

4/17/2018 - Minutes

1. Public Hearings, Public Meetings & Appointments

- A. 7:00 PM - Appointment/Informal Discussion Re: Squan-A-Tissit Chapter Of Trout Unlimited Presentation Proposing To Restore Stream Continuity On Sucker Brook By Replacing The Culvert On The Dirt Access Road And Removing The Stone Dam At Keyes Parker Conservation Areas And Replacing/Restoring The Sucker Brook Culvert On Brookline Street.

The local chapter of Trout Unlimited (TU), who focus on the Nissitissit and Squannacook Rivers, presented their proposal. The project would focus on stream continuity. The proposal would include the removal of the stone dam and replacement of the culvert under the dirt access road on Sucker Brook at Keyes Parker Conservation Areas. In addition, the project would include the possible retrofit with a porous weir (per TU Chapter engineer) or replacement of the Sucker Brook culvert on Brookline Street. The Sucker Brook Brookline Street culvert is the first impediment for fish and wildlife from the Nissitissit River. TU would need approval from the Conservation Commission to go ahead with their proposal. Per Armstrong, they have some funding and they would like to spend these funds in Pepperell. Surveys completed by TU and DFW identify brook trout, rare blandings and wood turtles, and rare mussels (brook floaters and pearlshell) in the project area. Recent research has identified that brook trout have been found to be a host fish for the rare brook floater mussels. Sucker Brook is a coldwater fishery, with the lower water temperatures needed for both brook trout and brook floaters to live. The impoundment traps sediment and as a south facing wetland, adds to increased water temperatures. Alex Hackman with Department of Fish and Game, Division of Ecological Restoration, attended the meeting. Hackman explained the engineering process for insuring there would be no impacts to infrastructure upstream or downstream, if the dam were removed. Hackman also referred to photos showing the downstream stretch of the river as sediment deficient, which would be restored if sediment is released during the dam removal. Dam removal would improve water quality once the impoundment is gone. If the project were selected as a priority project under an upcoming DER grant, DER would provide assistance with the project, as they did with the Turner Dam. There would be sediment testing, upstream and downstream, but DER would advocate for sediment release, unless the sediment results show contaminants that should not be released. They test for heavy metals, pesticides, and petroleum products.

Hackman said a 2011 Site Reconnaissance Study had been completed to evaluate the feasibility of removing the dam. To move forward with the proposal and to invest public resources, there has to be some interest from the owner to remove the dam.

Elliott had a recent discussion with Carrie Banks/DER who had evaluated the Brookline Street culvert around the obstacles this culvert poses to wildlife movement and Banks felt the culvert would not be suitable for retrofit. The inlet is raised due to the presence of a water main under the culvert and constricted, resulting in only about a ½" of water flowing through the culvert in the summer. The stream is 24' wide but the culvert is only 4' X 8' (about 1/3 of a bank width). These issues would need to be addressed with the replacement culvert. There is a five-year moratorium on digging up newly paved roads and the road was paved about two years ago. This would be an expensive culvert to replace. Hackman said this is a watershed approach to addressing stream continuity with the Brookline Street culvert being part of the process.

Peter Hazelton with MassWildlife and Aquatic Ecologist with Natural Heritage and Endangered Species Program, involved with fisheries and mussels, was present. Hazelton agreed the Brookline Street culvert is an obstacle to be dealt with, but also explained benefits of connecting the brook trout population above the dam with the brook trout population below the dam. Removing the dam will expand habitat for the brook trout, allowing the brook trout to move through the culvert to the Nissitissit River and to other tributaries. Hazelton said with the presence of as little as 3" of water in the culvert, brook trout can make their way to the river. NHESP and DER are very interested in working on this project as part of their ongoing efforts to enhance stream continuity in the Nissitissit River watershed. Hazelton said in marsh areas, which most of the brook flows through, much of the water is in the soils, flowing under the plants, so the marsh has the ability to retain cold water.

The project is estimated to take approximately two years. The project would begin with sediment testing. TU has \$40,000, to begin the process and they would pursue grants, if necessary. Hazelton

said there are other sources of funding, specifically the DFW Habitat Improvement Grant, which may rank highly as a habitat improvement for a coldwater fishery. The rarity of several mussel species is being studied by Hazelton as part of a five-state project with UMass Amherst. Preliminary data collection toward design would identify if the sediment is too polluted to be released. There are populations of native reproducing brook trout in Sucker Brook.

