

**Thornton Conservation Commission
Monthly Meeting
Tuesday, June 13, 2023 - 3:00 p.m. at
Thornton Town Hall**

Minutes

Present: Mike Boisvert, Katri Gurney, Al Lewis, Myrtle Lewis, Jerry Sobolewski

Myrtle Lewis called the meeting to order at 3:09 PM.

The minutes of the previous meeting were distributed electronically. A motion to accept the minutes of the May 9, 2023 meeting as presented passed unanimously, with 5 members present at the time of the vote.

1. Construction Project Updates

- Jerry Sobolewski attended the last Planning Board Meeting and shared that Owl's Nest is asking to make an amendment to the Town Ordinance by lowering the amount of acreage required to build a house; the current Ordinance stipulates one acre per house. Owl's Nest is tapped out on land and would like to build another 140 homes on the 100 acres on the adjacent "Pope Land" that was originally set aside for Owl's Nest to build the homes on their existing land. They are offering to purchase another 100 acres to offset the "Pope Land", donate money to build a library or something else to the Town's satisfaction.
- Myrtle Lewis is working on setting up a site visit of the Preserve. She has sent 4 emails without any luck setting up a site visit from the owners, Kevin and Debra Dorse. She met them at a Planning Board meeting and were receptive to providing the Thornton Conservation Commission [TCC] a site visit at that time. This is an 18-acre subdivision off Route 3 near Ham Farm Road. This will be a cluster development with 18 single family homes with shared common land. The developer has submitted an Alteration of Terrain application to the New Hampshire Department of Environmental Services.
- Myrtle Lewis asked if anyone on TCC can make the next Planning Board meeting.

2. Robin's Nest Improvement Project – Next Steps

- Myrtle Lewis followed up with Town Administrator, Desiree Mahurin, whether she has heard back, from legal counsel, regarding whether the Town of Thornton, has any legal liability with making improvements to Robin's Nest. She heard back from both the town's insurance company and outside counsel that there is liability despite there being a state statute for recreational immunity. The state statute for recreational immunity pertains to trails, not for making improvements for public recreation.
- Discussion ensued about the Board of Selectmen's reaction to this opinion and how this will further entrench their position not to get involved with this project.
- Myrtle Lewis shared an email she received from Joe Peznola. It was a response from Alan Hanscom from the Department of Transportation regarding Joe's latest engineering sketch/plan with making improvements to Robin's Nest. There are a lot of obstacles to overcome.
- Myrtle Lewis suggested bringing forward a Warrant Article to the Town for their approval to make improvements to Robin's Nest. This would require putting together a thorough plan to present and a campaign to educate the residents about the benefits. There could be groups of people in town who would be opposed so we would need to be prepared.
- Katri Gurney stated we could do something as simple as placing a porta pottie in the parking lot of the Town Offices, which is across the street from Robin's Nest, and putting signage for folks to use. This would help address our concern about overall sanitation and water quality in that area.

- Discussion ensued that this project is probably best left to Joe Peznola and the Economic Development Committee under these new circumstances. It appears the timing for this project may be sometime in the future. Perhaps it will be more apparent once a bandstand is built near the Town Offices, the public begins to attend events and the Town then begins to see the benefits of making improvements to nearby Robin's Nest.

