

Pownal Conservation Commission Minutes, 26 March 2024

Members present:

Matt Welch, Dick Hogue, Bob Van Milligan, Kathy Elders, Janet Lynch

Others in attendance:

Kate Day (Select Board), Alan Stearns (RRCT), later on Jon Morris (Select Board)

Meeting commenced 6:35 pm

Matt moved to approve minutes from last meeting and they were unanimously approved.

New Business:

Conservation easement for Elmwood Road, Map 9, lot 43.

(to be held by Royal River Conservation Trust/ RRCT)

The town attorney reviewed the conservation easement and did not have any changes or edits and the Select Board (SB) discussed it at their Monday evening meeting on 3/25 (the day before).

At that meeting, the Select Board voted to put the Elmwood Road conservation easement on the warrant for the Town Meeting in June. The SB also approved a warrant item for \$15,000 to assess all town-owned lands, and the Pownal Conservation Commission's (PCC's) request for funds from open space impact fees to pay for a survey of the Sweetser Road property on the warrant for Town Meeting.

Attendees discussed that there may be a conflict between the article to assess all town-owned lands and the article for the Elmwood Road lot conservation easement.

Jon Morris came later to the meeting and said that he views the article regarding assessment of all town lands as a general assessment of all of the attributes of these lands - recreational, ecological, etc. Jon also reported that the town's attorney determined that the two articles (conservation easement and assessment of all town lands) are not compatible, and that only one of the two can be on the warrant at one time. Jon suggested that the town consider the conservation easement on its own merits at the 2024 Town Meeting and table the assessment article for a future meeting.

Matt moved that the PCC accept the conservation easement for the Elmwood Road woodlot, Map 9, Lot 43 without edits or changes, and that it be put on the warrant for Town Meeting in June. The PCC unanimously approved this motion.

Discussion continued regarding the PCC's official and long-standing role in overseeing, surveying and keeping track of town owned lands, including but not limited to recreational values, and values as habitat for wildlife, climate change mitigation, etc. Dick noted that land surveys are a prerequisite to taking any action on these lands. The PCC regularly monitors these areas, works on trails and other maintenance, and is responsible for ensuring that they are surveyed by a professional land surveyor (John Mann). It was agreed that the PCC should continue to monitor and steward town owned lands as it has been doing.

The Poland Range Road town-owned lots (Map 2, lots 30-32) were discussed as an area of particular ecological significance (rich in wetlands, vernal pools, and other wildlife habitat). Related to this, PCC member Bob van Milligan noted that he and his wife Mary have been monitoring Pownal Town Lots 30-32 on Poland Range Road over many years. Their report documents 113 species of birds, 27 species of mammals, 10 species of amphibians and 5 species of reptiles. The full list of species documented by the Van Milligans in the Poland Range Road lots is attached. Alan said that once we get the recently completed survey of the Poland Range Road lots, it is possible to create a more detailed map showing important ecological features for reference.

We also discussed the Maine Natural Areas Program (MNAP), within the Maine Department of Agriculture, Conservation and Forestry, to monitor and document attributes such as rare plant and animal species, natural communities, significant wildlife habitats, climate resiliency modelling, marsh migration opportunities, and/or forest condition information. This program is an additional helpful resource to help assess the ecological values of larger town-owned lands which are so important to Pownal residents.

For larger town-owned lands, the PCC should also consider drafting comprehensive management plans to include vernal pools and wetlands, wildlife habitat, trails, hunting, and other recreational activities, in addition to the forestry management plans for these lands which the PCC already maintains and regularly updates.

Attendees discussed the importance of building alliances across multiple constituencies in town to raise awareness and get the word out about the recreational and ecological importance of larger town-owned lands for all Pownal residents.

Matt suggested that the next town newsletter should have information about the conservation easement for the Elmwood Road lot in advance of Town Meeting.

Old Business:

Brown tailed moth

Wellens King has reached out to Matt Nielsen via email to see if he has been able to meet with Top Leaf Tree, but she hasn't heard back from him. She also received the name of a guy in Freeport who works to eradicate invasive species- and offered to reach out to him if the spraying option doesn't work out.

Earth Day

The PCC should meet Saturday, April 20th at 9:00 am at Poland Range Road lots to survey and monitor these areas.

Next PCC meeting:

Tuesday, April 23rd

Upcoming SB meetings: Mondays, 8 April and 22 April

Meeting adjourned, 7:44 pm

Respectfully submitted by Janet Lynch, whose word processing program froze in the middle of the meeting and who regrets for any resultant omissions.