On a motion by Rand, seconded by Masterson, with all, except Elliott, voting in favor, the Commission gives approval for Trout Unlimited to begin their study to determine if the dam can be removed. Rand stated even though this is an Informal Discussion, it is appropriate that we should provide an answer to these funders to begin the process.

Even though the abutters were notified for the Informal Discussion, Rice requested a full public notification of a public meeting before the Commission provides full approval to remove the dam. TU will return at a future public meeting with the results of the sediment sampling.

Hackman said the town, as the dam owner, needs to voice some level of approval before funding and resources are made available, which was just provided by the vote.

On a motion by Rand, seconded by Masterson, Rand's earlier motion was rescinded for Masterson to provide a new motion to add clarification to Rand's earlier motion.

On a motion by Masterson, seconded by Rand, with all, except Elliott, voting in favor, the Commission gives approval for the proposed Trout Unlimited project, as it stands, for dam removal, preliminary design, access road culvert replacement, associated data collection, and preliminary design process. A public meeting will be advertised once TU submits the report with the results of the sediment testing to the Commission insuring the public, as well as the abutters, remain involved with the process.

- B. 8:00 PM Continuation - Public Hearing Re: Notice Of Intent Filed By Etchstone Properties For The Roadway, Supporting Infrastructure, Utilities And Stormwater For Work Within Jurisdictional Areas Under The MA WPA For A 40B Project Referred To As Birch Drive Extension, Which Has Been Identified As Assessor Map 14, Parcels 37, 214-215, 219, 227-230.

At the request of the applicant, the Public Hearing was continued to May 1, 2018 at 7:00 PM.

2. Review Of Draft Minutes

- A. Review Of Draft Minutes Of April 3, 2018

The draft Minutes of April 3 will be reviewed at the next Conservation Commission meeting.

3. Conservation Administrator's Report

- A. Breakfast With The Birds - May 12, 2018, 6:30 AM, Heald Street Orchard

The annual Breakfast with the Birds is scheduled for May 12, 2018 at 6:30 AM at the Heald Orchard.

- B. Wild & Scenic - Endorsement Letter

The Wild & Scenic Rivers Study Committee has requested endorsement letters from the Boards of Selectmen, Conservation Commissions, and Planning Boards asking for acceptance of the Stewardship Plan and support of the Designation of the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers as Wild & Scenic. On a motion from Rand, seconded by Dinsmore, all

VOTED: to sign an endorsement letter showing the Commission's support of the Stewardship Plan and support of the Designation of the Nashua, Squannacook, and Nissitissit Rivers as Wild & Scenic.

- C. Eagle Scout Candidate Samuel Jeffrey - Nissitissit Meadows Sign And Kiosk Updates

Eagle Scout Candidate Samuel Jeffrey is refurbishing the sign and kiosk at Nissitissit Meadows as part of his Eagle Scout project. Samuel will be completing a bench project for the Nashoba Conservation Trust as well. Samuel will be 18 in June so the project will be completed soon.

- D. Fence Maintenance - Fence Repairs At Nissitissit Meadows And Conservation Land Next To Covered Bridge

Gate City Fence has visited Nissitissit Meadows and the conservation land next to the Covered Bridge and a quote to repair/replace segments of the fences on both properties has been received. Gate City Fence will complete the repair/replacement work soon.

E. Robinson Hollow, 110 South Road, Open Space Ownership

The MA Division of Fisheries and Wildlife is currently working to purchase land from an abutting property owner of the Robinson Hollow Open Space Residential Development open space. The efforts by DFW to purchase the land have been complicated by a lack of access to the land. DFW's ownership of the Robinson Hollow open space would create the access needed to protect additional acreage. On a motion from Rand, seconded by Rice, all

VOTED: that DFW should take ownership of the Robinson Hollow open space if efforts to protect the abutting land occurs.

4. Matters That May Be Raised That The Chairman Didn't Reasonably Anticipate

Terrasi reminded the Commission of the next Master Plan Committee Visioning Session on April 19 at the Pepperell Senior Center. The current makeup of the Committee is business oriented and Terrasi suggested the Commission stay connected to insure there is a balance between future development and preserving open space. Rand is on the Committee and will provide updates as they become available.

Respectfully submitted,
Paula Terrasi