

*Received for record
Sept. 12, 2010
Town Clerk*

**Approved meeting minutes
Huntington Conservation Commission (HCC)
August 12, 2010**

Meeting began 7:09pm, adjourned 9:25pm

Commissioners in attendance: Wally Jenkins (chair), Roman Livak, Laura Hill Birmingham, Sally Hillary, Cassandra Wilday

Commissioners absent: Alan Brace, Margaret Fowle

Public in attendance: Wayne Curley

Wally called the meeting to order at 7:09pm

Review and approve minutes, review mail:

- Roman moved to approve the July meeting minutes as written, Wally seconded the motion
- Unanimous approval, Cassandra abstains her vote due to absence from July meeting

Bland Property presentation (Eric Paola, Aaron Worthley, Dave Brautigam presenters)

- This presentation is meant to be an opening dialogue about the Bland property purchase with the HCC
- The Bland children (Perry, Linda, and Beth) are looking for a buyer, although the property is not officially listed
- John and Elizabeth Bland were the original owners since 1962 and are now both deceased
- The land has a farming history (hay, cattle, open land)
- HHCT + local residents held an "interest" meeting about purchasing the land for conservation and public use
- Eric and Dave are on the board of the HHCT
- The HHCT voted unanimously to go ahead with the project
- The HHCT has ~\$5000 in the project fund, which is all available for a feasibility study or to make a deposit
- Dave and the Vermont Land Trust met with the Blands after the HCCT approval and discovered that the Blands are negotiating with another potential buyer who made an offer
- The Purchase and Sales Agreement has been drawn up with contingencies, including the land passing a PERC test
- The HHCT asked the Blands to mention to the potential buyers that the HHCT would like to pursue working with them as a partner in the land, but this is still vague as of now.
- Aaron presented maps of the Bland property, which borders Trapp Rd. to the North of the Living Future property and Camel's Hump Rd., and surrounds public buildings in the Town Center, including the cemetery, Brewster Pierce School, and town offices. The property also borders the Huntington River on the west end. The total acreage is ~250 acres.
- The acreage has a diverse landscape with wetland, early successional, mixed/northern

- hardwoods and conifers, sugarbush, beech stand with bear markings
- Some of the land is classified agricultural land (a little prime, mostly subprime due to wetness)
- A spring on the property used to supply the town center with water
- The property is within the zoning district and would align with the goal of concentrating density in the village district and rural residential district
- There are exceptional scenic vistas from property, including unique views of Camel's Hump
- Potential funding:
 - Open Space Institute, based on New York City, is a unique organization somewhere between a Land Trust and a conservation organization. They are involved with forest and urban land conservation, with a goal of preserving biodiversity. They have a new grant (1.4 million) to invest in town forests with a September 1 deadline with the following criteria: community interest, proximity to community, economic value, public equity/ownership. There is seed money available for a feasibility study.
 - A possible mix of funding:
 - 1) Community Forest Fund (4:1 match)
 - 2) Conservation Fund
 - 3) Vermont Land Trust, VHCB
 - 4) Private donations and fundraising
- Roman asked whether the HHCT was a public or private entity – if purchased by the HHCT, would the property be owned by the town, which brings up a tax revenue issue?
- Eric was not sure if the HHCT is public or private, but more thinks that the criteria underscore the need for the property to be open for public use. The property could go into Current Use, but there would be a tax shift. Aaron mentioned that an actively managed sugarbush could make up for tax loss.
- Aaron suggested that the project meets general and natural resource criteria of the Conservation Fund
- Uses include: town forest, town buildings, agriculture conservation/lease, wetland/river conservation, recreation/education, village density.
- Is the HCC supportive of the pursuit of the project?
- Roman is concerned with a lack of public hearing, but Wally reminded the commission that the HCC has open meetings and the agenda is publicly posted
- Eric mentioned that they are in the beginning of the project and there are still lots of unanswered questions
- Aaron said that they are seeking a different model of Conservation Funds – the project is looking for input of the HCC, rather than just submitting a proposal for funds, and hope this can be a collaborative process between the HCC, HHCT, and Selectboard.
- Dave agrees and adds that this process could increase input, cohesion and cooperation among many Huntington commissions and groups
- Public comment: Wayne asked whether Selectboard approval was important prior to the

September 1 grant proposal deadline, and mentioned that the agenda is full for the next Selectboard meeting.

