

Town of Danby Conservation Advisory Council

Minutes of Meeting on Tuesday, January 14, 2020
Danby Town Hall, 1830 Danby Road, Danby, New York

Council Members present: Clare Fewtrell (new Chair), Joel Gagnon, Mary Woodsen, George Adams, Ruth Sherman, Katharine Hunter (new member).

Council Members absent: Don Schaufler

Others present: Jason Haremza (Town Planner), Jonathan Zisk (prospective CAC member), Ronda Roaring (Danby resident), Bill Keokosky (Danby resident)

Meeting opened at 7:04 pm

Introductions

Clare Fewtrell introduced herself as the new Chair (been in Danby since 1992 - and only beginning to understand what a wonderful place it is) and invited other members and audience to do the same. Katharine Hunter was the only new member present. She has been in Danby since 2013. She is also in Community Council. In the audience and thinking of joining CAC, Jonathan Zisk has been in Danby around 15 years, is very involved in the environment and with a background in analytical chemistry, useful for studying problems in the environment.

Deletions or Additions to Agenda

Deletion: 2019 Annual Report – Matt Ulinski (former chair) will get this to the CAC by the February meeting.

Addition: updating CAC website documents

Approve Minutes MOTION for Draft November 12, 2019 minutes
Ruth Sherman moved to approve

Joel Gagnon seconded
All in favor, except Katharine Hunter, who abstained

Approve Minutes MOTION for Draft December 10, 2019 (notes, not minutes since quorum not present that day). Change requested and made: Sherman walked Fewtrell property, not Adams.

Joel Gagnon moved to approve
Ruth Sherman seconded
Unanimous approval

PoF: Betsy Keokosky (secretary) requested some feedback on depth of detail that members would like to see in minutes and most felt that current level was useful, rather than a summarization.

Privilege of Floor comments

None. Chair Fewtrell noted that additional comments from audience should go through the Chair.

Reports and Updates

1) New Chairperson sets direction for the year:

Clare Fewtrell gave a description of some of her expectations as new Chairperson. She is “diffident” and still learning about environmental issues. She needs others to contribute since she sees her role as “galvanizing” the Council. She has been a member for two years and has been “disappointed” in what was accomplished in that time. Natural Resources Inventory was a huge achievement but she felt it owed more to C.J. Randall (former town planner) than to CAC efforts. She pushed members to contribute more and be held to a higher standard, saying that she herself would work harder. She noted that it was important to have a quorum at meetings so members should attend if they possibly can, and also follow-up on commitments.

2) Discussion of Plans and Goals for 2020 -- What would we like to see happen?

a) Open Space Inventory (OPI)

Clare Fewtrell requested new town planner tell us how to go about getting OPI accomplished. Jason Haremza suggested prioritizing what is in Natural Resources Inventory (NRI), not reinventing the wheel. He suggested that members individually go through NRI maps and information and make a list of 10-25 suggestions to start off open space inventory list, send them to him, and see where they overlap to get a “good starting point”, rather than start as a committee. Flexibility in how to create OPI.

Joel Gagnon “complemented” what Jason Haremza had said by noting Danby needs to refine the zoning map. Protect areas from being developed; identify areas of town more deserving of conservation. He sees the CAC playing an important and early role in that.

PoF: Rhonda Roaring wanted it clarified whether this was an open space inventory or a plan. Joel Gagnon said plan was informed by inventory. We have an inventory.

PoF: Betsy Keokosky (secretary) raised the question of whether the Natural Resources Inventory was the same as an Open Space Inventory, or just fed into it. – she asked hadn’t we wanted more public input?

The Chair agreed and asked members how they feel about the Town Planner’s suggestion.

PoF. Rhonda Roaring said it would be useful to work with a large map. Define what was already known up front, and then fill in the other unknowns. Mary Woodsen said that private property is a barrier to protection. Joel Gagnon noted that there are still some things we can do.

PoF: Rhonda Roaring reminded group that Deputron Hollow was an area we were trying to protect.

In conclusion to this discussion: In lieu of access to the GIS mapping online, Jason Haremza offered to enlarge the last 3 maps (“forests”, “water quality”, and “agriculture” – Betsy Keokosky also suggested “scenic resources”) in NRI printout so people could see them better. Ruth Sherman said it would be helpful to have a big map to draw on at the meeting. Jason Haremza said he was still working on a method to project GIS on a wall. Katharine Hunter suggested we could divide and conquer by working on areas that each was familiar with.

Jason Haremza said he could break up the NRI report into several pdf files on town website so parts are smaller and easier to download. He said we need to block out an hour of agenda for a work session if discussion held during meeting. Clare Fewtrell will be out of the country for the March meeting. We may decide to have a separate meeting in February or April to work on this.

b) Should we pursue becoming a Conservation Board?

