by the Upper Valley River Subcommittee of the Connecticut River Joint Commissions. Orford Conservation Commission members expressed regret that the approximately ten-acre lot, which undoubtedly contains nationally-ranked soils and has long been farmed by local farmers, has been sold and will be developed. At the same time, it was recognized that the Commission’s statutory authority is limited in this instance to comments on the wetlands permit application. After considerable discussion as to the Commission’s response, the Commissioners voted to endorse the comments and questions submitted by the Upper Valley River Subcommittee which included: (1) concerns about the significant erosion in the proposed construction area and plans to minimize future erosion; (2) concerns about heavy equipment access for construction and their impact on the river bank; (3) the fact that the Connecticut River is a National Blueway, an American Heritage River and is also part of the Conte National Wildlife Refuge contrary to the applicant’s answer to Question 19 in Attachment A of the application saying that the project does not affect national rivers or sanctuaries; (4) the fact that this project falls into both the Wetlands and Shoreland jurisdictions and whether the project as proposed meets the Shoreland requirements; and (5) lack of construction details for the dock that would allow it to move up and down with water level fluctuations or any indication about how the dock could be removed seasonally.

Purple Loosestrife Control Project Monitoring: It was agreed that the Conservation Commission would monitor this project on a monthly basis by visiting the site and looking at and photographing the loosestrife and beetles and reporting results observed.

Japanese Knotweed Control: Laura McDaniel from Orford sent an email to the Conservation Commission asking if something can be done about the Japanese knotweed along Blackberry Hill Road and Archertown Road. Road Agent Charlie Waterbury attended the meeting and asked for the Conservation Commission’s help in determining the proper way to remove the Japanese knotweed from the ditches and rights-of-way. Harry agreed to do some research, starting with a discussion with Doug Cygan, Invasive Species Coordinator with the NH Department of Agriculture, and report back to Charlie and Laura.

Quinttown Class VI Road Damage: Carl Schmidt reported that he had that day been asked by Paul Messer to bring to the Conservation Commission’s attention a situation near Quinttown Four Corners involving damage to a Town Class VI road. According to Paul, Stacey Thomson had won a bid for a logging operation on land in that area now owned by Bob Green. As the logging work progressed, Stacey had obtained permission from Orford’s Road Agent to use the eastern end of Baker Road (“the Davis Hill Road”), which is a Class VI Town road, as a skid trail. According to Messer, the result was that a large section of the Davis Hill Road has been “destroyed” with dirt, plugged culverts (including old stone culverts), and the trees cut down on both sides of the road. While Messer said such permission includes a standard requirement to repair damages, nothing has been done to date. Also, a “big oil spill" occurred during the work, apparently due to a broken line, but there is no sign that has been addressed and oil cans were still there. Paul had stressed his opinion that the Town needs to protect its Class VI roads for recreation purposes and noted that the section that has been damaged gets significant use by hikers and mountain bikers, as he observed when he operated his sugar bush nearby. He said he intended to bring up the matter with the Selectboard. Harry Pease agreed to talk with the Road Agent about the matter.

Tom moved and Carl Cassel seconded the motion to adjourn the meeting. The meeting was adjourned at 9:15 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Harry Pease