3. Riverfront Property Presentation By NHDES

- At the "Introduction to Shoreland Presentation" there were 33 people; 22 from Thornton, 7 from Campton and 4 from Woodstock; 13 were lakefront/riverfront property owners and the rest were just interested in the subject matter. This was from who signed in, there were more than 33 people. TCC wanted to educate our residents, particularly those along the Pemigewasset River about what they can and cannot do (what requires a permit, etc.), before they violate DES rules.
- Rosemary Aures from the NH Department of Environmental Sciences gave the presentation. The content of the presentation was very good and catered to the public. The slides were very professional with excellent graphics. Rosemary was able to answer all the questions asked and encouraged the audience to contact her with site specific questions. There were also fact sheets and business cards available at the front of the room. It was held at the White Mountain National Forest Headquarters.
- TCC wished the presentation included protecting riparian zones since there was time to add this in. The presentation lasted about 30 minutes and could have gone longer; 45 minutes would have been better. Myrtle Lewis felt she needed to ask questions to make the presentation longer.
- Myrtle Lewis said she wished more people attended because TCC spent approximately \$56 per person to publicize the event. Perhaps we could use a more targeted approach to publicize these events and reduce costs. Myrtle Lewis asked TCC members to think about future topics that could be presented.

4. Thornton Natural Resources Inventory [NRI]

- Discussion ensued as to how the Natural Resources Inventory working document disappeared in TCC Google Drive. Mike Boisvert will unfortunately have to recreate it for any changes made after he uploaded to TCC Google Drive. Mike Boisvert will forward to Katri Gurney the most recent version for her to work on however it's probably best to forward any changes back to Mike for him to incorporate into the Master Document than using Google Drive after what happened. Al Lewis asked if there is some back up capability on Google Drive to retrieve the deleted document. Mike Boisvert is unaware but knows of someone who is quite knowledgeable of Google Drive and will ask.
- Myrtle Lewis shared that TCC will be partnering with the Geological Information System [GIS] Professor (Hyun Joong Kim) at Plymouth State University this fall. They should be able to do all the maps we need for the NRI and it will be finished by the end of the year. We will need to meet with the students in the fall and provide them a list of the maps/layers we want. Mike Boisvert would like to meet the students and we have \$1,000 to spend but could go higher. Since the NRI is part of the Master Plan, Mike Boisvert asked Al Lewis, who was on the Master Plan Committee if they had a budget. He said it was minimal. Mike Boisvert suggested that if we need to, add the NRI costs into TCC's budget for 2024.
- Mike Boisvert will work on the maps needed providing one from another town and asking students to duplicate it for Thornton. We will also request data they could extrapolate for TCC while they are creating the maps for our analysis. Mike will share his findings at next TCC meeting. TCC members will continue being responsible for their assigned sections and use the maps/data from the students to complete.

5. Thornton Night Out – August 1st

- Myrtle Lewis asked Katri Gurney if she could look into the Science Center providing a live animal show. The Town would pay for any fee.

- Myrtle Lewis suggested offering the Edible Aquifer presentation for the kids again but spend less money for supplies. Mike Boisvert felt the kids were more into having some ice cream than learning about aquifers the last time this was presented.
- Myrtle Lewis asked TCC members about a topic we could present at our table to encourage visitors to stop by and learn about conservation in our town.

6. Other Business

- Mike Boisvert shared that he completed the New Hampshire Association of Conservation Commissions “Wetlands Protection Series” that consisted of 7 programs. It was very informative with the last two programs being onsite in Concord. Mike shared some thoughts about how TCC could improve its review of Wetland Permits such as Town Administrator notifying Myrtle Lewis immediately if Wetland Permit requiring our review is needed since these are time sensitive. We could pre-approve someone on TCC to review/sign-off Wetland Permits on our behalf to meet DES deadlines. We could also periodically check the NHDES Wetlands Permit Query Tool in case TCC was accidentally not notified, and use a checklist to review Wetland Permits.
- Al Lewis suggested as part of TCC outreach efforts to offer the Town a guided hike. Peaked Hill Pond would be a good destination and perhaps offering in the Fall would be best. Will discuss further at the next TCC meeting regarding a date.
- Katri Gurney shared that there is a lot of Economic Development grant money available for outdoor recreational projects but they do require a one-to-one match.

7. Adjournment. The meeting was adjourned at approximately 4:54 pm. The next Commission meeting will be on Tuesday, July 11th at 3:00 pm.

Respectfully submitted,
Mike Boisvert, Thornton Conservation Committee Member