

Cornwall Conservation Commission meeting, 11/12/15
Cornwall VT Town Hall

Members present: Brian Howlett (BH), Rene Langis (RL), Marc Lapin (ML), Mary Dodge (MD), Bethany Barry (BB), Marc Cesario (MC), Mike Sheridan (MS)

Minutes written by Mike Sheridan

Minutes from October meeting approved, along with all CCC minutes

New business:

- 1) River Watch: we started by discussing RL's work to get Cornwall to provide some funding to the Addison County River Watch Collaborative. River Watch is a NGO that gets volunteers to collect water samples for lab analysis to evaluate water quality. Cornwall's contribution would be \$500 (which RL thinks mostly pays for the lab work, postage, etc.), which we plan to request at Town Meeting in March 2016. Will this be a separate motion or a line item on the list of charities and social services NGOs on the Town Meeting budget vote? Listing this request for \$500 as a separate motion would mean informing the Select board, while putting into the budget as a line item request requires at least 45 signatures on a petition to the Selectboard (45 signatures = 5% of the town's eligible voters). RL distributed blank petitions to Commission members for us to use for collecting signatures.
- 2) Conservation Fund proposal. RL and MD have been working with PC's Dave Anderson on this. There are, in effect, already two conservation-related funds in the town. The first consists of \$20 left in an account from our work getting the town biodiversity inventory done. The second is a trust fund known as the "Peet Fund" that was donated to the town for the purpose of "beautification and protection of Cornwall's natural resources." The Trustees for Public Funds are checking on the conditions of the trust in order to inform the Commission about what sorts of projects would be appropriate for funding. A Conservation Fund was proposed in the Town Plan and the CCC and PC are working with the Select Board to clarify and define the purposes and funding of such a Fund. To demonstrate the potential value of a Fund to the town, the CC discussed several immediate, specific, and relatively small projects. Our ideas include:
 - a. Wildlife movement. Install wildlife cameras, sand tracking boxes, etc. at key wildlife corridors around the town. Ideally the Cornwall School would be involved to help set it up, collect data, and evaluate the results, thereby providing a direct educational benefit. The Cornwall teachers are interested in this way of developing their science curriculum. The data could inform land use planning and road signage. RL will investigate how much this would cost to get started.
 - b. Douglas Pond. We discussed various strategies to make Douglas Pond a recreational destination for the town. We could, for example, work to remove invasive species. The key challenge is that the pond has silted up over the years of disuse, and cattails have filled it up. Removal of the cattails would create an ice skating area. A hiking trail or boardwalk could form a recreational area, but then we'd need to consider the establishment of a parking area. What the pond really needs as a conservation area would involve dredging, as explained in Amy Sheldon's 2014 report to the CCC. We are not sure how much of a priority the area is in terms of biodiversity conservation, so any Douglas Pond project would require more discussion and collaboration with other parts of the town government.

- c. Hiking trails guide. Cornwall has some great places to observe nature or just walk in the woods, but none of them are signposted, labeled, and mapped so that townspeople could know that they are accessible. Although some of these areas are public, the CCC could also ask landowners if they would allow recreational hiking and dog-walking on their land, produce a brochure and map, and post signage at trailheads.
 - d. More guided tours in Cornwall's wild spaces. We agreed that having a naturalist leading a group hike, such as the hikes in Sept. 2015 with Brett Engstrom and ML, is more effective (and fun) than trips led by non-experts ("That's a rock. That's a tree. This is mud"). This would require funding for the naturalists' time and transportation costs. The Cornwall School teachers are very interested in repeating the Sept. 2015 field trip for their fall 2016 science curriculum, but we would need funding.
 - e. Establish a Town Forest. This would be a major financial effort, and would require a lot of planning. BB will look into how this might work.
- 3) Connectivity zoning. ML is discussing zoning regulations with Jens Hilke from the VT Fish and Wildlife division, and Jamie Fidell from NRC about recommended agricultural setbacks from stream and river margins and protection of viewsheds. We are developing these recommendations in order to advise the Planning Commission on how they can do conservation-related zoning.
 - 4) Water quality. CCC members met with John Roberts, the state official responsible for small farm-related water quality issues, in June 2015. There is now a shift going at the state level to formalize 'accepted agricultural practices' into 'required agricultural practices'. There isn't much for the CCC to do on this, other than to provide advice as requested by townspeople. BH suggested the best role for the CCC would be to advise on wildlife corridors instead of water resources regulation, because many wildlife corridors are also waterways. There is a VT Watershed Grant application due Nov. 20 (soon!), and BB will inquire with the Addison County Regional Planning Commission for how these grants operate.
 - 5) Educational outreach. The Cornwall School teachers were delighted to have the CCC organize naturalist-led hikes in September 2015 and they want to do it again every year. They are interested in developing more science curriculum involving wildlife monitoring (see #2a above), but MS reported that they are unlikely to take the lead on this because they are already very very busy. MS will continue to coordinate with the teachers to help them build CCC projects that benefit the school.
 - 6) Letters to landowners. MD reports that she has sent out about 75% of the letters to Cornwall landowners with significant ecological features. Each of these contains specific ecological information about their particular property, so MD has been doing a heroic job doing this public outreach. Several property owners have responded with thanks and expressions of interest in further engagement with CCC activities.
 - 7) Subdivisions. Nothing to report. ML working to print maps from the Biodiversity Inventory to create an archive of maps at Town Hall for use in land use planning by town citizens and the Planning Commission.
 - 8) Inventory shapefiles – are they completed? What the heck is a 'shapefile' anyway? ML reported that shapefiles are information-bearing labeled polygons on maps in the ARC-GIS program. Brett Engstrom produced shapefiles of ecological areas for the Inventory. There cannot be public access to these shapefiles because they only work within the ARC-GIS program, which requires specialized training to use. Instead ML will print maps for the Town Hall's archive of maps (#7 above) for public use.
 - 9) CCC reports for the town newsletter – BB will write something for the December newsletter, while RL will work on the March 2016 newsletter. Will the March newsletter

come out before or after Town Meeting? If before, RL will write about the CCC-related issues to be discussed at the meeting, if after, he will write about the results of the meeting.

10) Next meeting

Thurs. Dec. 17, 12 noon in Cornwall Town Hall. Donations of Belgian dark chocolate will be cheerfully accepted to help incentivize the Commissioners.