

Cornwall Conservation Commission Meeting
Wednesday, May 22, 2019
12:30 pm, Cornwall Town Hall

CC members: Bethany Barry (BB), Mary Dodge (MD), Brian Howlett (BH), Michael Sheridan (MS), Katherine Branch (KB), Rene Langis (RL)

Recording Secretary: Katherine Branch

Blueberry muffins, baked and brought by Mary—thanks!

Updates:

1. Amphibian Walk May 19th with herpetologist Jim Andrews in the woods between West Street and North Bingham. Over 30 people attended, very successful. Mix of ages, including 5 children, 4 months being the youngest!
2. Robarts DRB Hearing on May 1st. Meeting room was full and attendees expressed strong concerns. RL presented the Conservation Commission's review of the application: the proposed location of its large parking lot and the environmental impact of a party facility would disrupt a critical wildlife travel route between two large forest blocks on either side of Parkhill Road. DRB members did not respond specifically to his presentation during the meeting. Next DRB hearing will be continued on August 1st.
3. Cornwall Town Plan Update. To bring the current Town Plan into compliance, the CPC is planning to add two new sections addressing forest fragmentation and flood resilience. MD contacted Connor Stinson, the CPC chair, to offer the CC's support. Currently CPC looking at how other towns have addressed these topics. Their next CPC meeting is Wednesday, June 19th and they have invited the CC to attend. MD cannot attend but BB will attend and BH hopes to be able to attend. **(Date change here: the PC is scheduling this discussion for their July 17th meeting.)** Josh Stearns, a new CPC member, approached BH about this topic but they haven't had a chance to meet yet. BH said he hopes to talk with him in near future. In keeping with the PC's interest in forest fragmentation, MD mentioned to Connor that a webinar on ACT 171 will be offered on Friday, May 31st, noon-1:30 pm and offered the possibility that a CPC + CC member could watch it together.

4. Zoning Bylaws Draft. The Draft is currently being reviewed by the SB, who have scheduled a public hearing for Thursday, June 27th at Town Hall. In preparation, SB divided the draft into sections and Ben Wood was assigned the Significant Features Overlays. Ben contacted MD and Marc Lapin and both met with him; MD met to review how the ecological information was gathered and presented in the 2015 Cornwall Ecological Inventory and Marc to expand on this and to share about how the Overlay maps were created. In the current draft, the Ecologically Significant Features Overlay no longer applies to minor subdivisions, only major subdivisions & PUDs. Most development in Cornwall is the result of minor subdivisions and this change removes protections in these applications for important forest and wildlife habitat. Over time, the cumulative effect would be the serious degrading the town's network of important natural areas. The ecological SFO map is currently a part of the Bylaws Draft and the CC will still be able to reference it in their review of minor subdivisions. BH suggested that it is important for the CC to have a close connection with the CPC. This could be facilitated by a member of CC attending the regular and special CPC meetings. One option might be to rotate attendance at the meetings, so that all members would be familiar with the work of the CPC, and would also form contacts with CPC members.

5. Otter Creek Wetlands Reclassification Project. In April, RL & MD attended the SB meeting and described the CC's work on an application to the State to reclassify the Otter Creek Wetlands Complex as a Class I Wetland. In early May, Zapata Courage from DEC also gave a presentation to SB and addressed questions that had been raised at the April SB meeting. The CC is one of several towns working on this. MD reported on the May 20th Steering Committee meeting with representatives from Salisbury, Middlebury, TNC (The Nature Conservancy), and a SB rep from Brandon. The timetable for completing the application is as follows. Before the TNC Americorps staff member leaves at the end of the summer, he will have completed the joint application, with the exception of designating the boundaries of the application wetlands in each town. These will be determined on a town-by-town basis with input from with property owners and abutters. MD shared a draft of a letter to property owners with land in or abutting the Swamp describing the project and inviting them to a public meeting on Tuesday, June 25th. Once finalized by the Steering Committee, It will be sent out to Cornwall landowners accompanied by an Info Sheet with FAQs by June 11th, allowing

about two weeks before the Cornwall meeting. MD passed out the letter for CC members to review and provide comments to her. MD will clarify the role of Cornwall SB in the application process.

6. MALT Meeting. Scheduled for May 23rd to discuss coordination and mutual interests. KB and MD will be meeting with Jamie Montague, MALT executive director.

Discussion Items

1. Summer/Fall/Winter Outreach. Last year Steve Trombulak gave a presentation on wildlife connectivity and the CC sponsored the presentations on Cornwall amphibians by Jim Andrews and Amphibian Road Rescue by Zac Cota. Ideas for 2019-2020 include: BH's idea of Sonia Howlett giving a May/June 2020 grassland bird field trip. Two-part as a possibility, presentation first then field trip. Another possibility of a swamp walk in the fall 2019, especially given the Swamp Reclassification project. Third possibility would be a walk in the varied lands surrounding Cornwall Orchards B&B. There is a headwater of Beaver Brook from, spring-fed marsh uplands on one side, a pond and beaver dam. Date would be late October or early November. Lise Anderson, owner of Cornwall Orchards B&B, would be willing to co-lead, maybe with Craig Zondag—KB will contact Lise to coordinate. MD is also discussing a possible tracking workshop with Monica.
2. Conservation Fund. The current Town Plan for Cornwall proposes the town create such a fund. In 2015 members of the CC and PC approached the SB, presenting information about its purposes and how such monies are being used in other VT towns. The SB voted to establish a Cornwall Conservation Fund, but limited Town contributions to a project by project application with any expenditure excess of \$500 being voted on at Town Meeting. If the CC wanted to return to this discussion with the goal of having a new proposal on the ballot for the March 2020 Town Meeting, MD suggested planning should start now. CC members present discussed and concluded that because of all of the other important business, this will be delayed, certainly to the end of the summer or possibly until 2021.

New Business

1. The Cornwall Recreation Committee has expressed interest in collaborating with Conservation Commission. The CC welcomes this collaboration. MD will be in contact with Annie Wilson, the Recreation Committee Chair.
2. Allen Karnatz contacted MD re VLT Easement on 125 acres of former Bingham property and asked for input about whether a trail in the easement, possibly along Beaver Brook, would be advisable in this ecologically sensitive site. After some discussion, CC members asked to know more about what was being considered there—this information would help it make a better-informed judgement. In addition, it could be difficult to locate a parking area for the trailhead. The Cornwall Ecological Inventory might provide some guidance on this decision, since the Bingham Woods are discussed on pages 38-41. MD will talk with MC, who is scheduled to be the buyer of this property about his perspective, before responding to Karnatz's inquiry.

Date for Next Meeting. Members present decided not to have a June meeting, due to the many other meetings already scheduled. Tentative July meeting: **Wednesday July 17, 12:30-2:00.** Food KB.

List of upcoming meetings and events:

Friday, May 31st: Webinar on forest fragmentation

Wednesday, June 19th: Planning Commission (CPC), flood resiliency on tentative agenda. BB will attend & possibly BH

Tuesday, June 25th: Cornwall Swamp Reclassification Public Meeting

Thursday, June 27. Select Board Public Meeting on Zoning Bylaws. BH will try to attend; MD will send out email closer to date to determine who can definitely attend

Wednesday, July 17th: CPC Meeting. Forest fragmentation discussion is on tentative agenda.

Thursday, August 1. Continuation of DRB hearing on Robarts proposal

Late October or early November. Nature walk on Cornwall Orchards property

Newsletter: October '18 (September: BB), January '19 (December: RL), April '19
(March: MS), **July '19 (June: MC)**