

Town of Pownal Conservation Commission (PCC) Meeting Minutes
Tuesday January 23 , 2024
6:30 pm, Mallett Hall

Members in attendance: Matt Welch, Dick Hogue, Kathy Elders, Janet Lynch, Bob Van Milligan and Wellens King (community member Marie Wendt arrived at 7:30).

Selectman Jon Morris arrived at the start of the meeting and asked permission to speak. He stated that he was there to communicate to the PCC that the Town Planner was at the selectboard meeting last night and suggested that the town consider getting valuations of all town-owned parcels. This recommendation was driven by the recent real estate requests involving the Elmwood Rd. and Poland Range Rd. woodlots. Dick voiced some surprise that the two parcels were being sought as he did not see them as being suitable for development. Matt referenced the 2020 Comprehensive Plan and that the PCC feels strongly about keeping the town-owned parcels undeveloped to help “preserve the rural character of the town”. Jon suggested that the PCC should publish its firm position on conserving town property.

Wellens asked Jon about the plan for browntail moth mitigation, specifically to clarify whether or not the PCC should move ahead with exploring mitigation strategies, including having an arborist come to the town to evaluate and give a proposal for spraying. Jon stated that we can move ahead as the town approved using state grant funding at last night’s meeting. He also reported that the 5th grade class at Pownal Elementary School will be working to put together educational materials on browntail moth to be presented to the town. Jon thanked everyone and excused himself.

Approval of minutes: The minutes were approved as written with minor spelling corrections.

Special Town Meeting, 1/22: The real estate request to purchase the Poland Range woodlot was rejected by the selectboard at last night's meeting. Matt reported that the PCC did submit an opinion on the request- which was that we do not favor the sale and/ or development of any town-owned property.

Bob mentioned that he talked to the town planner at last night’s meeting, as an abutter to a town-owned woodlot, about data that he has collected on bird species he has recorded independently. He suggested that, as the conservation commission, we might want to think about backing up our stance on conservation with data on wildlife present on the town parcels. It was mentioned that there might be opportunities in working with RRCT and the state - Dick mentioned “Citizen Scientist”, an amateur wildlife program

run by the state. Janet suggested that any future town-owned development be focused in the town center per the comprehensive plan, as a way to preserve wildlife habitat in other parts of the town. Janet also mentioned approaching Maine Audubon to see if there are any opportunities for exploring conservation there.

Old Business

Dick reported that he got word back regarding the Allen Farm on Rt 9, that the owners are exploring an easement with Maine Farmland Trust. He will follow up with any updates when they come available.

Conservation Easement with RRCT: Matt has been in communication with Alan Stearns about surveying the Sweetser road property. There was discussion about the cost of the survey, \$12,000 and whether or not we should proceed with the survey, accepting it as a “gift” from RRCT. Janet suggested that the abutters should be approached about a survey to see if they have an opinion about the matter. Bob made reference to a “quitclaim deed” on behalf of the abutter to avoid any future land disputes. Matt says that we need to come to a decision tonight about whether or not we will accept the survey offer from RRCT, as there is a looming deadline for applying for a grant to fund the survey. Janet raised the possibility of proposing that we offer to move ahead with an easement on the Elmwood Rd property this year, then perhaps moving ahead on the Sweetser Rd. lot when a survey is completed by the town. Matt moved that we contact Alan and politely decline for RRCT to pay for the survey of the Sweetser Rd. parcel, Dick seconded, all present were in favor. Janet will draft an email to Alan, stating our position. The question will be raised as to whether or not a survey is required to move forward with the easement on the Sweetser road property. Matt suggested that we put in a request at the next selectboard meeting (Feb 5) to get the Sweetser road parcel survey on the warrant for the Annual Town Meeting in June. The question was raised about other trusts that hold easements, Marie Wendt mentioned Maine Woodland Owners, Freeport Conservation Trust, and The Nature Conservancy.

Browntail Moth Mitigation: Wellens reported that she met with Becky, the town administrator, regarding moving ahead with a plan for using the state grant monies for browntail moth mitigation. Wellens stated that she is awaiting a call from Top Leaf Tree to set up an appointment for an evaluation of areas around the town hall and the larger cemeteries. Kathy asked if anyone has a drone to look out for nests. Matt shared a letter and photos referencing drone surveys, drone pruning and pruning via spider lift. It was suggested that we plan to hold a “Pruning Party” on March 2 (and perhaps on the 9th if demand is high). Becky will send out a blurb in the February Newsletter asking for citizens to submit requests for help with mitigation on their properties, and will compile a

list for the pruning days. Wellens will compose information to be published in the quarterly newsletter, and will also reach out to Kathy Hogue, member of the Recreation Committee, to see if they are interested in helping organize the pruning days.

The meeting was adjourned at 8:30pm. The next meeting is scheduled for February 27 at 6:30pm, Mallett Hall.

Minutes respectfully submitted by Wellens King.