

# MEETING MINUTES

## ALBANY CONSERVATION COMMISSION

**Tuesday, March 4th, 2014, 5:30 pm**

**Members present: Rob Nadler, Jack Rose, Dick VanDyne, Josephine Howland, Cort Hansen & Paul Brown, alternate. Public: William Abbott -Upper Saco Valley Land Trust (USVLT), Glen Mitchell – organic farmer & Sarah Hewitt.**

Rob called the meeting to order at 5:40 pm. He suggested we postpone approval of last months minutes and move on to discussion with the guests present.

Rob welcomed William Abbott of USVLT who updated the commission members on the USVLT agricultural planning. William said that the agricultural plan is a “top priority – back burner” issue for the USVLT board. He said it may take another year to organize their organization's household and that it was not an issue of funding while he reiterated grant and donation sources. Rob also noted other potential funding sources willing to assist in development of agriculture and the improvements at the DOT/NH Fish & Game site.

Rob introduced Glen Mitchell as an interested party to the agricultural development of the fields. William explained to all that an agricultural proposal was required for all farmers by stipulations from the grant organizations that had funded the original land purchase. Glen asked questions about goals, plans, size of field area, potential uses and length of contracts. William noted that any agricultural proposal should be a “dream list” of possible use to allow a variety of agricultural options and flexibility for the prospective farmer and that the proposal would involve approval by USVLT and the state. Rob showed a copy of the Forest Farm Field Lease Application that he and Paul had worked up which would be used to sort the farmer applications. Rob asked Glen if 5-10 acres is his desire. Glen said that yes it was and for the first year some type of clover or buckwheat cover crop would be planted to restore the soil and choke out weeds. Rob said that the next step for Glen would be to complete an application form. Rob said we should define an area to farm this season. Josephine explained the potential advantages for agricultural use by development of the DOT/NH Fish & Game site. Rob explained the purposes of an association with the USVLT for any agricultural uses, as USVLT would administrate use of the fields. William noted that water use would be part of the application approval.

Sarah Hewitt explained her interest in the agricultural planning from a background and concerns about food security, local crop production, organic grain production, etc. Sarah complimented the commission on planning for agricultural use of the fields and said that it was good time to start land improvements. William suggested a feasibility study might be a good place to start prior to searching for agricultural funding to make sure that there is a demand for local field leasing. Organizations such as Land-for-Good, NOFA and others were mentioned.

William said he could map the field into parcels to help divide the field into segments, while avoiding existing trails, roads, air strip, etc. Sarah inquired about buildings. Rob turned the question over to William who read the restrictive clause from the property easement which said agricultural buildings could not exceed 6 acres of impervious surfaces on the property, and noted a possible view-scape restriction along with a height limitation. William noted that NRCS funding could not be granted to the Town but it could be granted to a lessee for fencing, etc. with some restriction on lease period, etc. The guests left the meeting.

Rob asked for comments on the minutes from the 2/4/14 meeting. Having no comments Jack moved to approve the minutes and Josephine seconded the motion. The minutes were approved 5-0.

Rob asked about the airplane club's use of the fields and suggested that we map out and designate their plot and create a contract for its use along with assessing a small annual fee. He said that it would be only fair and equitable since we would soon be charging a fee for agricultural use of the land. Fees or income streams from forest and agricultural use would go into the town's forest conservation fund which would need to be designated since there is not one currently set up. Jack said that he would contact Paul Whetton from the flying club.

Dick asked if a beginning farmer should be required to pay a lease fee at all since they would be improving the soils and field conditions. Rob said that the fees envisioned would be very reasonable and affordable and Paul read the prices/acre he had researched from other sources.

Dick also noted that he had contact with an individual who would donate his time brush clearing the fields if the commission paid for the equipment. Rob said that Dan Sdankus had offered the free use of his excavator to the commission with the stipulation that we pay for the fuel to operate it. Jack said that he would contact Steve Solomon of the Conway Village Fire District to resume the discussion he had last fall with him about burning the fields this spring.

Josephine mentioned she was going to attend the Mother Earth News Fair in North Carolina held on April 12-13th. It is held regionally and this was a good opportunity to find it on the east coast.

With no other topics to address, Jack moved to adjourn the meeting, with Josephine seconding and a vote taken, the meeting adjourned at 6:48 pm.

Cort Hansen, Conservation Commission Secretary.