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November 17, 2009

Huntington Conservation Commission (HCC) Meeting Minutes
October 8, 2009
Approved November 12, 2009

Meeting began 7:00pm, meeting adjourned 9:16pm

In attendance: Alan Brace, Wally Jenkins, Roman Livak, Margaret Fowler, Tyler Miller, Laura Hill
Birmingham

Public in attendance: Cara LaBounty, Ken Pillsbury, Brett Lindemuth

I. Review and approve minutes

- September meeting minutes approved unanimously

II. Public questions and comments

- Ken questioned the outcome of the grant received for scenic inventory
 - Wally and Roman explained that the grant was used to write up a scenic evaluation methodology, which can be used to evaluate scenic areas
 - No areas have been evaluated using this methodology
 - Wally explained that the HCC members are planning on evaluating 15-20 properties sometime soon to be used as a baseline for interpreting the scenic inventory scores
 - Issue tabled until November meeting

III. HCC Mission Statement

- Roman found a mission statement from the HCC in 1989 and will email this statement to commissioners
- Roman also wrote a brief history by reviewing former annual reports
- Wally thinks the "Powers and duties of conservation commissions" statement would make a good mission statement for the HCC (refer to VT Statutes towns establishing conservation commission document, Title 24: Municipal and County government; Chapter 118: Conservation Commission)

III. Organization of Commission

Selecting new Commission members

- Can a recording clerk be a member of a commission?
- Alan mentioned that there is no information within the statutes
- When Alan went to the Selectboard in regards to Laura's letter of interest back in May 2009, the Selectboard said that they "prefer not to have a voting member as a clerk" but it is up to the HCC to decide
- Commissioners agreed that it is up to Laura to make the decision as to whether or not she can handle taking the notes and being active in the meeting
- If nominated to the commission as a voting member, Laura said that she can handle both responsibilities of taking meeting minutes and participating in the meetings as a voting member
- If the responsibilities become too arduous, Laura will bring this up during a meeting and another clerk may be brought on in the future, if needed

Public comment: Ken noted how school board members had trouble taking notes and paying attention

to the meeting

Select new chairperson (chairs serve for 1 year)

- Roman nominated Wally Jenkins as HCC chair
- Margaret seconded Wally's nomination
- Unanimous approval of Wally's nomination to chair

- Wally asked the commissioner if the commission wanted to continue the rotating meeting facilitator
- The commission agreed
- Roman asked whether Wally could review the draft agendas before they go to the HCC members and Wally agreed

Sign up for meeting facilitators

- **November: Roman**
- **December: Alan**
- **January: Margaret**

IV. Budget FY 2010-2011

- Ed Wildman needs FY 2010-2011 budget by October 15, 2009
- Level funding desired

- Wally did a quick review of the budget of the past few years and found the following:
 - **Requests:** \$2000 - \$2700
 - **Actuals:** \$1872 (average actual budget over 9 years)

- Wally recommends cutting the budget by 10%, which would remain above the actual expenditures (i.e., \$2400 budget request)
- Wally recommends taking the percentages of the breakdown of all average values for each line item and subtracting 10% from the overall budget
- Roman made a motion that there be a 10% cut in FY 2010-2011 budget (i.e., \$2400) and Wally will allocate the line items
- Alan seconded the motion
- Unanimous approval of FY 2010-2011 budget

- **Public comment:** Brett appreciated the reduction in the budget and integrity in the HCC budgeting process
- Brett did research into 3 years of town reports and found lots of 0's in budgets where money is routinely allocated but is not spent, but goes into the town's budget which gets approved and the town uses for other things

