

## ORFORD CONSERVATION COMMISSION

APPROVED MEETING MINUTES: OCTOBER 17, 2024

Meeting held in-person at the Niles Room in the Town Office

**Present-in-Person:** Commission members: Ted Cooley, Bob Hedges, and Harry Pease; Alternates: Fran Plaisted, and John Miller. Kevin Follensbee attended representing the Selectboard. Also attending were David Hibbard and Gail Keefer.

Meeting was called to order at 7 PM.

Fran and John were seated.

1. **Approval of the minutes from September 19, 2024:** The draft minutes were reviewed and discussed. No wording changes were suggested. Harry moved to approve the minutes. John seconded. Motion carried.
2. **Discussion of the future of the Rivendell Trail:** David Hibbard and Gail Keefer led a discussion of the history of the Rivendell Trail and the Rivendell Trail Association. The Trail runs from the Connecticut River in the West, over Sunday Mountain, and East to the summit of Mount Cube. Unfortunately, the supporting Rivendell Trail Association has declined in effectiveness in stewarding and maintaining the Trail. A concerted effort is required to maintain community interest in the Trail as well as keep the Trail cleared and in good shape. There is also a need to review and ensure appropriate trail easements are in place. David and Gail discussed the RTA's efforts across the four Towns of the Trail's route to address these needs. We discussed how the Town of Orford could engage and how the Orford Conservation Commission could be a vehicle for rallying Town engagement, promoting awareness and use of the trail, and the organizing needed trailwork. Preliminary discussions took place on how Rivendell Trail activities could be promoted in the Commission's 2025 summer activity calendar.
3. **Info Kiosk at Lower Baker Pond:** Harry reported that the Parks and Playground Committee had endorsed the proposal for an Info Kiosk at Lower Baker Pond. We discussed the path forward to getting the Kiosk constructed. Fran moved to approve \$500 for the construction of the kiosk. Ted seconded. The motion carried.
4. **2025 Budget:** Kevin reported that the proposed Conservation Commission budget had been incorporated into the Town 2025 budget. The proposed 2025 budget is flat to the current year. Fran moved to approve the proposed budget. John seconded. The budget was approved.
5. **Future hiking and trailwork activities:** Bob led a discussion of future hiking and trailwork activity projects that could be sponsored by the Conservation Commission in 2025. A list of more than

20 Orford hiking trails was reviewed. A proposed 2025 calendar was also reviewed. Given the success of the summer 2024 hiking outings, there was enthusiastic support for continuing the program. We also discussed how to spotlight the Rivendell Trail as part of the 2025 hiking and trailwork program. A refined proposed calendar will be discussed at the November Commission meeting. The goal will be to have a program of winter hikes as well as summer hikes. The calendar for the summer hikes will be finalized and published for the Town Meeting in March.

- 6. Website and digital presence of the Orford Conservation Commission:** Bob shared a comparative review of the Conservation Commission's current website design and presence versus the "best practices" of other Towns. Several important opportunities were identified to increase the content available on (a) Orford's hiking and outdoors recreation resources and opportunities, (b) public education on conservation issues and challenges, and (c) public engagement in Conservation Commission activities. We discussed the opportunities and the desire to develop a plan to address them. A specific action plan will be developed for a future Commission meeting, probably December.
  
- 7. Orford Heritage Trail trailwork efforts:** A strong final wave of volunteers over the weekend of September 28-29 and again on October 6 and 10 had allowed the wrapping up of the trail clearing project. We now need to address the Trail's erosion challenges. Volunteers to do work with a small excavator are being solicited. Bob has also reached out to the Upper Valley Trails Alliance for their input.

A motion was made by Harry to adjourn the meeting. John seconded. The motion passed.

The meeting adjourned at 8:12 PM.

Minutes were taken by Bob Hedges.