- Eric said that there is no specific stipulation in the proposal guidelines that states this.
 - Dave said that the Blands have been willing to wait a year and take the property off the market with ~\$10,000 deposit (primarily HHCT funds), in order for the HHCT to pursue a secondary appraisal (VLT approved appraisal needed) and seeking funding.
 - Landowner Perry Bland is interested in knowing whether there is official Selectboard support for the project.
 - Aaron asked Wayne whether the Selectboard would be interested in project development, or just an up-or-down vote? Wayne said this is a good question to ask the Selectboard.
 - Eric would like to see a partnership between the HCC and the HHCT, and then take the project to the Selectboard
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- The HCC will discuss the project amongst the commissioners and will be in touch with Dave with an official statement regarding our Selectboard recommendation

The following conversation happened at the end of the HCC meeting:

- The HCC should be careful with HCC support because of Conservation Funds
- Does the HCC support working with the formulation of the project?
- Roman is skeptical about bringing in multiple players in this project.
- Cassandra is supportive of multiple people and community support, but stresses that we need good facilitators.
- Roman asked whether the HCC should be supportive, but not a driver of the project?
- Wally will draft a statement and send via email.
- Cassandra asked whether the HCC can even pursue a project like this, and Wally said not before, but recently the language has been changed so that we can pursue conservation projects.

Special Places River Walk

- Gretchen Alexander from the Agency of Natural Resources will be the trip leader for the August Special Places River walk
- August 28 with a rain date
- Wally posted a notice in the Times Ink and will send one out on the Front Porch Forum
- Sally volunteered to be the contact person to take names, emails, and phone numbers in case of rain

Scenic Inventory

- Wally gave out 6 more sites to evaluate
- We will convene the scores of all 12 sites at the October HCC meeting

Community Waste Reduction Project Grant ideas

- The Chittenden Solid Waste District has up to \$3000 available for a town project that will result in less trash
- They fund 3-4 projects a year (~\$500-1000/town), and requires a 20% match from the town

- What are the issues that need to be addressed? Ignorance/awareness? Composting workshop with participants getting a free composting bin? Must have an educational component.
- Anyone want to follow through with an application? Due to time, we will leave this open for now.

Energy Conservation and Renewable Energy book purchase

- There is \$100 available for the purchase of energy conservation/renewable energy books for the Huntington library
- Wally will order books online – any recommendations?
- Laura recommended “Clean Power from Water” about microhydro systems

HCC clerk position

- Laura works an average of 3.5-4 hours per month, which will need to be submitted to Dan Stoddard
- Roman made a motion to increase clerk compensation to \$12.50/hour, Cassandra seconds
- Unanimous approval, Laura abstains her vote

Biodiversity Photo Contest

- Laura posted a picture of rare plant mountain sandwort for the August biodiversity picture at the library
- Wally asked Brian Pfeiffer to be a judge at the contest
- Received lighting tracks
- Would anyone be interested in finding potential sponsors? Prizes? Camera shops? Local businesses?
- The photos must be of Huntington or taken from Huntington
- Wally will draw up a Request for Entry factsheet, which includes information on submission limit, framing guidelines, etc.
- What are the categories, and the awards for categories?

HCC Retreat

- Commissioners can all attend on Saturday, October 2
- Wally will check date with Alan

Other business

- Laura and Dan are expecting 2 identical boy twins on January 14, 2011!

Adjourn: Roman moved to adjourn at 9:25pm, Sally seconded, unanimous approval

Date unapproved minutes to town clerk: August 16, 2010
Date approved minutes to town clerk: September 12, 2010