**TOWN OF  HARWICH**

***732 Main Street***

***Harwich, MA 02645***

**HARWICH CONSERVATION COMMISSION - MINUTES**

**PHONE (508)-430-7538 FAX (508)430-7531**

**FRIDAY FEBRUARY 24, 2023 – 2:00 PM**

**TOWN HALL – GRIFFIN ROOM**

**Commissioners and Staff Present:** Chairman John Ketchum, Jim Atkinson, Mark Coleman, Alan Hall, Brad Chase, Wayne Coulson, Assistant Conservation Agent Melyssa Millett and Conservation Administrator Amy Usowski

Commissioners Absent: Stanley Pastuszak, Associate Member Sophia Pilling

**Audience Present:** Chris Ploszay

**Call to Order**

Chairman John Ketchum called the meeting to order at 2:00 PM.

**Request for Certificate of Compliance**

**Rocco Orsini, 56 Purmackene Ln, Map 24 Parcel H17. SE32-2293.** New dwelling and appurtenances.

Chris Ploszay was present as representative. Ms. Usowski explained that Down Cape Engineering had evaluated the project and submitted a letter certifying that it was in substantial compliance with the Order of Conditions with a few small changes, including a slight change in the layout of the deck, the addition of AC units and propane tanks on the side of the dwelling, and a small area that had not been seeded at the time of the site visit. Mr. Ploszay stated that the area had since been seeded. Ms. Usowski recommended approval of the Certificate of Compliance with an ongoing condition prohibiting fertilizer and chemical use within Conservation jurisdiction.

Mr. Atkinson moved to issue a Certificate of Compliance with the discussed ongoing condition. Seconded by Mr. Coulson. Motion carried, 5-0-1, Mr. Chase abstained.

**Discussion and Possible Vote** -Work session on proposed revisions to the Bells Neck Land Management Plan(BNLMP). Continuation of January 27, 2023 meeting.

Mr. Ketchum opened the discussion, and called for comments on the proposed revisions that had been prepared. Mr. Atkinson made a few non-substantive edits.

Mr. Coleman distributed an outline of priorities that he would like to see added to the revised BNLMP, which included addressing erosion at areas where the paths met the water, installing more formal gates or fencing at path entrances to prevent motor vehicle access, relocating parking areas further from resource areas, removing excess road materials, replacing the North Rd pedestrian bridge with a car bridge, and fixing the grade and elevation of Bells Neck Rd and North Rd. For priorities around the bogs, Mr. Coleman listed improving the parking area at the herring run, Phragmites control, and revising the decision to let the bogs naturalize in favor of allowing at least a few sections of the bogs to remain productive. Mr. Hall agreed with these priorities, and added that improvement of signage should be near the top of the list.

Ms. Usowski recommended that the Commission include a list of short term versus long term priorities in the revised BNLMP, in addition to the narrative in section 5 of the document, which deals with Management Goals and Environmental Impacts. Mr. Hall stated that he would like to see a list of exactly what resources would be needed for each of these projects. Mr. Coulson commented that a few of the items could be done with very limited funding, including erosion control, removal of excess road materials, installing gates or fencing, replacing signage, and creating more established access points.

Ms. Usowski stated that she would like to remove redundant sections of the BNLMP, and would work on adding these priorities into section 5. Mr. Ketchum recommended that they separate the goals from the previous version of the BNLMP that had been completed from the new or remaining goals. Mr. Ketchum also stated that he would like to see a brief outline of what resources and steps would be needed for the larger goals, and near-term action items for each.

Commission members discussed whether or not the vote to naturalize the Bells Neck bogs should be revisited, with arguments for and against continuing cranberry farming on the bogs. Ms. Usowski explained that a fully advertised public hearing would be necessary if they were going to change the previous vote on this matter, and Mr. Ketchum added that they would need to see a concrete proposal for other potential options. Mr. Chase stated that he would like to see the BNLMP revised with the current vote for naturalization of the bogs, since this matter had been discussed at length by previous Commissions. Mr. Ketchum agreed that the revision of the BNLMP should proceed with the current vote. Mr. Coleman pointed out that some agriculture was permitted under the previous vote, and Mr. Chase responded that the vote had not been to allow the bogs to be leased, but to perhaps create some sort of cooperative educational program or some sort of public access on the property. Mr. Coulson commented that the bogs at Bells Neck had not been tended for years, so they would likely be too expensive and time-consuming to restore productivity for any farmers to be interested in them. Mr. Chase asked whether the cultivation of wetland plant species was an option on the bogs, and Ms. Usowski explained that they could grow the plants, but harvesting them from the bog would be too much of a disturbance to create a program. Mr. Coulson asked whether they could plant a number of blueberry bushes, so that the public and wildlife could benefit from the bogs without re-leasing them. Commission members agreed that that would be a good alternative.

Mr. Hall asked if they could look at other Conservation properties in Town for agricultural opportunities, since agriculture was such a large part of Harwich’s history. Ms. Usowski stated that they could, and Commission members mentioned Texeira Conservation Lands and the area abutting the Community Gardens as possibilities.

Ms. Usowski explained that she had been looking into funding sources for municipal projects, and would try to incorporate funding options in the description for each goal in the revised BNLMP. Ms. Usowski and Ms. Millett would look over the action items and make a prioritized list of goals and reorder the document as necessary. Mr. Coulson would look into sources for blueberry plants. Mr. Ketchum stated that they would review the list of priorities and goal narratives at the next work session meeting, and Mr. Chase added that he would like the Commission to consider water level management for the bogs as well.

Mr. Chase asked if they could schedule an on-site meeting so Commission members could discuss potential changes to the roads and bridge, as well as potential parking areas and plantings. Commission members decided on March 31, 2023 at 1PM for an on-site meeting at Bells Neck, with a rain date of April 7, 2023.

Commission members decided on April 14, 2023 at 1PM in the Griffin Room for the next BNLMP work session meeting.

**Adjournment**

Mr. Atkinson moved to adjourn at 3:30PM. Seconded by Mr. Coulson. Motion carried, 7-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Melyssa Millett

Approved: 03/01/2023