

Approved Minutes of the Huntington Conservation Commission Minutes for
December 10, 2009

Meeting began 7:05 pm, adjourned 8:51 pm

In attendance: Wally Jenkins, Roman Livak, Margaret Fowler, Amy Dohner, Laura Hill
Birmingham; **Absent:** Alan Brace
Public in attendance: Peter Jenkins

I. Approve Minutes and review mail

Minutes:

- Changes were made to the November 2009 meeting minutes
- November meeting minutes unanimously approved

II. Public questions and comments

- Peter is sitting in on the meeting to observe a town commission meeting and to see if he would be interested in joining a town conservation commission

III. Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions update

- The Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions annual meeting was canceled due to lack of interest
- Wally was not excited by the programs proposed at the meeting
- The organizers are looking for input from commissions for useful ideas to include in future meetings
- Margaret's idea: meeting with other commissions regarding public discontent with Conservation Funds?
- Commissioners should be receiving mailings from the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions if commissioners signed the sign-up sheet at the November meeting

IV. Scenic inventory

- Roman mentioned that there are old records of past HCC doing the scenic inventory (Tim Taft) at the Brace Farm
- All current commissioners rated the Brace Farm in teams of 2
- Range of scores of groups for Brace Farm = 25 - 31

Concerns about scenic inventory

- Amy expressed objections on how the scenic inventory may limit future energy decisions
- Amy foresees some future renewable energy projects that may serve the greater good, but town opposition to renewable energy seems to be all about aesthetics
- Regional energy is an important topic for the future of Huntington and is afraid that the scenic inventory may interfere with future energy projects
- Roman mentioned that a wind tower may make a good focal point as part of the scenic inventory
- Margaret: As a commission could we add our own line to the methodology?
- Roman recommended adding a line to the methodology regarding energy

- Wally doesn't think that we could *not* include the scenic portion in the evaluation of properties
- The scenic component is one component for evaluating a piece of property to be funded under the conservation fund
- Roman: when are we going to use the scenic inventory?
- Wally: Scenic inventory is addressed in the criteria of the conservation fund, so it can be used when evaluating conservation fund proposals.
- Amy: Plus, the HCC should be reviewing permit applications and providing comments, and the scenic inventory may be useful.

As it stands, does it seem like we can go ahead, when we have more people, do more inventories and use it as a tool to evaluate properties?

- Margaret: yes, but this should not be the only tool. Also, what does the score mean for the property owner? We should make sure the inventory scores stay relatively confidential so landowners do not get overly concerned about their "score."
- Roman would like to see more people involved in conducting the scenic inventory, and it would be an educational tool, similar to the listers evaluation tools. There is consideration for scenic views, but the score has no legal value.
- Amy: Is it important to have an inventory, or should be use as a need-based only? Not sure when we would use the inventory?
- Wally: One reason for an inventory in the light of the Conservation Fund is to be able to compare the individual scores to the inventory baseline scores
- Wally recommends being upfront with an article about the scenic inventory initiative, and it may be a way to recruit volunteers
- Roman will write the advertisement and a synopsis of the scenic inventory procedure, can use statutes for justification of scenic inventory.
- Margaret agrees with being open to the public about this process.
- We may not publish the article immediately, may wait for more commissioners, but we should start the process of writing the article.

Issues regarding scenic inventory evaluation

- Amy: The inventory was taken from one direction from 1 point, should we turn around (i.e., Camel's Hump to the south)? It was confusing in scoring the properties, so this may be why there is variability with the numbers.
- Bringing an orthophoto on scenic inventories would help with evaluating properties
- Perhaps we should take multiple scores for a single property, especially for large properties
- Wally thought we could take Aaron's randomized list, re-randomize by putting all into a hat, and pull 10 properties from a hat and evaluate more properties
- Everyone enjoyed evaluating the Brace Farm

V. Annual Report

- The HCC received a letter from Lucinda Hill requesting an annual report by January 13, 2010
- 2 reports needed: Narrative report (normal) and fiscal report (Fiscal year finances)
- The letter includes a line stating that commissions must describe "How, when, and for what

purposes is money used...” in the fiscal report

- Wally thinks this sounds like justification for money spent, rather than numbers on the spreadsheet
- Amy will touch base with Ed and/or Dan about the fiscal year budget before she leaves on Tues, 12/15 and will ask them to carbon copy Wally on the email
- Wally will write the narrative report
- Financial report deadline, January 20, 2010

VI. Vermont Yankee (VY) Resolution

- Laura presented information about the VY petition to be presented to townspeople
- Laura is drafting a Front Porch Forum email notice about the petition
- Wally and Laura are disseminating petitions to the library, Beaudry's and Jaques stores to gather signatures
- 5% of signatures needed to get forwarded to the SB for warning
- If 5% of signatures are not gathered passively by leaving petition at stores and library, door-to-door canvassing will follow

- Commissioners had questions about how much VY provides in electricity to the town of Huntington
- Laura read from the fact sheet that 2% of *New England's* energy is provided by VY
- Wally: The reason VY is not willing to give any electric price numbers to the state of Vermont because natural gas is driving electrical prices down
- Wally asks to emphasize in the Front Porch Forum email that the petition is *to warn for town meeting for townspeople to vote* on this issue at town meeting
- The selectboard may consider this NOT to be a local issue, so the selectboard may not warn this issue at town meeting
- Wally is encouraging the selectboard that this is a local issue for Huntington

- Wally previously spoke to the Huntington Energy Committee about their possible involvement in the resolution
- Wally is not in favor of going the committee route on this issue because of the potential political capital to be lost
- The energy commission did not want to get involved at the committee level

