

Readfield Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, July 14, 2020, Town Office

Present: Bruce Hunter, Jerry Bley, Greg Leimbach, Tim Sniffen, Andy Walsh, Stephanie Donaldson, Marty Hanish

Excused: Greg Durgin, Brent West, Bob Mohlar

RCC Meeting Minutes - A motion was made and unanimously approved by RCC members to accept the June 6, 2020 meeting minutes (Marty Hanish abstained).

New Business

Proposed Solar Array, Highland Ridge Farm – RCC discussed details of the proposed community solar array and concerns relative to existing conservation and scenic attributes of the project site based on review of documents provided to the Planning Board (PB). Jerry B. provided an overview of the project, which will impact approximately 19.5 acres of the 100+ acre property behind (southerly) the existing farm buildings. The project will have a lifespan of approximately 30 years. The PB review will determine whether the project is consistent with the Town's Comprehensive and Open Space Plans.

Concerns were raised regarding the project's potential effects on the scenic view from Rt. 17 and its potential impact on prime farmland soils that are currently in cultivation (cornfield). It was agreed that the solar panels will likely not block the southerly view from Rt. 17. Additional information should be sought concerning how the project will affect prime farmland soils. Other concerns included whether a chain link fence encircling the solar panels was necessary, since it may impact the quality of the southerly view more than the solar panels. Jerry B. suggested that a permanent scenic easement be required on the westerly portion of the property to protect the view toward Mount Washington and the White Mountains. The town or Kennebec Land Trust could potentially hold the easement. Marty H. suggested a resolution by RCC preventing prime farmland soils from being taken out of production.

RCC members agreed to offer recommendations to the PB to conserve important conservation and scenic elements of the property. Recommendations will address the following: potential loss of prime farmland soils; the proposed chain link security fence; management of the 19.5 acres as pollinator habitat, and the proposed permanent scenic easement.

Regional Conservation Commission Meeting/Cookout – RCC agreed to cancel the group meeting/cookout this year due to Covid-19. Bruce H. will email the other conservation commissions regarding the cancellation.

Old Fairgrounds Tree Planting – The Age Friendly Committee requested permission to plant a tree on the Fairgrounds property. RCC is okay with tree plantings but only in accordance with the Fairground Management Plan (1994). The fields will be mowed in the fall by Anna Carll. Greg L. asked whether the management plan has guidance for habitat enhancement. RCC members agreed to review the management plan. Tim S. will send a digital copy of the management plan. Andy W. will review the mowing section and make recommendations, if needed.

Old Business

Financial Report (July 1, 2020) – Tim S. did not receive a financial report for June. No substantive discussion.

Town Forest RFP – Based on Jerry B.'s discussion with Harold Burnett (town forester) regarding wood/chip prices from local lumber mills, contractors are skittish about bidding on stumpage until the markets settle down. Therefore, the RFP for the TF tree harvest has not been released for distribution. Jerry B. received a quote from Dan Pottle (contractor) for the road work for \$4,700. Additional costs for Pike delivering materials to the site (gravel) and equipment would bump the total cost of the project to over \$9,000. RCC allocated \$8,300 for the road repair. Jerry B. suggested a non-winter harvest so the road work can be combined with the tree harvest.

Outdoor Recreational and Conservation Areas Map – Brent W. sent the map edits to Art Grindle (Kennebec County Soil and Water Conservation District). Greg L. will trace the approximate route of the snowmobile trail on the map. Brent W. and Jerry B. will discuss the edits with Art Grindle.

Hunting Blind Draft – Previous comments from RCC members were incorporated into the draft hunting blind policy. Greg L. facilitated review of the draft policy with a local game warden who gave it a thumbs up. RCC members had some additional concerns regarding the draft policy. Marty H. recommended that shooting be away from established trails. Greg L. questioned how and who would enforce the policy. Would the game warden be notified of a violation? It was suggested that RCC could also make casual observations during the hunting season. Brent W. indicated that state regulations require that users register hunting blinds and tree stands with the property owner. The hunting blind policy should also note that all other pertinent state regulations apply to use of hunting blinds on the TF.

Jerry B. will discuss the proposed policy with Eric Dyer. Once approved, Jerry B. will submit the proposed hunting blind policy to the Selectboard for review and approval. It will then be submitted to the town clerk and posted at the Town Forest kiosk (?) with copies available at Town Hall. There will be no major implementation effort.

Town Conservation Properties

Old Fairgrounds Property – Bruce H. will talk to Anna Carll regarding the planned mowing frequency (this may be adjusted based on RCC's review of the management plan).

Town Forest – Jerry B. mentioned the new trail linking MacDonalds Woods with the Town Forest, which will allow hikers to avoid the seasonally wet and overgrown woods road.

The "You Are Here" signs located at trail intersections will need to be replaced (KLT?). Bruce H. also mentioned a sign to notify hikers of poison ivy on some trails.

Meeting adjourned at 8:10 p.m.

Submitted by Andy Walsh on August 9, 2020