

Cornwall Conservation Commission

June 25, 2015 meeting

Present – Mary Dodge (MD), Brian Howlett (BH), Bethany Barry (BB), Rene Langis (RL), Michael Sheridan (MS)

Busy elsewhere – Marc Cesario (MC) and Marc Lapin (ML)

- 1) Inventory Final Report and 2nd Public Forum feedback
 - a. As part of the process for the Municipal Planning Grant that helped to fund the inventory, the town is asked to evaluate the project. Overall we (and, we think, the town) are very pleased with how it turned out. Cornwall's new-found but enduring fascination with limestone promises to bring the town fame for centuries, if not millennia. The only issue we had with the second public forum in April was that sometimes it was hard to hear Brett's presentation and see the maps and other information projected onto the screen. Next time we'll be sure to have a microphone and sound system in place.
 - b. The one bit of business that remains is to get the GIS layers from Brett Engstrom, to be posted online so that they become publicly accessible. Marc Lapin will follow up with Brett to get these, and may consult with Kevin Behm from the Addison County Regional Planning Commission on this process.

- 2) Guided tours to inventory sites

Mary Dodge's successful application for a small grant from the Association of Vermont Conservation Commissions means that we will be organizing two or three guided tours of important sites described and evaluated in the inventory. Marc Lapin and Brett Engstrom will co-lead these, depending on dates and availability. We discussed where the first guided tour would be, and concluded that the best site would be the Ledges. We need to

 - i. Check with Brett and Marc and dates and times
 - ii. Contact the relevant landowners for permission
 - iii. Decide how to publicize the tour. MS will contact the Cornwall Elementary School teachers who want to build a science curriculum using the Inventory (Emily Hoyler and Mindy Harvey) to see if the 3rd and 4th grades would like a guided tour in late September 2015.

We want to explore the possibility of doing two guided walks during Brett's September visit: a school tour on Friday PM and a second walk for town residents the following morning.

- 3) CCC activities for the next year
 - a) Assist in the update of the town's Zoning Regulations.

We will share information from the Inventory including the state-significant site map which shows conservation-sensitive areas of the town to assist the

Planning Commission's work. We will also investigate and write a list of best conservation practices to help the PC to write zoning regulations that can, for example, determine the setback requirements for rivers, streams, and swamp areas. BB and ML will coordinate this process of building the feedback process between the PC and the CCC on issues such as proposed subdivisions. This will involve finding out what other towns with conservation commissions have done to establish best practices and to build effective relations between conservation and planning commissions.

b) Review of subdivision applications

ML will continue to review and advise the PC on subdivision applications, with the participation of other Commission members as needed.

c) Water quality and flood hazard abatement

Now that we have reports about water quality and stream health in Cornwall, we want to work to increase vegetative buffers along streams and in frequently flooded soils. MC, RL, and BH will work on this. This will involve investigating if there are funding sources that would help town landowners restore or create buffer zones. Our next steps include

- i. building a list of sites from the Inventory and Amy Sheldon's report in collaboration with Select Board member John Roberts
- ii. confirming their conservation status and prioritizing them
- iii. connecting landowners with funding sources

d) Sharing information from the inventory with landowners

Now that we have a lot of information, what do we do with it? Other than posting the report on the town website for everyone's access, we want to give individual landowners the information about what they have on their land. Ideally we'd like to visit the important conservation sites with landowners to show them exactly what makes their land special, but this will take a lot of coordination and interest. To build that public support, we will prepare letters to landowners describing these conservation sites. The idea is that each person who owns a piece of a significant conservation site (as determined in the Inventory) will get a letter addressed to all of the landowners of the site with the relevant extract from the Inventory. The letter will close by inviting the landowners to get together with us for a community event, such as a coffee-and-cake discussion of the site and how to appreciate it and use it. MD and BH will lead this effort.

e) Outreach program

We are interested in working with the Cornwall elementary school to get Cornwall kids learning from the town landscape. MS will work with the school to build this relationship. The outcomes will probably include field trips to sites with state-significant features, and perhaps getting the kids to do research, such as documenting wildlife movement between forest blocks and landscape districts. We may work with the Audubon Society to build this

outreach program because they have a program that could help fund this. One idea that we discussed is sand tracking (use of sand beds along wildlife migration corridors to observe and record animal tracks). The idea is that the schoolkids could smooth the sand and return a week later to record what tracks had been left in the sand. We can also imagine students learning from wildlife cameras set up in the woods. MS, MD, and BH will lead these efforts.

- f) Assist the PC in its effort to create a Conservation Fund
RL will look into what other conservation commissions do for ongoing funding.
- g) Town newsletter – RL will write a short piece for the July newsletter. MS to write for the October newsletter.
- h) Ideas for future discussion and action
 - i. Work toward the creation of a town forest for Cornwall:
Community Forest Grants (US Forest Service) and the Town Forest Stewardship
 - ii. Douglas Pond restoration to swimmable status

Next meeting: Thursday August 6, 1 pm at Town Hall.

Respectfully submitted (and thinking about limestone),
Michael Sheridan