

NORTHFIELD CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Minutes of the meeting on March 9, 2016

The meeting was called to order at 6:37 pm.

I. ROLL CALL: Present were Commissioners Nathaniel Miller, Don Wallace, Jane Pekol, Pam Knox, Leslie Matthews, Ruth Ruttenberg, and Laura Hill-Eubanks. Also attending for part of the meeting was Nate Freeman.

II. SET/ADJUST AGENDA:

III. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (scheduled):

IV. APPROVAL OF MINUTES: February 16, 2016 minutes approved 5-0-1, with one member abstaining and one absent at the time of the vote.

V. DISCUSSION

a. Town Meeting: A survey was distributed to evaluate the interest Northfield residents might have in participating in community solar projects. Laura will get the completed paper copies to Jane. Leslie will make the survey available online. The report on the results of the NCC's Town Forest Survey was distributed. The results will be available on the Facebook page (Northfield Conservation Commission).

b. Tree Tapping in the Town Forest: A commercial maple sugaring operation has run sap lines through a part of town forest lands without first obtaining permission from the town. The party insists it was accidental but has asked and received permission from the Select Board for a lease to tap the trees. The lease awarded was non-competitive (no bidding). A forester will be looking at the trees and marking those that are valuable. NCC has responsibilities for developing management policies regarding the town forest but was not consulted before the lease was voted on. Concerns were raised that there has been no assessment of the potential impacts of this company's activity on the forest, the wildlife habitat, or the erosion that may be caused by equipment in the forest and that might result in harm to water quality. It is unclear as to what terms will be included in the lease to protect the town's property from any damage or long-term impacts. It would be prudent for this lease to be short-term so that the process can be reviewed. NCC continues to work on the Forest Management Plan, including a natural resources inventory, but the plan has not yet been completed. NCC will plan to work on policies for this type of use and other uses in the town forest with opportunities for the public to have input.

c. Water Street Park Plan meeting: A public meeting will be held regarding the planning for a public park to be established in the Water Street area where flooding caused a loss of homes. The purpose of the meeting is to get input from

area residents. The meeting is scheduled for March 15 at 7 pm.

d. Current Town Commission openings: There are several openings for town positions. They include those on the Planning Commission, and a potentially new Development Review Board (which may replace the current Zoning Board of Adjustment); and the job of Zoning Administrator is open. Nate has also formed a new organization, Northfield Community Development Network (NCDN), where participation is welcomed.

e. Natural Resources Inventory: Michael from Arrowwood Environmental will come to the next meeting of the NCC to provide an update on the Natural Resources Inventory of the Town Forest on Paine Mountain. The inventory will be used to develop the Town Forest Management Plan. A portion of the NRI grant money must be used to produce a map/brochure. Leslie will work on this. Initially the idea is to provide a map of the main trail (PMT) and include information on Leave No Trace use of the forest. Access and public parking is a problem. Norwich has said that the Shaw Center can be used for parking. When appearing before the Zoning Board of Adjustment, a spokesman for the Medical Center said that its parking lot would be available on weekends and off-hours. NCC should confirm this.

f. Urban Forestry Plan: Elise (Vermont Urban & Community Forestry Program) has sent a version of the Urban Forestry Plan with her suggested changes. The Plan should go to the Select Board for comments. A training session for tree maintenance is planned for late spring. Town manager will organize it. Ultimately the Plan is to be presented for approval by the Select Board and implemented as described in the Plan.

g. Winter Carnival: Pam and Christine will help lead some of the events in Winter Carnival this weekend.

h. Open meeting rules: Review and discussion of current open meeting law requirements.

i. Boy Scout use of Cheney Field: Collin O'Neil, the manager of the Norwich U Shaw recreation center, has requested that the Cheney Field in the Town Forest be used to host a Norwich event for the Boy Scouts. He estimates there will be 70 or more people that would camp there. NCC has questions regarding the lack of facilities and other issues that we do not have information on. Collin was invited but could not attend tonight's meeting. NCC will follow up.

f. Disc Golf on Cheney Field: Collin O'Neil has also asked the NCC for its opinion on whether to allow Norwich to install part of its disc golf course on Cheney Field, part of the Northfield Town Forest. The course is normally made up of metal poles with other attachments. Members of the NCC raised concerns over the fact that these would be permanent installations; would increase traffic in the field, along with any related impacts and a need for increased management;

and be inappropriate in such a naturally beautiful area and one that is highly valued traditionally by the town's residents. Vote was called as to whether the NCC will support the use of Cheney Field for disc golf course. Vote was NO: 0 (Y) – 7 (N) - 0 (A).

VI. PUBLIC PARTICIPATION (SCHEDULED):

VII. ADJOURNMENT: The meeting was adjourned at 8:15 pm.

Respectfully submitted by Laura Hill-Eubanks, Northfield Conservation Commission.

These minutes are subject to changes and approval at the next regular meeting, but are substantially correct.