

Town of Danby Conservation Advisory Council

Minutes of Meeting on Tuesday, February 11, 2020
Danby Town Hall, 1830 Danby Road, Danby, New York

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

Council Members absent: Don Schaufler

Others present: Dan Klein (former CAC member and Tompkins County legislature member), Ronda Roaring (Danby resident), Bill Keokosky (Danby resident)

Meeting opened at 7:04 pm

CAC Chairperson, Fewtrell, welcomed Jon Zisk as a new member who had already been put to work last meeting working with Adams on researching a State Environmental Quality Review Act (SEQR) for Town Board concerning West Danby property ash harvest or ash treatment. (see below)

Deletions or Additions to Agenda – None, though Fewtrell mentioned that Town Planner Haremza will not be able to attend session segment on Open Space Inventory.

Approve Minutes MOTION for January 14, 2012

Joel Gagnon moved to approve

Ruth Sherman seconded

Unanimous approval

Reports and Updates

1) 2019 Annual CAC Report by previous CAC Chair, Ulinski

- Report had been submitted to members previously as an email attachment. Only edited change was a request by Woodsen to remove the reference to her name (over confusion of whether she had left CAC or taken a respite) in the “Membership” paragraph.

Approve and forward to Town Board MOTION for CAC 2019 Annual Report as written by Ulinski (former chair) and edited to include Woodsen’s request

Gagnon moved to approve

Zisk seconded

Unanimous approval

- Edit to be made by secretary who will send report to supervisor for town board and to town clerk to be sent to Department of Environmental Conservation (DEC). **The final version is appended to these minutes.**

Privilege of the Floor

- Klein took privilege of the floor to make comments on West Danby Land Management in regards to dying ash trees, which is an item on today’s agenda. He reported on a previous decision on management of West Danby Town land while he was a member of CAC. (Tompkins County Legislature had also discussed a similar question of management of the county’s approximately 60 acres of forests). He said at the time, the decision had been made to keep the West Danby property old growth (that is, unlogged) for the following reasons (he commented only on logging, not injecting trees with insecticide):
 - Old growth is rarest habitat in Tompkins – injecting trees was not incompatible with old growth, but logging was)
 - Trees left alone are sometimes found to be resistant providing seeds for future resistance.
 - Logging is disruptive and always does damage
 - Dead trees provide habitat
 - Logging creates light for invasive species to move in.
 - Logging equipment can carry invasive species in
 - CAC should make decisions based on environmental and conservation principles, not monetary.

- Disturbed soil (from logging) is less effective for carbon sequestration and the trees, when converted to lumber (whereby holding on to the CO₂) could easily come from elsewhere. All the waste branches, sawdust, etc. left behind return carbon to atmosphere
 - Leaving old growth is the simplest management
 - All of Danby is logged-over forest and the municipal government is in the unique position of just allowing old growth to take over.
 - Old growth is inspirational
- Woodsen commented that dying ash also let in light and invasive species as they die back. She mentioned the future threat of thousand cankers disease on black walnut trees.
 - PoF:Roaring agreed with Klein and said that she had come across some blight resistant chestnut trees left in the woods, which she had later tested.

Reports and Updates

1) Recommendation on Ash Tree Harvest and Treatment at the West Danby Water Board property – Zisk and Adams

- Zisk went over draft report that he and Adams had researched and written. (It had been sent previously to members by email and is included at the end of these minutes)
 - If the Emerald Ash Borer (EAB) is within 30 miles it is a threat; it will be here shortly but it is not here now. If you use chemicals before it arrives they are wasted so we have some time. You have to have an infestation before they can be used.
 - Zisk disagreed that the West Danby location is classical old-growth woods. He noted that it has so many underground streams that it is almost hydric soil. Also has a pit and mound topology, which indicates that it has not been farmed or logged for a long time. Parts of it have a well over-45 degree slope. It was not conducive to old growth. He thinks it is too wet to have aggregates or reserve carbon in the soil.

Report does not recommend logging which may degrade the habitat so badly it would take decades to recover. Zisk agreed with Klein that the soil's ability to sequester carbon would be badly reduced.

Fundamental message is that if CAC wanted to use poisons it would have to be trunk injected. Soil drench or aerosol spray would end up in the ground water. Zisk said that the effect on animals would be minimal. Trunk injection would be after trees had flowered so less effect on pollinators. No effect on birds since they tend to eat live grubs.

But might not be possible to do any chemical treatment at all because DEC restricts the two main chemicals needed. Have to become a licensed applicator unless it's for home use.

Of the four chemicals you could possibly use on Emerald Ash Borer, there is some overlap with the ones used for the Hemlock Woolly Adelgid. Getting someone licensed for application has a long-term practicality. Danby could become a town that did our own trunk injecting. It would take a year to get trained. The DEC is open to that.

Zisk noted that issues Klein mentioned are "dear to his heart," but logging can be done for different reasons. Can log for habitat management or to get rid of weed trees. But he would only log this property if there was a tree that looked like it would destroy things if it fell.