- Wally will follow up with Amy about the monthly budget report request

Conservation Fund

- Wally mentioned the conservation fund was voted on for the town, so it cannot change unless it is an article voted on at the town meeting
- In 2009, there was an initiative to take out funding for the conservation fund for a year's time, but was taken off the 2009 town meeting agenda after consideration of public comment
- **Public comment:** Cara asked what the conservation fund can be used for
 - The Conservation Commission hears request from townspeople or committees for conserving lands or historical renovation
 - Past projects have been used for the historical curtain renovation and the Bradley property. A history of funding can be found in the HCC files.
- It is estimated that \$158,000 is currently in the fund
- Roman noted that we cannot go out and pursue projects for conservation funding (source is from 2000 town report)
- Roman would like to see the fund expended in some fashion
- Roman mentioned the 3 bridges in need of repair, which perhaps are historical structures
- **Public comment:** Ken wanted to use the conservation fund for building the salt shed (current project estimate \$450,000)
 - Laura mentioned that the HCC has not received a proposal for the conservation fund for the salt shed project
 - Ken also mentioned that he would not like to see the conservation funds used for the Hanson Field property because it will not be developed on anyway
 - Wally mentioned in defense of the property that it would provide a public place for children and families to enjoy nature, and is also a prime scenic and recreational resource
 - Ken advocated that the conservation money be used to benefit the taxpayers of this town
- **Public comment:** Brett mentioned that Huntington residents are very environmentally sensitive
 - Last year at the town meeting, Brett thought that cutting the \$16,000 funding for the conservation fund for 1 year would have been a good idea, given the complete dire picture of the economy
- **Public comment:** Cara mentioned that in 2010, the HCC could carefully word an initiative cutting the conservation fund for 1 year with automatic reinstatement in year 2.
 - The townspeople of Huntington need to know that they are supposed to come forward to request funds
 - Conservation Fund needs to have a stated goal to preserve a certain parcel of land, etc.
 - Individual people coming to request funds may look to some people like certain individuals are profiting while others are not
- Roman made a motion to table the Conservation Fund discussion until November meeting
- Wally seconded
- Unanimous approval of tabling discussion

V. Times Ink articles

- Wally wonders whether there is support on a regular 2-3 times a year Times Ink article commitment, or should it be on an ad hoc basis on HCC programs?
- If we're going to do it on a regular basis, can we have a sign-up now?
- Alan prefers a Conservation Corner to allow for better discussion with townspeople especially about the Conservation Fund, 2 to 4 times per year
- One commissioner can write up, bring to the commission and have the commissioner's approval
- Roman also likes the idea of a Conservation Corner, but is worried about the time involved to write 4 articles
- Wally mentioned that Alan's idea of disseminating the agendas at the stores has been a great way of getting the word out about the HCC, but has concerns about nailing a Times Ink article down to something regular
- The Renewable Homes Energy Tour would make a great write-up for the Times Ink
- Wally will check in with Amy about whether Dean got any pictures of the Renewable Homes Energy tour
- Margaret mentioned the idea of having something at least twice a year, even if it says the same thing, would have a great value in terms of getting the word out
- Alan will volunteer writing each article for the Times Ink
- It was agreed to generate more articles through the Times Ink and Alan will be the point-person
- **Public comment:** Cara mentioned that one of the mistakes of Richmond was the purchase of the Bombardier land (next to new bridge in Jonesville).
 - Cara mentioned that Richmond Land Trust went to the Richmond Selectboard to use Conservation Funds to acquire the property, including funds from VT Housing, for the conservation of hayfield between the Winooski and Huntington Rivers.
 - Richmond Land Trust is granting all rights to VT Housing and now it is up to the VT Housing to decide how this land will be conserved.
 - If Huntington purchases lands for conservation, Cara urged us to make sure the *town* gets the easement rights.
- **Tyler's parting thoughts:**
 - It is important to have the distinction between the town (or other public entity) acquiring land and private land conservation
 - It is critical when talking about land conservation to conceptualize the specifics of each deal (every project is unique, with different restrictions and reserved rights, etc).
 - Conserving your land does not release the landowner from paying taxes, most are under current use, but conservation does not automatically decrease the taxes.
 - Studies have shown that the higher the population of a town, the higher the taxes

(conserving land does not necessarily “cost” the town tax revenue, but likely reduces the property’s requirement for expensive town services over time).

- Roman expressed frustration with the Hanson field because there is no immediate threat to the Keirs selling the property
- Tyler responded that the proposal may be coming in “ahead of the curve”
- Tyler agrees that the conservation fund should be expended more often, but there may always be people in town who do not want to conserve a specific parcel of land that has a proposal in for conservation funding. Tyler said that “you can always talk yourself out of conserving anything” (e.g., the Hanson field may be deemed mostly undevelopable and therefore some think that there may be no reason to conserve this land. But if a parcel of developable land comes up for conservation, someone will make the point that houses should go here, and therefore the land should not be conserved.)
- Tyler also reminded everyone that the HCC’s narrow focus is to represent conservation in the town, to carefully read proposals that come in under the Conservation Fund, analyze the proposals using the established criteria for the Fund, and to make recommendations to the Selectboard who makes the final decision. The HCC is an advisory committee that makes recommendations, but does not make the final decision.

