

Conservation Commission Meeting
Public Minutes
August 9, 2023

Members in Attendance: Mark Young (Chairman), Bob Stephens, Lise McNaughton, Brian Silva, Matt Lipinski, Andy Artimovich, Doug Cowie (Alternate), Becky Dunham (Alternate)

Chairman Young called the meeting to order at 6:31pm.

Motion by Stephens, second by McNaughton, to appoint alternate member Doug Cowie as a voting member in tonight's meeting. Unanimously approved.

Motion by Artimovich, second by Cowie, to stream tonight's meeting. Motion was defeated 5-2.

Agenda Items

1. **Minutes Review:** Stephens suggested a minor amendment to section 4.d.ii of the draft public minutes from the 7/12/23 meeting. The amended subsection would read as follows (with changes shown in strikethrough and bold):

~~Three~~ **Two** Commission members, along with a ~~Sportsmen of Brentwood member~~ **neighbor** invited by Mrs. Fuller, eventually met with her to discuss her interest in conserving the property, potential easement limitations, and the conservation process.

Motion by Young, second by Stephens to approve 7/12/23 public meeting minutes as amended. Unanimously approved.

2. **Bills & Reimbursements:** None.

3. **Business**

- a. Town Boundaries Update: Chairman Young reported that Epping is putting off this effort until fall. No other updates were reported.
- b. Tremallo Subdivision (Middle Road): Dunham reported that the property owner may wish to conserve some portion of that parcel. Details TBD.
- c. Great Bay Investment (RTE 125): Chairman Young advised that he had previously emailed the Commissioners this group's plans for developing the land next to Tractor Supply, and noted that the current plans may have zoning issues.
- d. Consultant: Chairman Young reported that two candidates had been interviewed for this role. Lipinski asked whether a written statement of work has been prepared for the intended services. Chairman Young stated one had not been, but should be. Dunham reported that one of the candidates acknowledged our town was not unique and it was common practice for towns to retain consultants to manage Conservation Commission work.

4. Prospective Conservation status/updates (non-public as needed under the law)

Webb Property RFPs: Chairman Young reported that we had received one response each to the Appraisal RFP and the Wetlands Assessment RFP, which we previously sent out to several service providers. The proposed price for the Appraisal proposal received is not to exceed \$8,800, and the proposed price for the Wetlands Assessment is \$9,329. Substantial discussion occurred regarding whether to proceed with conserving this property and if so, whether to accept the Appraisal and Wetlands Assessment proposals. Cowie questioned whether it was prudent to conserve this property since it is so wet it would not likely be developed in any case. Artimovich suggested that proceeding with conserving only the undevelopable 75 acres may be the approach to consider. Stephens advised that the owner may be willing to sell the property to the Town for \$1 million. Public comment was generally not in favor of expending the money for the proposed Appraisal and Wetlands Assessment. Upon motion by Stephens, second by Cowie, the Commission unanimously voted to defer further consideration of the property to the September meeting.

Swasey Property Walk: Chairman Young reported that he found the property to be quite attractive for conservation as a result of the recent property walk. Dunham concurred. They noted several factors favoring conservation. Motion by Cowie, second by Lipinski, to formally proceed with consideration of this property for conservation. The motion was unanimously approved, with Stephens abstaining.

Fuller Reconsideration: McNaughton expressed concern that some relevant data may not have been considered when the Commission previously voted to abandon further consideration of this property for conservation. She noted that the property was adjacent to other conservation property and if conserved, would favorably extend the conservation reach of the combined tracts. She also expressed concern that too much consideration may have been given to possible lack of public access and hunting on the property when the prior vote was taken. Lipinski raised economic considerations as being most relevant in his mind when the prior vote was taken. He related his understanding that SELT approached then-Chairman Stephens to express its plans to conserve this property, and to inquire whether the Town wished to participate in the conservation. Over several months of deliberation, the Commission was not able to get full clarity regarding the extent of participation SELT wanted from the Town. It was only after the Commission had the property appraised that SELT advised it wanted the Town to fund the full amount of the easement, which would exceed \$300,000. Public comment from town resident and SELT Board Member Rob Wofchuck highlighted SELT's interests proceeding with the Town to conserve this property, and how non-participation by the Town would only hurt the landowner. Other public comment express concern about conserving property where there would be no public access. Cowie stated that public access is not something we can insist on when conserving property as the landowner is under no obligation to give it. Stephens noted that none of the easement rights ultimately negotiated are being given; rather, we are purchasing those rights as part of the conservation transaction. Following additional discussion, McNaughton moved that the property be reconsidered for conservation upon SELT's providing a proposed conservation

budget at the Commission's next meeting. Cowie seconded and the motion was unanimously approved.

5. Other Business

Town residents Kim and David Saxton requested time on the September meeting agenda and Chairman Young advised them how to file that request online.

Artimovich informed the Commission of recent advice received by the Selectboard from the Town attorney that all property conservation discussions should be held in public session, except those related to financial issues.

Upon motion by Cowie, second by Artimovich, the meeting was adjourned at 8:25pm.