

Topsham Conservation Commission
Minutes
May 12, 2020
5:30pm
First Remote Meeting via Zoom
Minutes Approved 07-22-20 meeting

In attendance: Shana Stewart Deeds, Victor Langelo, Rod Melanson, Steve Pelletier, Raija Suomela

I. Approve minutes of March 10, 2020 meeting

Steve makes motion, Victor seconds. All unanimously in favor of passing March minutes as written.

II. Status of native plant sale(s)

There is no longer an ability to have an education component, and many are canceled, so TCC native plant sale activities are postponed until next year.

III. Review of vernal pools on Clearview Ln property - Town owned property

Some time in 2019 a neighboring property owner sent a letter to the Town Manager wondering about buying the property.

TCC planned to visit the forest wetland looking for evidence of frog and salamanders to assess the property's value as habitat. Victor went twice; Steve 3-4 times this Spring 2020. No one found any egg masses. They found it to be low lying, sandy soil, wooded wet areas and lots of mosquitoes - some deeper pools, but amphibians don't seem to be using it much; it is descent deer habitat. Not on the medium to high natural areas map. No further action needed at this time.

IV. 569 Middlesex subdivision review - info in our Subdivision Review

Discussion of the proposed subdivision ensued

Rod reported that on May 19 the staff review goes to Planning board, Tom is looking at surface water in review

Minor subdivision – 2 duplexes, 4 units proposed

Submission didn't talk about open space

Town usually asks for open space payment in lieu

Maine statute – impact fee has to have a tie in to what cost is lost by town

Recreation tallied on a user basis, open space is harder to pinpoint functions and values lost

Some acreage will be taken out of tree growth

Owner plans to build units along road. TCC is interested to assess owner's plan to put additional units or split lots further into the property towards the resource protection area closer toward the Muddy River.

This lower part of the property falls within a Topsham focus area, the habitat and connectivity between rivers in Town is important

Comment about word of mouth neighbor concern about the septic system being installed on ledge. We hope that the Planning board is paying attention to the septic requirements and permitting

TCC thinks open space and corridors/connection to the Muddy River is important, development could block access to open space, we hope viable access and habitat connectivity is considered that can also conform with the future plans of the landowner.

V. Update on solar zoning ordinance (draft on our google drive)

Discussion ensued

This ordinance is a positive step for conservation in the Town, because if development is proposed in high value areas in Natural Areas plan there will be a fee to pay for land disturbance – though the cost of replacement isn't close to what the fees are. Fair market value is higher than fees assessed. Other development doesn't have a mechanism for mitigation at this time - this would change that. The subdivision fees are based on units, this solar

fee is based on soil disturbance from development. The fee allows for remediation if development occurs in less desirable places, and encourages solar development in more desirable areas.

Rod reiterated that there are aesthetic and open space impacts from solar – this ordinance seeks to identify what the impacts are and how to mitigate them. TCC wants to disincentivize solar built on pristine, undeveloped blocks of habitat. We should stress the loss of recreation - hunting and hiking when discussing this ordinance and that the fee associated with it could remediate some of those impacts. The Planning board is suggesting that the ordinance stick with existing setbacks in this zone - 75' setback from front and 50' sides.

Steve wonders if Topsham should form a formally acknowledged solar committee.

Action – attend the May 19th Planning Board meeting. We need to sign up with Irene to get on the approved Zoom list.

VI. Other

Planning

Aroma Joe's application was resubmitted to the Planning board without many substantial changes.

Rod anticipates the Crooker rezoning discussion to open back up.

We are all going to invite Topsham people to join TCC Facebook page (Titled 'Topsham Conservation') and make a post.

Raija went to the Mallet Woods conservation easement property to remove Japanese knotweed. We still can't find the property pin. The signs are not up yet. Victor will indicate what pin is missing when he sends the map to Rod.

The paved road was accepted for the Somerset extension, Rod will request to record as a Town easement. It's a utility easement now – water line – so they can't build on it.

Motion to adjourn by Shana at 6:58, seconded, meeting ended when all were in favor at 6:59pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted for approval by Shana, Secretary.