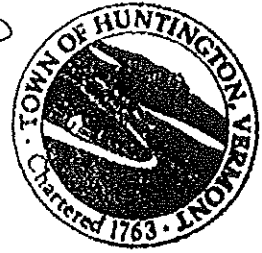


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DATE July 27, 2017



Huntington Conservation Commission

Minutes for June 8, 2017

Approved, July 13, 2017

PRESENT: Rebecca Ryan (Co-Chair), Sheri Lynn (Co-Chair), Maggie Mae Anderson, Guthrie Smith, JB Bryan, Darlene Palola, Jenna Koloski,

ABSENT: Jeannette Segale

OTHERS PRESENT:

CLERK: Natalie Beckwith

Call to Order: Ryan called the meeting to order at 19:06.

Public Comment: None.

Minutes of May 11, 2017:

MOTION: Smith moved to approve the minutes, Anderson seconded. Passed unanimously of attendees.

Mail: A letter from the Vermont Land Trust (VLT) was passed around for members to review informing that they are looking to recruit a new VLT president.

Work Plan:

Debrief on call with the Charlie Smith Road parcel landowner

- The owners are three sisters that inherited the land and they all live out of state. Lynn and Ryan now have all three of their contact information.
- Ryan summarized that the landowner they spoke with, Wendy (Moore) Hillhide, seems very open to selling the entire 72-acre parcel to the Town of Huntington. She agreed to hold off on listing the property for now.
- The landowners were also interested in donating a small section of land along the river. Ryan speculated that the worst-case scenario would be only securing this small parcel.
- Ryan informed that the parcel is adjacent to the larger Timbervest property that has been on the market for a long time. The HCC could pursue getting funding for a larger property. The Public Land Trust works with municipalities to secure land but is only interested in considering larger parcels.
- Bryan prompted the group to review the parcel on a map to clarify where it is in relation to landmarks and other properties. The group briefly discussed.
- Lynn said that the best next step would be to gather at the property and walk the land with the County Forester, Ethan Tapper. The Selectboard would be invited to attend and there would need to be a public notification. The group discussed possible dates to propose to Tapper.

- The most ideal dates are June 20th or June 21st, 2017 at 18:30. June 27th is an alternate date if needed.
- Lynn noted that anyone who cannot attend the group walkthrough could potentially view the property at another time.
- Once the date is finalized with Tapper, the HCC will make an announcement to notify the Selectboard and the public.

ACTION: Ryan will ask if Tapper is available on the proposed dates and will reach out to the landowners to inform them of the plan to visit.

ACTION: Ryan will go through the old minutes from when the HCC discussed potential partners and funders for purchasing land in the past and will report back at the next meeting.

ACTION: Lynn will send an agenda out to serve as notice for the walkthrough meeting once the date is confirmed.

Discuss Fritz property adjacent to the current Town Forest

- Segale, who could not attend the meeting, sent an update via email which Ryan read aloud:
 - “Fritz property would provide a dryer access to our Town Forest. His property includes the Gullywhumper trail. However, the addition of the property would not resolve initial access concerns. An adjacent landowner has mentioned interest in purchase of this property. Additionally, this owner has allowed the Nordic ski area to place trails on his property. He's been a pleasant partner to work with.”
- There was discussion of the potential benefits and drawbacks of the property and the group determined that the HCC would not pursue next steps.
 - The parcel has a trail but would not necessarily improve access to or provide parking for the current Town Forest.
 - Anderson asked the group to consider that if we have the opportunity to pursue the accessible 72-acre lot then the HCC could focus efforts on that opportunity and not on improving access to the existing Town Forest, which would be retained for conservation purposes.
 - The group agreed that improving access to the current Town Forest is something that the HCC has dedicated a lot of time and effort to in the past and that it would be good to focus energy on this opportunity for a town forest with access and potential for more recreation.
- Bryan noted that the lot on Charlie Smith Road is potentially very steep and may not be the right fit for access and recreation to meet the town’s needs. The group tabled further discussion on that topic until the property has been viewed with Ethan Tapper.

ACTION: Ryan will send Beckwith Segale’s email.

Debrief on the May 20th, 2017 Invasives workshop

- Those who attended the workshop felt that it was very informative and overall a really great event; however, attendance was very low.

