



Auburn, Maine

Conservation Commission

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Minutes January 11, 2022

1. The meeting was called to order at 6:00, held on zoom.
Commissioners present: Amy Dieterich, Sam Boss, Dave Griswold, Rhyanna LaRose, Adam Platz, Jane Costlow
Guests: Dana Staples (City Councilor at-large) Kathy Shaw, Bill Sylvester, Chris Carson
2. Update on the Mayor's Ad Hoc Committee, Board and Committee restructuring proposal
Commissioners discussed the proposal to restructure Auburn committees, in particular the Conservation Commission, Forest Board and Ag Committee. Sam read the charge as received from the from original *ad hoc* group (2021), and then invited comments on the current proposal from the Mayor. He asked the commissioners to consider both limitations and potential advantages to the proposed structure.
 - a) Commissioners discussed various aspects of the proposed changes, with an eye to coming up with a list of proposed revisions and questions to submit to City Hall. These included frequency of meeting, how the existing charges would change, overall structure, the relative merits and visibility of "working groups" vis-à-vis "committees," whether the new structure would give those involved greater "cloud," and the purview of the City to change and/or disband existing committees. On the last point, Amy noted that ordinances are created and may be deleted by the City Council. Dana noted last year's merging of various boards, and urged the commissioners not to lose sight of their role as important parts of the process.
 - b) Dave urged the Commissioners to see this as an opportunity to make the committees more efficient and productive, and to improve communication with the Council; the new structure could work both ways, to pass on ideas from council and to take them reports about what we're doing. Dave also urged that any structure proposes operate for three years, after which the process and structure could be reviewed and adjusted if needed.
 - c) Jane urged the Commission to come up with specific proposals to insert into the proposal as received.
 - d) In addition, commissioners discussed the following specifics of the new structure included the following: To what extent membership might change, and whether current members would be encouraged to continue.
 - e) Bill noted a similar change at the state level some 10 years ago, with cabinet level positions restructured from Conservation, IFW and Ag to Ag, Conservation, Forestry. He further noted that the state model actually works really well: It's powerful.
 - f) Chris commented that he is not averse to having the groups join together if it means better communication with the Council. He suggested that the fundamental question is whether the purposes of the two committees (CC and Ag) are close enough to make logical sense to combine.

- g) Sam expressed the need to retain voices of both groups.
- h) Commissioners decided to have representatives of each group identified in the Mayor's proposal (CC, Ag, Recycling) work together to come up with specific language and proposals, bearing in mind that the stated objective is to make the structure more efficient. The proposed recommendations should identify a plan for what the status of the working groups would be; what channels could be structured for communicating with the Council; and how to allow for creativity and concerns from citizens and working groups. Groups need to be able to initiate things without going through the oversight group.
- i) The working group on the proposal will be Sam, Kathy, Dave, Chris and Jane. They will use the upcoming Ag meeting (1/25) as a forum to move forward.

3. Other business:

- a) Sam reported that Dave, Jane and Sam visited Littlefield Dam with Soil and Water District reps and a Federal fisheries biologist. The Federal biologist (who is working on his report) concludes that the dam is a complete barrier to fish. The group discussed creating a portage around Littlefield Dam for recreational use. Sam noted the need to think about funding for dam removal, trail development. Jonathan Labonte could be an important contact, since he is involved in ongoing conversations about rail to trails on the northern bank of Little Androscoggin
- b) Kathy and Bill reported on the Nexamp Solar facility site visit, noting the huge scope of the project (approx. 27 acres of panels), with power for 800 homes. Dave noted that the company is obliged to clean up/take away set up after life of the project. There was brief discussion of the possibility of having pollinator pairings at solar sites, and the question arose of whether there are erosion problems on the site?

4. Forest Board Reports

- a) Dave reported on the Street Tree Replacement Proposal (see Appendix 1). Historically, very little money has been budgeted to replace trees (in either Auburn or Lewiston). The proposal would have the cities budget to replace anything that comes down. Currently, new development projects before the planning board specify landscaping but make no specific mention of trees. The proposal recommends one street tree for every 50 feet of road frontage, and if this is not feasible on site, the developer would provide monies to replace street trees at another location. (Place TBD by city arborist etc.)

Dave noted the timeliness, even urgency, of the proposal: there are currently 430 ash trees in Auburn, and it's just a matter of time before emerald ash borer arrives. It is highly likely that Auburn will be faced with an accelerating rate of street trees coming down. In terms of process, the proposal should go first to the Planning Board and then to City Council.

Jane made a motion to support Dave's proposal and bring it to the Planning Board. Amy seconded. The motion unanimously passed.

- b) Dave also noted that the city needs an Emerald Ash Borer management plan, to try to get ahead of mortality. The Forest service in Maine has a new program for invasive management and mitigation, which connects municipalities to a trained forester to work up a plan. The state covers the whole cost of mitigation work. Dave suggested considering if we could apply for the whole city or for selected sites within the city (e.g. Sherwood Forest). Dave will report at next meeting; the city may need to provide money upfront to participate in program.

- c) Plans are ongoing for a Browntail moth webinar with Allison Kanoti and other events/activities on invasives; third week of February, to be followed by an on-site event, TBA.

5. Procedural items

- a) Approval of the Annual Report for 2021. Jane made a motion, seconded by Dave to approve Sam's outstanding annual report. The vote was unanimous.
- b) There was brief discussion of whether CC would host a Winterfest event.
- c) November minutes: Jane made a motion, seconded by Rhyanna to approve the November minutes. The vote was unanimous.
- d) Conservation Commission Meeting time: Second Tuesdays are more complicated than initially thought; we'll stick with third Tuesday. The next meeting will be February 15.

Amy made a motion that the meeting be adjourned, which was seconded by Rhyanna.
The meeting was adjourned at 8:12

Respectfully submitted,

Jane Costlow, Secretary