

Approved as amended 3/30.22

Plainfield Conservation Commission
Minutes of Meeting Held February 23, 2022

Meeting was held in Town Hall. Commissioners present: Erik Burcroff, John Burns, Judy Ferber, Jack Nelson, Alice Schertle, Judith Williams (chair)

Also present: Walter Jennings, Highway Superintendent; Mark Stinson, Plainfield resident

Call to Order, Judith Williams, 6:35 p.m.
Minutes of 1-26-22 approved as amended.

57 Summit St. Property

There was a discussion of the property on Summit, which Jack reported has recently been sold. A question had arisen previously about a misleading real estate listing describing the property as non-jurisdictional. There is wetland on the property. Mark pointed out that the presence of a bank makes it jurisdictional. Jack has spoken to the purchaser, who said he has no immediate plans to build. Jack informed him that an RDA would be necessary before a building project could take place.

Eversource Right-of-Way Vegetation Maintenance Activities

Judith read from the basic notification document describing planned vegetation removal, extent of areas involved, and procedures to be used. Jack reminded the Commission that part of the trimming will be done on North Central.

Farmland of Local Importance

Judith described a contact with Al Averill, soil scientist with American Farmland Trust. He said the designation of land as FLI (Farmland of Local Importance) can be given to land with soil types suitable for crops but not otherwise recognized by USDA as prime farmland. An FLI designation could help ensure eligibility for certain funded programs for farm preservation. Al said local knowledge can help in identifying potential FLI land.

Forest Removal Article

Judith shared an article from the Hampshire Gazette describing the proposed removal in Shutesbury of up to 350 acres of forest, for solar arrays. Multiple parcels would be clear-cut for the installations. Mark said the original NOI was submitted 3 years ago and has resulted in much push-back. Emily Stockman has been involved in doing peer reviews.

Walter Jennings, Highway Superintendent

Walter gave a report on his contact with DOT regarding culvert flooding on 116. Walter brought a letter to DOT from the Plainfield ConCom describing the severe erosion undermining the road and requesting DOT engineering help. DOT responded that they couldn't be involved at this point and recommended we hire a professional consultant to assess the problem and estimate the cost of repair.

Walter said he has located the outlet and that water is coming through or around the culvert. He found multiple beaver dams and extensive areas of tangled underbrush and fallen trees with water flowing toward 8A and Hawley. He feels the culvert will have to be replaced at great cost. He has applied for a One-Stop Grant in which 5 projects are included, with the 116 project as number 1. He said that none of the projects has a guarantee of acceptance.

Jack said that culvert replacement grants are now available. Walter said he has applied, including for a Prospect St. project, and will continue to apply, as allowed, for one a week. Walter feels we should hire a consultant to come up with a “plan of attack” to address the culvert problems. Mark said he would be involved in the process and will send suggestions to Walter.

Road Salt

Judith reported that resident concern about road salt being overused and potentially seeping into streams has been brought to our attention. Walter said nothing has changed since he became Highway Superintendent regarding the amount of salt used on our roads. He said there have been more ice storms this year, requiring more applications. For the third winter we are using unmixed salt rather than salt mixed with sand. The salt/sand mixture was found to be less environmentally friendly as it resulted in large pile-ups of the sand mixture. He said beet-based road applications were being developed which show promise.

Judy F. asked if studies have shown whether road salt has contaminated streams and wells. John said many such general studies exist though not studies particular to Plainfield. Judith said we will seek some information and articles on the subject and that the Agriculture Committee and Board of Health might be interested in similar research.

Mark left the meeting at 7:15.

Walter left the meeting at 7:30.

Staffing Update

Judith reported that Mary Grover will be our DEP contact. She cannot attend a Commission meeting at this time but will be available to answer questions, at 413-755-2154. Judith said we will invite her to join us at a meeting when her schedule permits in the future.

Alden Lane Property

Judith read a letter from Roxanne Finn, owner of property at 15 Alden Lane, who states she has concluded “some site analysis and initial design” for work and asks if the ConCom would like to review it. She also asks about renewal of a previous Determination. She further states that a parcel across the street from her property has sold and asks if requests have been received regarding building or other activity on that parcel.

Forest Cutting Plan

Judith gave Judy F. a multi-page Forest Cutting Plan to review, for South Central property owned by Alan Page. We have reviewed several Page property cutting plans in the past, including in January 2020.

Chapter 61, WPA Material

Jack shared a pamphlet, from the Mount Grace Land Trust, titled *Conservation Land Use Planning with MA Chapter 61 Laws*. The pamphlet explains the acreage requirements, tax reduction benefits, etc. of land in Chap. 61. Jack noted that the town's right of first refusal when such land is to be sold or the use changes could be passed on to a land trust.

Jack also shared a pamphlet he considered useful, titled *You and the MA Wetlands Protection Act* by Ivon Schmukler.

Judith recommended a Holly Ryan video introducing the WPA. She felt it would be useful for residents and people who are considering a property purchase.

Local Bylaw

Jack gave information on the proposed bylaw to a resident who expressed concern about over-regulation of wetlands. Jack provided Commissioners with copies of the information sheet he put together to answer such concerns. The sheet summarizes the proposed bylaw and its purposes, and compares it with existing regulation under the WPA. It gives specific definitions to counter, for example, the claim that streams are merely runoff. Mark has read the draft bylaw and offered suggestions. Jack said we need to discuss and refine the bylaw summary.

We need to plan a town informational meeting and we'll try to get the bylaw on the docket for Town Meeting in early May. The Conway School has maps that may be useful in a presentation. John offered to get together with Jack to review Jack's Power Point and to create maps and charts as appropriate.

Conway School Project

Erik reported on the Conway School Climate Resiliency Plan project. He represents the ConCom on the Core Team from the Joint Boards. The team has provided the Conway students with information on Plainfield needs and concerns that will be incorporated into the plan. Erik said the final Conway project will be available in late March.

The next regularly scheduled Conservation Commission meeting will be held in Town Hall on 3-30-22 at 6:30 p.m.

Adjourned, 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Alice Schertle