- Ryan asked if someone could write up a summary of the event for the annual report. Attendees noted that Segale took notes and therefore should be asked first if she is able to write the summary.
- In addition to removing invasive plants, the workshop attendees planted three willows. Koloski and Smith noted that the HCC will need to flag the willows and perform some ongoing maintenance. Ryan suggested inviting the boy scouts to take on that process.
- Smith suggested having the July HCC meeting at the site where the willows were planted. Lynn noted that the July meeting would be needed for planning and discussion of the VTRCA application if the HCC was invited to give a presentation, which is the next step in the application process. The group agreed to keep the July meeting at the library as usual, but noted that a light agenda might allow time to visit the site where the willows were planted.
- The turn out was very small for the May workshop and it was mostly attended by HCC members. Ryan suggested that promotion start earlier in the future. The information from the presenters was not complete until very close to the event which made it difficult to promote this time around. For the fall invasives workshop the HCC will start earlier and make sure to inform more local groups.
- Lynn asked the group to consider the best way to prevent conflicting events, or scheduling events at the same time as other community events. The group noted that the workshop was on the only sunny day in a while so that may have contributed to the low turn out.
- Ryan suggested buying an ad in the Times Ink for future events. The group liked this idea and agreed to consider it for the next event.
- Anderson asked how to make sure that the HCC can pay Mike Bald for the contract for the fall invasives workshop before the fiscal year is over. This expense was approved in a vote at the May 2017 HCC meeting and Anderson has since contacted Bald to confirm. The group briefly discussed.

ACTION: Ryan will send Anderson Mary Keller-Butler's contact information.

ACTION: Anderson will contact Mary Keller-Butler and copy Ryan and Lynn to request payment of \$325 for Mike Bald for the hands on invasives workshop in the fall.

ACTION: Koloski will contact Segale to review her notes on the May workshop and determine next steps for the maintenance of the willows.

Budget follow up

- Ryan updated that the HCC has paid for a two-year membership to the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions.
- Mike Bald will be contracted for the fall invasives workshop in the FY16-17 budget.
- Ryan priced out the metal signs discussed at the May HCC meeting. The metal signs are about \$18 each. The potential challenge would be hanging the signs because they are heavy and would be best bolted down.
- The group discussed the benefits and drawbacks of having permanent metal signs and decided that it's best to put them up only at the active time of year. Discussion of other options led to the decision to consider reflective plastic signs instead that could be put up and taken down for the season each year.

ACTION: Ryan will find out if the HCC could order plastic reflective signs instead of metal.

ACTION: Smith will obtain the amphibian sign crossing design used for the previous signs and share it with Ryan.

Impromptu Items

- Koloski proposed forming a concentrated committee/task force to work on pursuing the purchase of a new land parcel. The group agreed to pursue this but noted the need to comply with appropriate regulations in doing so.

2018 Work Plan

- The co-chairs, Lynn and Ryan, said that they feel that the group may have too many priorities and it would be good to focus on the highest 3 priorities for the next 12 months.
- Bryan suggested dropping off working on the old Town Forest because the HCC has done everything possible at this time.
- There will still be work to do on the storm water initiative in the coming fiscal year. Palola provided an update on the work planned. Lynn asked what the HCC's role is and what the town's role is in this work. Palola sees the HCC's role as helping to educate the community. She noted that there is a storm water plan meeting on June 26, 2017.
- Lynn asked Beckwith to read out the priorities on the FY17 Work Plan. Beckwith did so.
- Lynn noted that if the HCC gets the grant for the consulting work on the town forest that will necessarily inform what is prioritized for the coming year.
- The group discussed using the work plan as a tool to stay on task and questioned if there is a better way to utilize it or a format that would be more effective.
- Ryan said that Segale had emailed some suggestions for other events and activities to be considered by the HCC.
- Lynn noted that collaborating on events instead of hosting them might take some of the pressure off and reduce the HCC actions. Focusing on collaborating on events could help focus our efforts. Ryan recommended choosing one event per quarter.
- Koloski suggested planning events far ahead of time and promoting them for the year or a larger period of time. The group discussed having a meeting that is dedicated to planning priorities and outlining how they will be achieved.
- The HCC usually takes one month off in the summer and prefers it to be the month of August. Lynn recommended setting aside the September meeting for establishing priorities and planning.
- Lynn suggested thinking about what criteria should be used to determine what type of event is a good fit for the HCC's efforts.
- Smith said that she would like to prioritize having an invasives workshop in the spring and one in the fall.
- Lynn suggested possibly focusing on pulling invasives and the hands on part and not worrying so much about the educational portion of the event because the indoor educational events are not well attended.
- Palola noted that the Bird Museum provided events and education related to birds and bird watching so the HCC should not add efforts in that area.

