

Lebanon Conservation Commission
Regular Meeting, 4/5/10
Minutes

Call to order, 4:30 p.m.

Members present: Keith Laporte, Marc Lang, David Scata, Jan Fitter, Jon Slate, Emery Gluck, Toni Willard (c. 4:35)

Member absent: Alton Blodgett, Howard Wayland

Also present: Town Planner Phil Chester (arrived at 4:42)

Jon Slate was appointed acting alternate (Toni had not arrived yet).

Motion to approve minutes of 3/8/10 regular meeting with correction of the date to 3/8/10; seconded and passed unanimously.

No audience present.

David Scata was not present when reappointments were discussed. He confirmed his continuing interest in serving on the commission. Andrew Holley of Burnham Road has inquired about serving, and there was consensus that he is a good choice for filling any future vacancy.

Phil distributed 2010 POCD Natural Resources Implementation Table.

A neighbor of the Rechlins told Phil that Mr. Rechlin said he plans to move a stone wall within the easement area. This is only hearsay. Consensus that moving (as opposed to removing) a wall would not violate the spirit of the easement and would receive pro forma approval, but it is important that the Rechlins inform us of any such activity for the sake of precedent regarding future easement management.

Discussion of setting policy for conservation easements. The commission will conduct annual site walks on town-held easements of significant size or natural resource value. These will be scheduled in the fall of each year. Which easements to be inspected will be decided and the landowners informed. Smaller subdivision-donation easements will not be inspected unless a request is made about a specific case. The commission needs to establish additional guidelines for managing easements and communicating with owners.

The Board of Finance retained \$20,000 for the open space account in the capital budget [[budget hearing is April 12]].

Eastern CT RC&D annual meeting, lunch, and river cruise is June 21, \$20.

Discussion of Community Supported Agriculture grant application (\$1000) and ag. writing contest (prizes of \$100, \$50, 425). Both have been advertised. Money is from the Ag. Grant. ConsCom will review CSA grant applications at next meeting, writing submissions at the meeting after that.

Litter trash bags are available in the Selectmen's office, and Joyce will cover roadside pick-up. Earth Day activities have been advertised.

Commons Hill Trail: Cedar posts have been donated, and Jon Slate will donate a gate. Charlie Hinkley will make a nice sign for cost. A sign is also needed for the other end of Schalk Road to alert that the opposite end is gated. Information and alerts also need to be posted (color of blazes, no motorized vehicles, hunting allowed, etc.), and possibly a box with maps or trail descriptions. Tentative work date: Sat. April 24; Marc will call.

Outreach efforts: In addition to ag. writing contest, discussion of town-wide mailing (around Nov. 1?) to promote/explain open space fund and efforts. Discussion of holding a forum – a lot of work; would attendance be any good? Paula Stahl is doing further work on tax impacts, etc.

Motion to adjourn at 6:05pm, seconded and passed unanimously.

Respectfully submitted,
Jan Fitter, Sec'y

March 1, 2010

To: Lebanon Board of Finance

From: Lebanon Conservation Commission

The Conservation Commission recommends that the Town make the full contribution of \$100,000 to the Town Open Space Account for fiscal 2010, per the established long-term Capital Plan and the 2000 Plan of Conservation and Development (to also be recommended in the pending Plan update). We make this recommendation for the following reasons:

- An allocation to this account is not an expenditure but an investment.
- Open space in Lebanon requires about \$.17 on the tax dollar for services; residential properties require about \$1.12 (CCS, 2007).
- Investment in the Open Space Fund will return benefits by helping to control the need for other capital and operating expenses.
- It will help control increases in property taxes.
- It will help preserve Lebanon's character as a good and unique place to live.
- 93% of Lebanon's residents believe that preserving open space and farmland in town is important; 77% believe that the Town should fund preservation efforts (Land Conservation Survey, 20008).
- The need for open space funds is subject to unpredictable conditions, and when need arises, it can't be put off until better times. If a parcel important to the Town goes for development it is gone forever, and the Town must absorb service costs.
- There are over 10,000 acres of unprotected land in Lebanon. Owners representing more than 1,000 acres have been in touch expressing interest in preserving their land.
- Outlays to assist in preservation have been steady. With projected commitments, the Open Space Fund could be under \$50,000 by the end of 2010.
- The only way an open space fund can effectively protect the Town is for it to be built up. The planned contribution to this account that began only three years ago has been reduced for two years in a row. The fund is shrinking.
- It took several years and much effort to establish the Town's commitment to maintaining an Open Space Fund. Another year of reduced funding will further undermine that commitment and handcuff the Town in future land protection efforts.

Realizing that the Board of Finance has requested flat budgets for this fiscal year, we do not make this request lightly. It reflects the special nature of an open space fund and the potentially high return on the open space dollar.