Lancaster Conservation Commission (LCC) Meeting Minutes
Town Hall Second Floor – December 11, 2023

LCC Members present: Sam Mayne, Kim Votta, Kathy-Jean Lavoie (Selectboard Alternate), Nancy Southworth

LCC Members absent: Vickie Gibbs, Leon Rideout

Others present: Racheal Stuart, Heidi Chester

Initial Business: Mayne called the meeting to order at 5:35 pm; roll call & introductions waived.

Approval of minutes:
Votta made a motion to approve the October 10, 2023, as written. Southworth seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Ongoing Business / LCC Workplan Topics:

Town Forest Trail Development Update (Stuart)
Stuart reported the status of ongoing work, using relevant maps & plan documents (uploaded to Drive). She said Shane Beattie has started the maintenance & rerouting of Corridor 5 trail. She reported the receipt of 2 bids for trail construction, which will be a Northern Forest Center (NFC) contract. She referred members to the AMC/Lancaster Town Forest Planning (Sept 2023) for review of 1.3 mi. Loop Trail on existing skids roads, plus 0.5 mi. new trail construction. She reminded LCC that there will be no parking on the Page Hill Rd. side of loop. Stuart asked for LCC input regarding the plan's proposed 10ft. wide x 10 ft. high corridor. Stuart proposed narrowing to 6-8 ft. width, stating it was sufficient for pedestrian traffic but would require less construction work & have less impact on wildlife. Mayne said the Heritage Trail plan specifies 4 ft. wide x 8 ft. high.

Stuart noted most of the NFC funding will be depleted by end of project. She was concerned about Heritage Trail & asked members to consider encumbering funds from the LCC's 2023 Budget to the Town Forest trails project, in order to leverage some of the existing NFC funding toward Heritage Trail work. Members were agreeable; they encouraged Stuart to seek assurances that LCC's contribution be applied specifically to existing project costs as currently listed (not overruns). Stuart suggested a $5,000 total contribution, itemized as $2,300 for signage & $2,700 for trail construction. Lavoie & Mayne reminded Stuart that documentation would be necessary to encumber funds; Stuart agreed to provide appropriate scope of work details to Town Manager Ben Gaetjens-Oleson before end of year.

Votta made a motion to approve the encumbrance of 2023 LCC Budget funds toward Town Forest Trail Development in the amounts of $2,300 for signage & $2,700 for trail construction ($5,000 total); Southworth seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

Martin Meadow Pond (MMP) Water Quality (Mayne/Southworth)
Southworth reported that she sent the MMP water quality documents she received from Mayne to Stowell of the MMP Association, along with an invitation to attend an LCC meeting & voice concerns directly. She reports no response as yet, but notes the Association may only be active in summer months due to seasonal-resident membership. Lavoie stated the most recent measurement seemed to be an outlier compared to prior data; Mayne concurred. Mayne suggested the LCC revisit this issue once next year's summer testing has occurred & the MMP Association has had a chance to respond to Southworth's outreach.

Riparian Restoration Project Update (Mayne)

Mayne reported the State Conservation Committee's Conservation Grant Program ("moose plates" grant) has awarded $30,000 toward the project. He said one tree planting will be covered by this grant in spring 2024. He said the Upper CT River Mitigation & Enhancement Fund application has been submitted; decision expected this winter. Mayne said he should hear from the ARM Fund soon. He said the Lancaster Elementary School has agreed to put more of its land into conservation; approvals are in process. Mayne said he recently became aware of the Fruit Tree Planting Foundation (FTPF), which could meet the school's request for apple trees as part of the project's plantings. Members commended Mayne for his hard work & successful fundraising efforts.

Southworth made a motion to approve the Fruit Tree Planting Foundation application to support the LCC's Riparian Restoration Project & to name Sam Mayne as authorized representative to submit the application; Votta seconded. The motion carried unanimously.

LCC Leadership, Clerk Recruitment & New Membership

Votta initiated discussion about LCC leadership, as she will be leaving after March 2024, thus Vice Chairperson position will be open; Chairperson remains open since Stuart left in March 2023. Mayne said he could continue acting as Chairperson in some respects, as he is willing to run meetings & be the point of contact for the LCC, but he could not commit to posting agenda/notices or recording meeting minutes. Votta said she could compose agenda/notices, but did not wish to record minutes. Lavoie said the search for clerking candidates has been posted to Resident Notices; in the interim, she suggested Robin Irving be approached since she has clerked for other Land Use boards. Mayne noted LCC meeting frequency will likely be less than once a month in 2024, until new members are recruited; Votta will talk to Irving & ask if she's willing to clerk until LCC finds a new permanent clerk.

Members asked if anyone had heard follow-up from Gibbs regarding the potential LCC recruit she had encouraged at the time of October meeting; status was unknown. Votta will contact Gibbs to discuss. Lavoie suggested a former Selectboard applicant who seemed suited for LCC membership; she will contact him. Southworth said she has 2 recruits in mind, whom she will contact; she also suggested getting the list of trailwork volunteers & approaching possible candidates from it (provided residency is met). Members will work on getting/checking this list. Next meeting was set for February 12.

Other Business:

2024 Budget Proposal

Lavoie reported the LCC 2024 Budget Proposal was submitted as approved by the LCC at their October meeting; she noted the proposal was a reduction from the 2023 LCC Budget. All budgets are currently in review by the Town Budget Committee, in preparation for Town Meeting in March.

Members expressed gratitude to Chester, whose service as LCC Clerk ends December 31, 2023.

No further business offered.

Mayne moved to adjourn; Votta seconded. The motion carried unanimously. Meeting adjourned at 6:53 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Heidi Chester

Approved February 12, 2023

Kim Votta, Vice Chairperson

Sam Mayne, Member