It was decided to delay this decision until we had completed OPI.

c) Posting signs at easements

These would say something like “Protected by Danby Conservation Easement.” See what Finger Lakes Land Trust easement signs look like. Joel Gagnon suggested a contest for a graphic design for Danby Conservation Easement sign.

d) Proposed Danby Planning Group

Joel Gagnon, new Town Supervisor, explained ideas for new Danby Planning Group that would have core group of members from each town Board and the CAC, as well as interested members of the public. Regular participation is required to vote. The goal is to revise the zoning ordinance and write a new Comprehensive Plan. The first meeting will be in February.

Short-term: Changes would be made in existing regulations to hold situation until updated plan made. Long-term questions concern 1) what do we want, 2) where do we want it, and 3) where does potential for development exist? Jason Haremza has the expertise to provide necessary support.

Clare Fewtrell, Katharine Hunter, Ruth Sherman, and possibly George Adams, expressed interest in being on board.

Secretary Betsy Keokosky said that she would be interested as a member of the public. Joel Gagnon said that people could jump in at any point. There will be working focus groups. He is chairing it.

d) Interactions between the CAC & Planning board

Clare Fewtrell asked why there haven't been any? It was explained that the main planning board applications are to divide one lot into two lots; haven't had applicants evaluating properties for environmental impact. The current process does not have any environmental evaluation. The old process, which did was rescinded.

e) Ash tree harvest

Don Schaufler had walked the Danby-owned, West Danby Water District property last fall and made a list of ash trees that could be harvested before the emerald ash borer or other diseases killed them. Former CAC Chair, Matt Ulinski, took a CAC resolution recommending harvest to the Town Board. He proposed to the Town Board that the CAC implement the harvest. Joel Gagnon said Town board had declared itself lead agency for SEQR review, but is looking to the CAC to help assess the environmental impacts of harvest and how best to mitigate them. The Town Board had suggested we could possibly save some ash trees. To do it we would need to cut down and sell some trees to purchase the chemicals and equipment to save the others. PoF: Jonathan Zisk explained how problematic this was and how many different opinions there were on the subject since it might affect pollinators and requires a trunk injection that can spread through roots. The state might be prohibiting chemicals needed. George Adams has seen injector and chemicals used at Cornell Botanical gardens. Jon Zisk said that he had treated a tree on his property. He suggested equipment could be bought by town and Joel Gagnon added that it could be offered for public protection of other trees.

Clare Fewtrell reminded the group that speed was of the essence in our decision. We had a small window of opportunity before trees might be infected.

PoF: Jonathan Zisk said that there were two SEQR questions – one if the trees were harvested and another if they were treated.

Jason Haremza asked if the remuneration from a harvest was worth the effort of doing a SEQR? The original discussion of

simple harvesting had expanded into a complicated set of options.

Clare Fewtrell concluded that we didn't have enough information to make a decision. She asked George Adams, Jonathan Zisk and Don Schaufler (as a long distance consultant – he is in Florida) to come up with a recommendation concerning:

- Environmental Impact of chemical injection
- Costs/Benefits analysis
- Mechanics of which harvesting option – look at possibility of each one;

Joel Gagnon also mention Bruce Richards – in the lumber business and on Danby Planning Board - as an additional source of information. Jason Haremza said that the project description is vague for a SEQR, which needs specifics.

f) **Other goals –**

Ruth Sherman brought up working with highway department on class for training them about invasive species. She will continue to work on this.

Katharine Hunter suggested a blurb on CAC activities in the DAN each month. She would write it if people feed her information.

3) Follow-Up on Completed Easement Monitoring Forms – Clare Fewtrell

We did 4 inspections – should we send copies of easement monitoring forms to each of easement holders, with a cover letter? Members agreed that transparency was the best policy and it was also a good idea to let owners understand that we are keeping track of the easements. Clare Fewtrell will put together and send.

4) Follow-up on Clare Fewtrell Property Easement Proposal

Clare Fewtrell wants to finish baseline report that she is working on before continuing.

5) Other Easement Prospects –

Various names were mentioned:

Mary Woodsen suggested Dan Hoffman on Bruce Hill. Ted Crane and Pam Goddard were mentioned. Also Bill Evans' contacts.

Another was June Pollack who has property on Hornbrook Rd by the Danby Community Park. (Dan Klein had talked to her in the past but those negotiations had stalled.) Rhonda Roaring brought up her list from the past and Clare Fewtrell asked her to resend it. The general concept, as Mary Woodsen noted, is that it's one thing to express interest but another to go ahead and do it. Clare Fewtrell wants to create a more systematic approach, set priorities, and get suggestions. She asked CAC members to come up with names, addresses and tax map numbers, so that the CAC can compile a list of prospects and set priorities. (Some priorities suggested were: properties with more than 50 acres, special areas of focus, adjacent to already protected areas, such as bordering Danby State Forest or Deputron Hollow)

6) Update documents on website

Joel Gagnon and Mary Woodsen had revised the Easement template and it will be posted on the CAC website. Two documents concerning easements (easement fact sheet & tax information) also need updating. Clare Fewtrell is working on these.

7) Status of Herbicide on Pipelines – George Adams

Not covered.

Next Meeting is on January 11 at 7p.m.

Adjournment

The meeting ended at 8:40 p.m.

Submitted by Elizabeth Keokosky (Secretary)