

Bolton Conservation Commission

Minutes: May 20, 2013, 6:00 p.m., Town of Bolton Office

Present: Larissa Urban, Kathy Costello, Amy Ludwin, Ken Remsen, Lars Botzjorns (Chair), David Parot, Steve McLeod, Lexie Haselton

Guests: Quinn Keating, Lydia Menendez, Ron Lafreniere, Daniel Champney

1. Accept minutes of March 18, 2013 meeting – minutes approved and accepted

2. Bolton Potholes

Lydia Menendez of the VT Rivers Conservancy was present to update the CC on management options.

Origin of VRC involvement is because private owners of ½ of the Potholes contacted them. VRC contacted funders and learned the purchase price of that property is reasonably low. \$34,000 was an old appraisal which needs to be revised. VRC tries to find long term owners and community support. Potholes come with significant management issues. The VRC approached CC and Select Board at which time people shared concerns regarding the management of the area (i.e. safety). The Bolton School Board is also looking at it as the owners of the other half. A Purchase and Sale Agreement has expired, however, it is still available for purchase.

Lydia's time was previously funded by a grant which has passed. Lydia is willing to pick up the project on behalf of the VRC providing the following: VRC is interested in preserving and promoting public access to Vermont's recreational assets. Management issues need to be minimized to the point where users feel safe and comfortable.... VRC needs to be invited to partner with the town in order to move forward. If the Town shows interest in being committed to working with other partners, VRC will be at the table. VRC believes inaction should not be an option. Challenges remain. David said that while parking on the Access Road has been addressed; problems have shifted to the Smilie School parking lot.

VRC has public access easements on a handful of swimming holes. The Potholes are different in terms of the amount of use, parking and proximity of neighbors. Clarendon Gorge, Huntington Gorge, and other high volume swimming holes may offer ideas for management.

Lydia reiterated that she is not available to continue problem solving unless the Town makes a committed effort to address issues. She suggests clarity of vision.

Lars moved (Kathleen seconded) to take the following steps:

1. Form a CC subcommittee to oversee a monitoring/survey of potholes use this summer.
2. Board/Committee chairs (CC, Select Board, School Board) will meet to discuss Town's investment in management planning. If agreement exists, a joint communiqué (possibly also including private landowners) will be sent to VRC to restart the planning process.

Discussion: Last year the Town boards were non-committal, however the Select Board was open to having the VRC in the community to engage the public in conversations (including two public meetings). In 2012 the Select Board focused on addressing parking issues on the Access Road. Steve said that discussions with other Boards should not preclude any options for future management.

Motion carried unanimously.

3. Science to Action (ECOS) project

Lexie updated the CC on project status.

Amy and Lexie (and now also Ken) have represented the CC on the four- town Steering Committee. Jens Hilke, a state wildlife planner, is donating time to help in the project. A community values meeting will be held at the Jericho Elementary School on May 29 (6-8 p.m.). Attendance by at least 20 (diverse) Bolton community members is desired. During the summer there will be a series of public field walks/public events (e.g., wildlife tracking, woodlot management) across the four towns. There is also an online mapping tool that can be found on the project's web site. The CC discussed knowledgeable community members who should attend the May 29 event and divvied up who should contact them. Certain Bolton landowners are being contacted for permission for Arrowwood Environmental staff to access their land for intensive field inventories. Steve expressed concern that the results of the project could be used to restrict uses of land. Amy said that recent court opinions regarding Act 250 have led to the need for these types of inventories in reviewing development plans. The DRB and Planning Commission are looking for this information to inform zoning by-laws and the development review process.

The Science to Action project has been underfunded and towns have the ability to further fund field inventories if they would like. In terms of Bolton, potential funds could come from an outside grant. Amy will find out more about that option. If that grant doesn't come through, the CC could use funds from its annual budget and/or request funds from the Bolton Conservation Fund. Currently, the CC has \$1,464 remaining in its FY2013 budget, which expires on June 30 (the FY2014 budget is only \$500). The Conservation Fund has around \$25,000 available, however the CC agreed that those funds should be saved for other conservation projects with immediate impact.

Lars moved (Lexi seconded) that the CC approve the use of funds from the FY2013 annual budget to augment the existing project funds, on the condition that other funds are not available.

Discussion: Arrowwood had to cut \$12,000 from the original budget, which means Bolton would need to make up \$3,000 to achieve the original plan. Concern was expressed about what work would be accomplished with these funds and that it should take the form of further field inventory as much as possible. It was agreed that the Town could steer Arrowwood towards certain parcels. Ken suggested that the Planning Commission has a vested interest in the results of this project and so should help contribute additional funds. David expressed concern that Town funds need to be used at all

The motion carried, 6-2, with the stipulation that the Planning Commission be requested to contribute part of the shortfall. Lars will coordinate funding issues and keep the CC informed.

4. Preston Pond Conservation Area Management Plan

Lars stated that approval of the draft plan will wait until the next meeting to allow committee members more time to review it, and to address issues raised by CRAG-VT and potentially by VAST. Larissa and David asked about signage and promotion of the Area. Lars stated that it is a local resource that certainly could use enhanced signage, but that broad promotion is not desirable. The draft plan addresses these concerns. The focus of the plan is wildlife management and to introduce some habitat diversity.

Volunteer Steward position

Quinn Keating was invited to the meeting to express his interest in the position. He and the CC agreed that the position description is broadly written and 2013 will serve as a trial period. Quinn asked the CC for priorities and also stated his own ideas for near-term projects. The Committee unanimously welcomed Quinn to the position (pending final SB approval) and asked him to submit a list of needs to be funded by the CC annual budget. He will do so soon so that funding for Preston Pond projects can be balanced with funding for the Science to Action project.

Lars will keep the CC informed on budget needs and promptly contact the SB for final approval of Quinn's candidacy.

5. Other Business

- **Long Trail relocation and bridge construction update**
DRB will soon issue a final decision from the Town. GMC is lining up remaining permits and funding to begin construction this summer. David and others shared concerns re: the northern abutment and future flooding, people jumping off the bridge, visual impacts, universal access to the bridge, the safety of crossing the RR and using the Notch Road underpass, and the extent of trail development on the Sara Holbrook property. Lars will relay these concerns to GMC.
- **4X4 Center Off-Road Driver Training School Master Plan Application**
DRB looking for CC input on plan. David (and Lars) to see if the CC can offer any input on natural resource issues that the DRB hasn't already addressed.

6. New Business

Larissa requested that at the next CC meeting we discuss the CC's participation in state land planning on the Bolton Nordic lands. She expressed interest in being the CC liaison with VT DFP&R.

Meeting adjourned at 8:17 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen Costello and Lars Botzjorns

Approved 7/15/13