VII. Conservation Fund

- The HCC spoke previously about the working budget, but put off talking about the Conservation Fund
- The selectboard is interested in level funding everything, but finding that some groups are not able to do that
- Wally talked with Ed Booth and he would like us to make a decision tonight about the Conservation Fund

Wally generated 3 options to consider and discuss, and will have to be warned:

1. To leave it as it is \$16,000/year, revisit it next year at this time
2. To suspend it for a year and revisit that next year

3. Reduce it by 5-10% and revisit that next year

- Margaret asked how much each townspeople gives to Conservation Fund
- Wally: less than a penny for every \$100 of appraised value or \$8.95 for every \$100,000 appraised value (average of ~\$20/household assuming \$200,000 appraised value)
- Million dollar appraised property owners \$90/year into the fund
- Some of these landowners have the option to enter current use, which reduces taxes significantly (20-25% of fair market value)
- Roman's comment was that if you own a million dollar property, then you can afford \$90
- A 16,000 annual appropriation represents (0.5% of the town budget)

- Laura mentioned adjusting 5% down but also advertising these revealing statistics to townspeople
- Amy agreed with Laura about not suspending the conservation fund for a year, but 5-10% would be a gesture
- Reduction will have to be warned to be decreased by 5% reduction

- Roman disagrees, if we remove it for a year, Roman thinks that we can get it back
- Amy feels strongly that we don't suspend the fund because it will be a fight to get it back

- Why reduce rather than suspend? Wally thinks a suspension means that you don't value the Conservation Fund, whereas a reduction would be a good measure in hard economic times
- Margaret agrees that it is important to have a good gesture with the reduction, but we need to value conservation in hard economic times, and thinking toward the future
- Amy agrees with Wally's thinking that the suspension is not a good idea

- From 1 study, Wally's reading of it is that developed land costs more than it generates in taxes, not by much
- For developed land, every \$1 that went to taxes needs \$1.09 for services
- For undeveloped land, every \$1 that went to taxes needs \$0.30 in services
- Cost more in taxes for developed land than for undeveloped land

- **Roman motion to present an article to the SB for a 5% reduction for the Conservation Fund (\$16,000 - \$800 = \$15,200)**
- **Amy seconds the motion**

- Discussion as follows:
- Margaret asked whether our article will get some other groups to turn the article into something else
- Wally: someone can stand up at Town Meeting and say get rid of the conservation fund
- Roman: there can be an amendment to the article prior to Town Meeting
- The HCC needs to be prepared at Town Meeting to support this

- Wally will call Ed Booth of the selectboard with the result
- For the article to get into the warning, we may have to present the article to the selectboard

- The HCC should write the article, don't let the selectboard write it, make sure to include the "reduction for one year"
- It makes sense to get the information out through the Times Ink article prior to Town Meeting
- February Times Ink article
- Wally will write article and send it around
- Wally will check with Ed Wildman to see if the article needs to be presented to the selectboard
- Roman suggested sending it to Heidi as well
- **Unanimous approval of the 5% reduction for the Conservation Fund (-\$800, \$15,200)**

VIII. Mission Statement and new members advertisement

- Margaret wrote the new members advertisement and Wally got the advertisement to Heidi for the Times Ink deadline
- Wally: do we also need to follow through on other aspects of how we go about advertising for the position (Front Porch Forum, public notices at town office, public library, store, town website, etc.)?
- This is Ed Wildman's (townhunt@accessvt.com) job, but the HCC can check in with Ed about taking the initiative on this
- Margaret will follow through with Ed about getting an OK with the advertisement
- Wally called Tom Bailey about the fluvial erosion session runoff issues covered in the November HCC meeting minutes
- The presentation is at the Planning Commission meeting on December 16, 6:30pm at the town office (speaker at 7pm)
- Wally also asked if the Planning Commission was interested in the scenic inventory, Tom asked commissioners to call Wally if they were interested

IX. Landowner forestry workshop sponsored by library

- Ann and Wendy at the library were interested in getting a forestry workshop together
- Margaret spoke with Ann about past Audubon initiatives
- Margaret pointed Ann to the forest bird initiative at Audubon

X. Vernal pool mapping project

- Arrowwood Environmental is partnering with the VT Center for Ecostudies conducting a multiyear vernal pool mapping project throughout the state
- The northern 1/3 of the state is already done, and they are starting on middle section, including Chittenden county
- Project is supported by state wildlife grant
- Methodology involves remote sensing and on the ground field verification
- Arrowwood is looking for volunteers for field verification
- Arrowwood is currently looking into training grants for volunteers
- Are commissioners interested in volunteering? HCC promoting volunteerism (coupled with salamander crossing, etc.)?

- Commissioners all seemed favorable to these ideas

XI. Other business

HERO Transportation grant

- Amy heard from Lucinda Hill that HERO (Huntington's Everyone's Resource Organization; Don Sheldon is involved) recently had a \$25,000 grant awarded to HERO to investigate transportation issues in the town
- HCC had initially tried to partner with the energy commission in the Park and Ride initiative
- Amy is curious about this and would like to find out more, and will get in touch with Don

Annual report questions:

- Roman had questions about the annual report: Maple syrup tour, forest ag producers, etc... how does that relate to conservation?
- Wally mentioned that annual reports haven't been about *why* we (HCC) do this, but more of a *what* are we doing?
- Roman thinks one of the reasons people live in Huntington is the commitment of townspeople to conservation
- Wally will include more "why" in the annual report
- Margaret: Should the energy commission be involved in the sugarmaker's tour and couple with global climate change as maple production is a resource at risk – an educational component

Amended minutes respectfully submitted by Laura Hill Bermingham (HCC clerk) on January 19, 2010

RECEIVED _____

DATE _____

January 19, 2010