

Conservation Commission Meeting

November 29, 2023

Members present: Tim Copeland, Brad Jones, Bill Kenny, Allison Knab

Non-members present: Mark Connors, Town Planner

The meeting was called to order at 7:16 p.m.

Minutes:

- The members had not had a chance to review the October minutes. They will need to be redistributed for the next meeting.

Mailbox

- Rockingham County Conservation District sent monitoring reports for the Hanna Conservation Easement (317 Portsmouth Ave.) and the Smith Conservation Easement (13 Spring Hill Road). They were completed by drone and no issues were found.

200 Domain Drive (Timberland Property)

Gordan Leedy, landscape architect with Tighe & Bond, spoke on behalf of a project at 200 Domain Drive, which was sold by Timberland to Albany Road, a real estate development company. He was joined by wetland scientist Stefanie Tetreault. Part of the building that Timberland is no longer using is being repositioned and leased out. A new access to the building is being proposed, as well as two small building additions and a patio, in plans dated November 20th.

The proposed path to the parking lot and service drive to the building would impact 1842 square feet of wetland. Mr. Leedy said the design has been developed to allow visibility from the parking area and the best point of access to the new section of the building. Ms. Knab asked what the buffer impacts would be; Mr. Leedy said approximately three times the wetland impacts but did not have an exact figure. The walkway is being planned to handle vehicles and because of the soil it would be difficult to put a bridge over the wetland, according to Mr. Leedy. The proposed service drive is 22 feet wide at its narrowest part and the proposed walk is 10 feet wide. The proposal also includes the removal of any invasive species and planting of native plants.

The project is slated to go before the ZBA for a variance and then to the Planning Board. The Commission could sign an expedited review form for DES. Ms. Knab expressed concern that the project did not seem to make any attempt to minimize wetland impacts, and that there were other possible designs that would not cut directly through a wetland. Mr. Jones agreed. Mr. Copeland noted the path could go between the pockets of wetland instead of being built through the wetland. Ms. Knab noted that the role of the Commission is to represent the town's natural resources and that she did not feel comfortable supporting the proposed plan.

Ms. Knab motioned, Mr. Copeland seconded a motion to write a letter to the ZBA and Planning Board noting the Commission's concerns with the project and belief that a better design could avoid such substantial wetland impacts. All voted in favor.

College Road Solar Energy System

Greg Gavutis (62 College Road) gave an overview of his plan to install a ground-mounted solar energy system at his property. The property backs up to Jewell Hill Brook, which requires a minimum setback distance of 150

feet from the shoreline. His father, George Gavutis Jr., is a wildlife biologist and has flagged what he perceives to be the edge of the wetland, which is approximately 125 feet from the proposed system. The installation site was selected for its sun exposure and location in an open space that would not require large trees to be cut down. The house would not be appropriate for roof-mounted panels.

Mr. Kenny asked several questions about possible damage to the solar panels, especially falling trees, that might damage the panels and thus impact the wetlands. Mr. Gavutis believes the panels would be far enough away from large trees, and noted that the property does not get strong winds. The Commission asked questions about the size of the panels and the size of the installation pole.

Mr. Gavutis expressed concern about having a certified wetland scientist flag the property due to the cost. His father felt that his experience could serve to properly identify the wetland boundary. The Commission was concerned about the precedent of not using a certified wetland scientist. Mr. Connors said he would reach out to Rockingham Planning Commission to see what their quote would be.

The Commission noted no other concerns about the variance request. Mr. Copeland motioned, Ms. Knab seconded a motion to approve the proposed location provided it was determined to be approximately 125 feet from the wetlands. All voted in favor.

While in attendance at the meeting, Mr. George Gavutis registered concern about the town's use of larvacide and adulticide for mosquito control. He did not feel either was necessary or worked and could have very harmful impacts on other species. He discussed other methods of mosquito control.

Ross Brothers Property

The Drinking Water Groundwater Trust Fund has awarded \$91,950 in funding through the Source Water protection grant program toward the purchase of the Ross Brothers parcel (Tax Map 18, Lot 41). The town is still seeking grant funding from the state DES Local Sourcewater Protection Grant. The brothers have signed a Purchase and Sale agreement with the town.

Mr. Copeland spoke to register his concern about the large difference between the assessed value of the parcel and the appraised value. Ms. Knab noted that we have always paid the appraised value, regardless of the assessment. Mr. Copeland felt it was a bad precedent to pay an amount so much over the assessed value. Ms. Knab felt that a new precedent had not been set as we were paying the appraised value as we always agreed to with the homeowner.

Other Business

- Mr. Connors noted that a six lot subdivision on a 16-acre parcel has been proposed on Bunker Hill near the North Hampton town line.
- The Stonybrook Lane development proposal will need to go to the ZBA to decide whether single family homes could be allowed on the property. The current proposal includes 59 houses. Parkman Brook runs through the property.

At 8:57 p.m. Mr. Kenny motioned, Mr. Copeland seconded a motion to adjourn the meeting. All voted in favor.

Next Meeting: January 24th, 2023.

Respectfully submitted by Allison Knab