VI. Town Forest trail planning

- The Trail Grants proposal is due on January 15, 2010
- Roman is somewhat upset when he heard that Aaron gave Wayne and Joe a copy of the State of the Forest report and Aaron had no authority to do this
- Laura mentioned that Amy disseminated the State of the Forest reports to local public places (i.e., the library and town office) after our September meeting
- Wally mentioned the disorganization of the HCC due to the recent resignations of committee members and lack of an official chairperson.
- Wally mentioned that the HCC should have gone to the Selectboard first before Amy posted the State of the Forest reports around town
- The delay has been because the HCC has been waiting for Mike Snyder’s finalization of the Forest Management Plan to present the whole package to the Selectboard
- Tyler mentioned that there have been several years of preparation up to this point, and now the HCC has enlisted the VYCC to help plan for potential future trails through the town forest with no immediate intent to construct anything.
- **Public comment:** Cara mentioned that there was an intention to begin trail construction because of the plan to design trails. Therefore, the HCC will develop a plan for sometime in the future for trail construction.
 - She asked that we get approval from the Selectboard to walk the Town Forest property in the trail design phase, and that the Selectboard should have signed off on the State of the Forest report.
- **Public comment:** Cara noted the various problems with access to the Town Forest, which affect her property.

- Cara has never received updated maps about Town Forest access after multiple requests for updated maps.
 - Cara met with 2 Selectboard members on the Ancient Roads Committee and noted the errors and omissions on the maps contained within the State of the Forest report.
 - Cara also noted other errors within the report, but was not specific.
 - Cara noted that the HCC is releasing documents that affect her and other landowners, and these documents contain errors.
 - Cara is more than willing to work with the HCC, but she has still not received the corrected maps.
 - Cara mentioned that people cannot cross her property without her permission, and she needs a copy of the corrected maps.
- **Public comment:** Brett is also not opposed with public access to the “so-called” Town Forest, but he is not necessarily on board with the Ancient Road avenue, but may be open to an easement.
 - Brett noted that the usage of the land is what drives the conversation, and the HCC is “putting the cart before the horse”
 - Brett said that everyone needs to make use of the access, but it has to be done right.
- Tyler noted that, as the HCC, we’ve been focused on, “if there is ever access, we can do these things, like trails...” but the HCC has not been deeply engaged in the ongoing process to secure access.
 - Wally quoted the HCC September meeting minutes: “Aaron mentioned that he is confident that the TF access will go through based on the positive responses from the affected landowners.”
 - The HCC has not asked any harder questions other than hearing that the landowners are amenable
- **Public comment:** Cara mentioned that the HCC, Ancient Roads committee, and Selectboard need to have better communication about this issue.
 - Perhaps it should be an agenda item for Selectboard that all committees meet
- Wally mentioned that the HCC needs to step back and make sure all affected landowner’s are aware of the vision of the Town Forest
- Alan mentioned that the hold up is based on the question of official designation
 - Steve and Aaron looked into this issue between September and October’s meeting, but Alan is still uncomfortable with the ambiguity of town forest designation process.
- **Public comment:** Cara mentioned that State of the Forest report be stamped “draft” because there are errors, especially in the maps and elsewhere in the document
 - Cara recommended taking the report off the shelves.
- The trail walk with the VYCC will be canceled for October 17
- Wally mentioned that the public comments have been heard and will be taken into consideration

- Town Forest designation tabled until November

VII. Scenic inventory

- This issue will be tabled until November's meeting
- Wally will send out pdf of the randomly generated map points to commissioners

VIII. Website update

- Laura spoke with Will Keyworth and Dan Stoddard about updated the HCC website and moving it to the town's website
- Will Keyworth mentioned that for \$1500, he would transfer all files from the old HCC site to the new HCC town site, and would provide training for web maintenance.
- Dan Stoddard found a local towns person, Todd Cummings, who is willing to volunteer his time for updating the entire Town of Huntington website, and this can include transferring the HCC webpages
- Todd is in the process of reviewing the current website and will make recommendations in the near future.
- Roman mentioned a few things that would be good to add to website:
 - Arrowwood wildlife habitat
 - Fluvial study through Agency of Natural Resources

IX. Gillette Pond Special tour with Richmond Conservation Commission

- There were 3 Huntington and 2 Richmond attendants
- The event was very nice with rain in the morning, which cleared out in the afternoon
- Wally thinks that the Special Places tour was not big enough to generate a Times Ink article

X. Tyler's resignation

- Thank you Tyler for your service on the HCC and your wonderful insights on all things conservation!
- You will be missed!

XI. New business

- HCC documents were organized by Tyler and Laura
- Alan will call Ed about the file drawer
- Wally will go through the files
- Wally will contact Ed about advertising for 2 conservation commission positions
- Roman hopes that we can receive all applications by next meeting
- Wally thanked the public for their comments
- Cara thanked the commission for hearing her comments, it's a good thing what we're doing, but it has to be done right
- Margaret will pull the State of the Forest report at the library
- Wally will talk with the Selectboard about the State of the Forest Report