

MEETING MINUTES

ALBANY CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Tuesday, September 3rd, 5:30 pm

Members present: Rob Nadler, Jack Rose, Dick VanDyne, Cort Hansen, Josephine Howland, Paul Brown alternate. Olivia Saunders - UNH Cooperative Extension Service (CES) Carroll County.

Rob called the meeting to orders at 5:30 pm.

A motion was made to approve the minutes of the 8/6/13 Conservation Commission. The motion was seconded and a vote was taken. The minutes were approved 5-0.

Olivia Saunders from the UNH Cooperative Extension Service (CES) introduced herself. She was present to help explain what assistance the UNH CES could provide the Town in planning for agricultural use of the Town Forest.

Rob asked about what was the going rate for lease of a acre of agricultural land. Olivia said that there was no set or average price since there were many variables in land qualities, location and sizes. Those factors would dictate the lease values in each situation. Rob asked about acreage size and the needs for agricultural use. Olivia said it would depend on the agricultural use of the land, livestock grazing or crop cultivation. If crops were grown the space requirements would be twice the area in cultivation in order to allow for crop rotation and fallow use. If livestock was anticipated the acreage would be somewhat less, but grazing use would have to rotate some in order to not overgraze any one area. She said she would be happy to evaluate the land and give recommendations. Olivia suggested a long-term lease was the best arrangement to attract interested farmers. A 10, 15 or 20 year lease may be a good start. She noted that the minimum lease period for any farmer to qualify for a USDA NRCS grant award was a 5 year minimum. Olivia explained some of the other requirements for a NRCS grant. Rob asked if the CES could help us with a Request for Proposal (RFP) for the land. She cited some examples of farm projects of which some were Community Supported Agriculture (CSA) types. Burlington VT, Exeter NH and others.

The subject of buildings on the property was brought up for discussion. Rob noted that due to the USVLT easements, buildings may be an issue. Olivia said that buildings may be a necessity for some agricultural uses such as winter housing for livestock breeding, washrooms or refrigeration areas for crop harvesting, hay or feed buildings for livestock, etc. She mentioned a Bowdoinham ME farm that has 5 farmers on a 100 acre property with 1 farmer using 90 acres raising greens, and the other 4 sharing the 10 acre balance, as well as sharing the wash and refrigeration facility and the utility costs that services them.

Paul asked about a template for a RFP and she said she could check out other organizations and see what they used, mentioning the organization "Land for Use" in the SW corner of NH. Paul asked about a time line. Olivia said that land improvement work might occur in either the spring, summer or fall months, while seed ordering usually took place during the winter months, typically in February. She recommended not to rush to accept a RFP but to spend time finding a good partner relationship and then go forward. She also recommended going to the Northeast Organic Farmers Association (NOFA) to help find interested farmers.

Before leaving the meeting Olivia said that she would look for lease models to use as a template and she would be happy to walk the property with us.

Rob noted that town has passed a new ordinance that addresses the issue of camping and campfires on the land prescribing a \$250 fine for any violation. He said that the Town counsel had recommended that the NH State RSA be referenced in the ordinance in order to give it teeth. Rob passed out copies of the new ordinance which notes RSA 41:11-a as the authority the ordinance is based on. He said that he was going to ask Kathy Vizard about what size signs could be ordered from NH Prison Industries so we could post areas that camping may be an issue.

The topic of the acquisition of the NH DOT garage was raised. Rob thought that the best approach was to work on a justification that would offer the State or the USFS a solution to a problem. One advantage to having the property was the saving of quite a bit of road construction and solving a significant part of the access issue to the field area. Questions about hazardous materials were asked. It was acknowledged that the Conway Fire District was concerned with the problem but exactly what wastes are present is not known, although salt is considered the primary problem. It was agreed that any potential transfer of the property would have to have some release from liability regarding any hazardous waste. Rob said that Executive Councilor Ray Burton and NH DOT Commissioner Chris Clement was going to be in the area on 9/6 around 2 pm. Jack has been working on arranging a meeting to take place with both at the Town Hall with all the selectmen present to discuss the proposal.

Rob mentioned that he had talked with Curtis Coleman, Albany Road Agent, about assisting in the improvement and development of the 2 parking areas on the west end of the property along the Kancamangus Highway. Curtis said that he can meet with us to evaluate the work needed to grade and provide gravel at the landing site and create, grade and gravel a small lot at the Town Center exclusion site. It was suggested we do so soon.

Cort said that he would contact Mike Martin, Saco District Ranger, about sending us another copy of the satellite photo he provided us this spring for use at the Burton/DOT meeting on Friday. There is also a need to have at least a temporary trail map until the final map is produced by the USFS.

Cort explained the trail work that was accomplished with the local NEMBA club on August 18th. The club had 18 volunteers that completed almost all of the remaining trail work on the western end of the property including extensive grade work in several locations. There are a few spot that need some additional work but the trails can now be considered finished. Cort intends to do paint blazing and installation of the remaining signs shortly. He mentioned that as soon as we have a temporary map the kiosks can be posted with them and hikers and bikers can start using the trails. Josephine mentioned that once we have a final map copy that we tag each map with an appeal for donations toward the Albany Forest Fund, particularly noting if donations are tax deductible.

With no other business to address Josephine made a motion to adjourn the meeting which Jack seconded. The motion approved, a vote was taken and the meeting adjourned at 6:35 pm.

Cort Hansen, Conservation Commission Secretary.