



TOWN OF NORTHBRIDGE CONSERVATION COMMISSION

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23 MAR 20 PM 3:55

NORTHBRIDGE TOWN CLERK
LINDA E. DYER

Meeting Minutes March 01, 2023

Justine Carroll, Steve Gniadek, Chloe Mawn, Cindee Cummiskey, and Barbara McNamee were present. Rich Chiras and Justin Arbuckle were absent. David Pickart, Conservation Commission (NCC) Agent and Barbara Kinney, NCC Administrative Assistant were present.

J. Carroll opened the meeting at 7:02PM.

Attendees: Mary Shugrue-Yacino; Christine Johnson; Joseph Susienka; and Mike Tonry.

Citizen's Forum

None

(248-XXX) 172 Linwood Avenue (Map 5, Parcels 58 & 59)

Proposed construction of a garage & driveway with associated grading and site work. The applicant is Timothy & Jane Labrie represented by H S & T Group, Inc., 75 Hammond Street, Worcester, MA 01610.

The applicant/engineer has requested a continuance.

Motion made by C. Cummiskey and seconded by S. Gniadek. The NCC voted 5-0 by roll call vote of C. Mawn – Yes; J. Carroll – Yes; C. Cummiskey – Yes; B. McNamee – Yes; and S. Gniadek - Yes to continue the Public Hearing to April 05, 2023 per the applicant/engineer's request.

Old/New Business

Castle Hill Farm – Discussion

D. Pickart explained that he has met with Town Counsel; Glen King, Community Preservation Committee (CPC); Alex VanderBaan, the property owner; and Lisa Moczynski, Metacomet Land Trust (MLT). They discussed the status of the land sale and the list of conservation restrictions of what is and is not allowed along with potential improvements to the property. These are the concerns that were raised and the NCC is requested to provide feedback.

The first concern is regarding allowing the use of horseback riding and mountain biking on the trails. The draft restrictions prohibit these uses. D. Pickart sees the disadvantages of allowing these uses as a larger parking facility would be needed for the horse trailers, the trails and boardwalks would need to be wider to accommodate these uses, the horses can dig up the trails and their waste would not be cleaned up and may have seeds of invasive species that would infest the property. There have been cases where horses may shy

away and go through the wetland or balk (rider has fallen off and broken a limb) at the boardwalks crossing the wetland. This could cause injury to the horse and/or rider and cause damage to the wetland.

The mountain biking could cause damage to the trails. The bikers could cut new trails without authorization and create stunts. There is potential for conflict between biker and hiker. Mountain biking is allowed at several other locations within town (example: Goat Hill). MLT has the same concerns with both forms of recreation.

Note: It is next to impossible to amend the Conservation Restriction (CR) once it is in place. D. Pickart will follow up with a meeting with the owner and stakeholder(s). The wording could be drafted in such a way that it will allow for some leeway to make some minor changes as needed.

Mike Tonry questioned the process stating that the NCC has enormous power to make these decisions. D. Pickart explained that this is just the beginning of the outreach and process. He has been in discussions with the stakeholders. He will be meeting with the owner tomorrow. The CR must be in place in order for the Town to purchase the property. The Board of Selectmen (BOS) on behalf of the town will need to approve the CR. The schedule is somewhat flexible. It is anticipated that the Purchase and Sale (P & S) will close before 04/30/2023. However, the CR does not need to be final by that date. The state has strict guidelines with CRs. The state needs to review and approve the CR which could take up to a year or more. A Public Hearing will be held by the NCC in two (2) weeks or possibly their first meeting in April.

The NCC took a consensus by roll call vote of J. Carroll – Yes; C. Mawn – Yes; C. Cummiskey – Yes; B. McNamee – Yes; and S. Gniadek – Yes (5-0) to leave the restriction for horseback riding.

The NCC took a consensus by roll call vote of J. Carroll – Yes; C. Mawn – Yes; C. Cummiskey – Yes; B. McNamee – Yes; and S. Gniadek – Yes (5-0) to leave the restriction for mountain biking for now but would like to see more discussion on possibly allowing it in the beginning and restricting it later if needed.

