

## MINUTES OF MARCH 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021 MEETING

Access via phone (646) 558 8656 or via web at [www.zoom.us](http://www.zoom.us) with Meeting ID 962 2282 1771 / Password 867981

A meeting of the Longmeadow Conservation Commission was called to order at 7:02 P.M. on March 24<sup>th</sup>, 2021 and was again conducted remotely consistent with Governor Baker's Executive Order of March 12, 2020, due to the current State of Emergency in the Commonwealth related to the Covid19 pandemic.

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chair Al Laakso, David Dumais, Andrea Chasen, Stephen Gazillo, John Bresnahan. **Absent:** Roman Berman, Christopher Nolan, Kiernan Mulcahy.

**OTHERS PRESENT:** Tom Geser from USFWR, Markelle Smith from The Nature Conservancy, Dave Marinelli.

**MINUTES OF PRIOR MEETING:** Mr. Laakso made a motion, and was seconded by Ms. Chasen, to accept the minutes of February 10<sup>th</sup>, 2021 as presented. Roll call vote: Ms. Chasen, yes; Mr. Laakso: yes; Mr. Dumais: yes; Mr. Gazillo: yes. All in favor 4-0, motion passed.

**TREASURER'S REPORT:** No report provided at this meeting. Treasurer Dumais has been discussing budget adjustments with Finance Director Paul Pasterczyk for FY22, thus resulting in a Miscellaneous category increase from \$700 to \$800 to fully cover MACC membership dues that will start on July 1<sup>st</sup>, 2021.

**DISCUSSION – PROPOSAL FOR POTENTIAL AND RESTORATION OF LAND IN MEADOWS:** Ms. Smith and Mr. Geser presented the following findings:

1. Friends of Fannie Stebbins and The Nature Conservancy are currently working on transferring land ownership to the Silvio O. Conte Fish & Wildlife Refuge to enhance the long-term permanent legal protection and management of the entire area while gaining access to more federal funding.
2. Extensive, months-long and ongoing deed research on the part of Mr. Geser, has generated a map that displays a patchwork of land ownership in an area that, from an ecological standpoint, functions and thrives as one. Some of the findings in this research is that a number of parcels have permanent conservation protection under Article 97, therefore a land ownership transfer, even with the intent of maintaining the conservation protection, would require the lengthier process of obtaining 2/3 majority vote at the State level. There is also a lack of legal deeded access, which Mr. Geser is interested in pursuing as a subsequent phase of his research.
3. It is their understanding that trying to make a more cohesive ownership layout would enhance the protection of the land by obtaining easier access to federal funding. The example of the floodplain restoration project was cited, which has only been implemented in the portion of the floodplain that is eligible for federal funding with the assistance of the National Resources Conservation Service (NRCS). It is poised to become the largest non-fragmented area of national floodplain vegetation in the entire Connecticut River watershed but, according to experts, the entire floodplain can benefit from an expansion of this project.
4. All parties that have land ownership in the floodplain are in agreement that there is room to improve accessibility in the various parts of the floodplain, therefore a proposal to gather representatives from each party and create visioning sessions where ideas are shared with the intent of creating a universal, holistic view of the entire area are being considered.

Ms. Smith inquired about any interest the commission may have in engaging in a land ownership transfer for some parcels similar to the Friends of Fannie Stebbins, The Nature Conservancy and USFWR endeavor; however, she cautioned that this was a time sensitive decision due to impending deadlines on federal funding available for such transactions.

While the commissioners agreed that a more comprehensive vision of all stakeholders would be beneficial for the ecosystem and the public's enjoyment of the land, the topic of land ownership transfer raised some concerns. The Town of Longmeadow is the largest property owner in the floodplain (with ownership being distributed between the DPW, Water Department and Conservation Commission) and other owners include private individuals, federal agencies and national entities such as Tennessee Gas Pipeline, Amtrak and Eversource, many of which have infrastructure responsibilities in the area. Some of the town-owned parcels were obtained by the Conservation Commission through decades of arduous legal and funding work, resulting in the deeds describing these properties as being in the "care, control and custody of the Conservation Commission"; that said, Chair Al Laakso's own years-long internal review of these old records determined that some deeds lacked the conservation protection legal language even though the matter had been approved at a Town Meeting, therefore correlation of all databases should remain an ongoing effort. In addition, the floodplains are part of Longmeadow's heritage with the area being the site of the original settlement centuries ago. Any work on federal land is still subject to the boundaries of the Wetlands Protection Land, therefore must be reviewed by the Conservation Commission, but it would be exempt from other local permitting.

On a final note, all parties agreed to establish the visioning sessions among all stakeholders as an initial step, with the intent of better understanding the stakeholders' visions on how to maintain this valuable ecosystem and better assess all adequate funding opportunities that would aid in the continuous protection and care of the land.

**OTHER BUSINESS** – The following items were discussed:

1. The Pioneer Valley Yacht Club will be submitting an RDA for a lighting project in the near future to upgrade the dock lighting to LED lamps.
2. Ms. Chasen reminded all present about the upcoming town-wide, socially-distant cleanup event on April 11<sup>th</sup> (rain date to be May 2<sup>nd</sup>); some commissioners will provide assistant on specific locations to guide the volunteers.

Meeting adjourned at 8:37 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

*Bianca Damiano*