

Conservation Committee Meeting Minutes
Cape Elizabeth Town Hall
7:00 p.m., Wednesday, March 8, 2023

Present: Corinne Ketcham, Chair, Matt Craig, Emily Helliesen Day, Bruce Moore, Richard Sullivan (arrived at approximately 8:00 p.m.).

Staff: Maureen O'Meara, Town Planner

1. Call to Order. Chair Ketcham called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.
2. Public Comment. No member of the public was present.
3. Minutes. Mr. Moore made a motion, seconded by Mr. Craig, to approve the February 8, 2023 meeting minutes and the motion passed 4-0.
4. Tree Warden Presentation. Jeff Tarling, Tree Warden, summarized his experience with municipal tree management and open space and made a presentation about potential coordination with the Conservation Committee. He is impressed with the Cape greenbelt and acknowledged the pressure on open spaces. He receives email requests from citizens regarding trees and most of that work involves educating people about risk and tree health.

Threats to town open lands includes the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid, Emerald Ash Borer and Winter moth. We need to work soon with hemlocks as in 5-6 years, there will not be many left. We should get beneficial beetles. Ash trees decline quickly and many of them are street trees. There has been a lot of damage from winter moth, such as on Mitchell Rd and Robinson Woods. He made a distinction from normal storm damage to mature trees and the nature regeneration cycle in the woods. Invasive treatments tend to favor mechanical over chemical, with a combination of both. Maine Audubon and the State of Maine are coordinating a removal of honeysuckle at Kettle Cove.

There is some inventory of town trees, such as in Fort Williams, and heritage trees. When there is room for tree planting, he favors native species. There are limited funds for tree planting and he has experience with the Community Orchard program in Portland that has significantly increased available funding for tree replacement. He has experience with and support community connections and is willing to help the CC.

Chair Ketcham noted that the CC has a limited program to work with community volunteers on invasives. We emphasize mechanical removal and responsible disposal, and have a project underway at Dyer Woods. Invasives is a large project to tackle.

Mr. Craig volunteered to meet onsite and encouraged more attention to open space management. We focus on trails, but may need to focus more on trees.

Mr. Moore asked about the town plan to combat insects? Mr. Tarling said he tends to find them on general town survey work and then act, often in response to citizen calls. There is room for citizens to report issues. He noted that a tree dying is part of the cycle and he will not just cut down a tree in open space because it is dead. The context needs to be evaluated.

Mr. Moore suggested the town could provide educational materials on the town website to educate trail users on identifying diseased trees. Mr. Tarling said that a cheat sheet on the worst invasive plants can be used. There are different levels of threat, with a lot of invasives showing up on disused farmlands. He supports timed action to stop seed spread.

Chair Ketcham suggested this would be a good item for the Greenbelt Gazette, and Mr. Tarling said he would put some pictures together.

CELT Stewardship Director Ardath Dixon was recognized and she reported a beetle release in Robinson Woods in 2013. Mr. Tarling concurred that beetle release is a good response and perhaps we should identify the hemlock stands for focus.

In response to a question, Mr. Tarling said he could use some funding support from the CC. Mr. Craig asked him to provide his priorities for open space management. Mr. Tarling noted a significant pignut hickory located at Wells and Sawyer Rds.

Mr. Craig noted his front yard Norway maple and perhaps we should educate citizens with invasive trees on their property.

[Mr. Sullivan arrived]

5. Greenbelt Trails Management.

Trails map update. The CC reviewed updated mapping of trails at Cross Hill/Winnick Woods and Gull Crest. The committee asked for more mapping at Winnick Woods to extend the “purple” trail.

Open Space monitoring. Committee members received monitoring sheets for properties where the town holds an easement and will try to visit properties by the end of March.

Priority projects. Staff has sent to the priority projects list to NEMBA, Portland Trails, UNE student groups, USM student groups, and others who are inquiring about trail improvement work. The MCC team is arriving in June and a CC member should take the lead in directing the work to be done. The CC agreed to contact former CC members who have agreed to lead improvement projects.

Encroachments. Staff will prepare a letter for CC Chair signature to Cross Hill properties where encroachments have been identified by CELT. In some cases, it may be time to seek assistance from the Public Works Department to remove encroachment materials.

Great Pond. The new boat rack is under construction and will be finished in time to add boat rack slots to this year's lottery.

Other trail work. Mr. Sullivan noted a low area on the Two Lights Trail and the CC granted permission for erosion control mulch to be added. Mr. Sullivan will perform the work.

Mr. Craig asked for a process update on the Pesticide Ordinance proposal and Ms. O'Meara reviewed the status.

Ms. Dixon asked for event approval to remove invasives on Gull Crest as part of the CELT Chickadeeds project at the adjacent preserve. Committee members asked how the invasive materials will be disposed of. Ms. Dixon said the materials are pulled and left in place. The committee discussed putting them in trash bags and there was a question about whether the material would then be burned or composted, potentially spreading invasive materials.

Mr. Craig asked about how invasives removal integrated with rabbit habitat and Fish and Wildlife Service (FWS) permission? Ms. Dixon said CELT had met with FWS and the material removal is limited to specific areas and the materials can be turned into aisles for rabbit homes. The CELT project removal will open up, but not completely clear the area. Ms. Dixon agreed to come back in April with more answers. The CC would like CELT to use the Invasives application form.

Gazette. Committee members suggested the next issue include identifying disease in trees, the new Great Pond boat racks, and mud season.

6. Planning Board Review. No items on the March 21st meeting require CC review.
7. Next meeting. For the next meeting, scheduled for April 11th, the CC will review the CELT invasives removal request at Gull Crest, Tree Warden priority funding, information on machine built trail improvements at Winnick Woods, and seeking contractors to perform priority trail improvements. The meeting adjourned at 8:30 p.m.