The second concern regards the equipment access to the habitat management areas. The current owner of the property has concerns with the access along his property line as it could be used as a hiking trail and he doesn't want hikers that close to his property. He would like to see the access come through his driveway to around the back of his property. D. Pickart explained that this would need a legal agreement (easement) allowing access. MLT would like to leave language to build the access as shown now in the future if a future owner did not want the access through their property. D. Pickart is working with the owner on what the options are and what can be agreed upon. The area for the proposed access along the property line would require little tree/brush removal as it is currently clear. The NCC is open to exploring solutions.

The next concern is regarding the community garden and pavilion. The current property owners on Castle Hill Road are not amenable to having the community garden in that location so close to their properties. It could be moved to an area between Riley Pond and the lower pond on the lower pond side of the road, but it would be more work as brush would need to be cleared. There is sufficient land to expand the community gardens at the

Elsa Mason property and that property has a fund dedicated to the property that could handle the expansion. The community gardens will be left as shown on the plans for the presentation to the public to hear their concerns and if there is interest in having the community gardens. D. Pickart will look at other areas on the Castle Hill property to see how viable it would be to have the community gardens located there. Feedback is needed from the property owners regarding screening between the properties.

Mary Yacino, Gill Court, has a huge problem with sketchy people present sometimes at Riley Pond. She avoids hiking the trails at those times. She is concerned that these amenities will attract more sketchy people.

C. Mawn left the meeting about 8:00PM. The NCC took a consensus by roll call vote of J. Carroll – Yes; C. Cummiskey – Yes; B. McNamee – Yes; and S. Gniadek – Yes (4-0) to explore the possibility of the community gardens more.

The NCC took a consensus by roll call vote of J. Carroll – Yes; C. Cummiskey – Yes; B. McNamee – Yes; and S. Gniadek – Yes (4-0) to explore the possibility of the pavilion more.

The final concern is with the parking area. The current property owners are concerned with the parking area next to their properties. D. Pickart explained why the parking lot is needed and why parking is not wanted along the street. This is the only viable location that does not need a lot of sitework. However, the parking lot could possibly be moved further south. Screening could be provided between the parking area and the abutting properties. The parking lot access could be gated to be closed after hours.

The NCC took a consensus by roll call vote of J. Carroll – Yes; C. Cummiskey – Yes; B. McNamee – Yes; and S. Gniadek – Yes (4-0) to leave the parking area in general with slight modification(s) to keep it from becoming an unwanted gathering place.

The next steps will be to gather more feedback and compile the information. D. Pickart will be meeting with the Safety Committee on March 15, 2023. The NCC will hold a public forum either in March or April. D. Pickart said that he would give tours of the Castle Hill property to any NCC member that would like to do a field trip.

Minutes

February 15, 2023

Motion made by B. McNamee and seconded by C. Cummiskey. The NCC voted 5-0 by roll call vote of C. Mawn – Yes; J. Carroll – Yes; C. Cummiskey – Yes; B. McNamee – Yes; and S. Gniadek - Yes to approve the minutes of February 15, 2023 as written.

Other

Benson Road – D. Pickart will be before the BOS at their meeting on March 13, 2023 to request the change to have the NCC manage the property on Benson Road and why it is important not to sell it. B. McNamee and J. Carroll stated that they can attend as well.

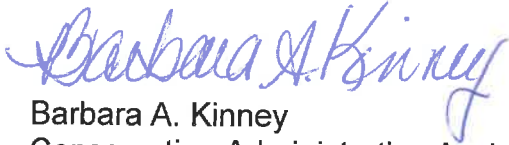
The NCC members present performed administrative tasks (signed Orders, etc.) that were needed.

Adjournment

Motion made by B. McNamee and seconded by C. Cummiskey. The NCC voted 4-0 to adjourn the meeting at about 8:15PM.

Respectfully submitted,

DATE APPROVED:



Barbara A. Kinney
Conservation Administrative Assistant