- The group agreed to have the September 14th meeting be dedicated to discussing the FY18 work plan. Ryan noted that the group should vote on each priority. Koloski suggested having that planning session in a different format than the work plan or normal meeting format.

ACTION: Koloski will think about the best way to structure the September planning meeting and coordinate with Beckwith. Beckwith will plan to facilitate the planning meeting so that the HCC members can focus on participating in the planning exercise.

Discuss supporting the Citizen Science events

- Segale sent an update via email, which Ryan shared. She suggested partnering with Ann Dannenburg who organized the event.
- The group discussed the Citizen Science events and how workshops and events seem to not be well attended. There was not support for prioritizing the Citizen Science events in order to prioritize events better aligned with the work plan.

Discuss and define goals for Town Forest management

- Segale sent questions and comments via email, which Ryan read aloud:
 - "Questions for county forester: What additional steps should we take to turn this area into an excellent wildlife habitat and bird haven? Suggestions include the release (allow sunlight in) of hard mast trees such as oak, beech, shagbark hickory. (Hard mast trees produce high fat content nuts for our wildlife and birds to make it through our winters.) If we went this route, we could also hold a chainsaw training workshop at the Town forest, and folks attending would be benefiting the wildlife."
- The group briefly discussed Segale's comments and agreed to consider in the context of setting FY18 priorities.
- Tapper had offered to update the Town Forest Management plan. Ryan asked if the town or the HCC was responsible for overseeing that task.

ACTION: Ryan will find out who is responsible for getting the Town Forest plan updated.

ACTION: Ryan will ask Tapper Segale's questions.

Other Business:

- Barbara Elliott, Town Administrator, had distributed a document from VLCT regarding the Open Meeting Law and highlighted a couple of the items, including:
 - Email correspondence falls under the Open Meeting Law and constitutes a 'meeting'. Therefore it is important that members not engage in group discussions outside of meetings, and do not 'Reply all' to information distributed by others.
 - When a member is participating in a meeting via telephone, Skype, FaceTime, etc. any vote that is not unanimous must be done by roll call.
 - All meetings, including work session and sub-committee meetings, must follow the Open Meeting Law.

- Palola said that the HCC has to be careful about discussing sensitive issues via email with the whole group.
- Lynn asked if sending out the agenda is okay. The group agreed that clarity is needed on this topic.
- With further discussion it was determined with some confidence that distributing information prior to a meeting was alright as long as there was not any discussion before the meeting.
- Lynn asked how to proceed until clarity is provided. Palola said that it's fine to proceed as usual in sending out the agenda or sharing information, but decisions and discussions are not appropriate via email.
- Bryan said that the problematic action is replying to the whole group because then it becomes a meeting. The chairs can send information to the whole group but if anyone needs to reply they should reply only to the chairs in order to prevent a violation of the Open Meeting Law.

ACTION: Palola will get the full text of the regulation document from Barbara so that further clarity can be gained.

Grant applications and Other Projects

- Palola provided an update on the work of prioritizing the work for the storm water project. There will be standards coming out in July regarding storm water runoff that Huntington will have to respond to/change. The new town plan is critically important because it is prescriptive for land and homeowners.
- Palola said that the letter of intent for the grant application is due in early July and asked if the HCC should demonstrate support for the application.

ACTION: Palola will check with Barbara Elliot if a letter of support would be appropriate and helpful for the HCC to provide the Selectboard in support of the project.

Topics for Next Meetings Agenda, July 13, 2017:

- Next steps on willows planted during the invasives workshop
- Discuss Charlie Smith Road land
 - Debrief on visit
 - Next steps
- Prepare for the VTFRCA grant application presentation (if invited to present)
- Discuss plan for September planning and prioritizing meeting

Adjournment: Ryan moved and Smith seconded to adjourn the meeting at 21:06. Passed unanimously.

June 8 2017: HCC monthly meeting at the Huntington Public Library

June 13, 2017: Draft/unapproved minutes sent to Town Clerk for website posting

July 13, 2017: Final/approved minutes approved

July 20, 2017: Approved minutes sent to Town Clerk for recording & website posting