In Conclusion Zisk thinks it is foolish to just let EAB come in and ravage area. He and Adams recommend training for someone in Danby. (<https://www.dec.ny.gov/permits/45618.html>) Adams added that It is important to learn how to save trees because there are so many trees that will be affected in Danby. Now there is one EAB in Newfield but there are dozen of already confirmed sightings of Hemlock Woolly Adelgid. It already exists all over Danby. In Michigan

Hollow and Lindsay-Parsons Preserve, and its distribution is under-estimated.

The discussion continued with others contributing:

- Fewtrell asked about the Finger Land Trust properties surrounding the West Danby site. Should we talk to them? Gagnon said that the Land Trust has taken a “hands-off attitude” to any sort of forest management.
- Woodsen emphasized that the really important tree to preserve is the hemlock since it is unique in its habitat and there is no tree to take its place. Sherman noted that ash is a succession tree.
- Hunter said that she has saved a lot of hemlocks on her property (with a trunk spray not an injection) since there are many things that need the habitat that exists around them to live in. The hemlocks are beautiful (as everyone agreed) and the gorges without them would make this area less of a tourist attraction. She said the cost of what she paid for many trees was less than what she would have paid if one tree fell on her house.
- Fisk said NY is not outlawing chemicals that might be a problem with pollinators – it is regulating their use.
- Gagnon said that the only reason we are weighing in on this at all is that the Town asked for guidance. Logging was not something we had wanted to do. He said we had not committed to “old growth” as a concept but we had committed to “old trees.” And there were some inspiring trees on the West Danby property – beautiful ash. Others remarked also on the basswood and beech. Gagnon noted that there is a lot to be taken into consideration here concerning environmental impacts. Chemical treatment was not on the radar when we made the recommendation to the Town Board to salvage-cut ash for lumber before they were ruined.

- PoF:Keokosky (in audience) mentioned that there was no market for ash since it was overloaded with that type of lumber. Also it was noted was that the current tariff with China had killed the market there in hardwoods.
- Zisk responded that the “vagaries of the market” could change in a year. And it could be 1-3 years before EAB gets to these woods. Adams remarked that estimates are made on only partial observations – so result in under-estimations. A comment was made that we could put up traps for the borer. People relayed where they had seen ash and hemlocks and possibilities of infections.
- Gagnon summed up the discussion by observing that we are now in a completely different place from before, since we are now talking about active management. He reminded group that the CAC had not finished the management plan for West Danby. Other Danby-owned property on Deputron Hollow was on a steep slope and we were going to leave it to “do its own thing.” The West Danby property soils were much better soil (with which Zisk disagreed).
- Zisk said that “management” was not a dirty word. One management idea is that forest is considered a repository for habitat. Another is that management might be for the forest itself, to cut down trees to save others, cut out weed trees, etc. But such management requires expertise and is very expensive. Gagnon said that Schaufler’s ideas had also included the idea of eliminating competition.
- Gagnon said the conversation had become about a management plan, which is good, especially since we have new people on the board with new insights and perspectives. It has become more in-depth. But at this point we need to return the information back to the town board.

- Fewtrell, in closing the discussion, said that if we are deciding not to cut the timber then the urgency of the debate has decreased. The original intent was if we are going to cut, to do it soon, but, if we are going to treat, we can do it later.
- Fisk ended by saying that he would send an edited copy of the report to everyone for comments and then send Gagnon a final copy to give to town board.

2) Other easement prospects - Suggestions were:

- Adams asked what can I tell person to induce them to take an easement?
- Explanatory documents on web page: easement template, etc.
- Improve documentation on CAC web page – Town Planner already made changes- what is there now is up to date.
- Part of learning process is going through making an easement of Clare’s property
- Need link to Finger Lakes Land Trust
- People need to know what is involved
- PoF:Roaring suggested thinking about a group discount for surveys

3) Update on Invasive Species Training – Sherman reported no progress. Had not heard back from Laura Shawley (who is reported to be ill) - Still not set a date for PRISM classes.

4) Update on use of Herbicide on Pipelines - Adams turned project over to Zisk, and Hunter, who expressed interest. Hunter noted that if they (companies with pipelines) have a right of way then they can spray.

5) Open Space Inventory

Questions were raised on priority areas to conserve

- Reference to Jake Brenner, an Ithaca College professor who teaches human environmental geography and is interested in society and the environment. In the past he produced a 5-page paper giving property weights to prioritize properties for

conservation easement procurement. Fewtrell noted it was of use to us but not in its present form. He had used a different set of maps. George and Jon volunteered to contact him but Jon will do so as he knows him. Can his weighting system be used with the NRI? Using his data depends on knowledge of GIS. Gagnon noted it was a useful first pass. Now with GIS we have layers that can be superimposed on each other.

- Members generally discussed problems of reading maps to discover which areas had more possibilities.
- Tools to find owner and parcel number
 - GIS mapping on Tompkins county web site
 - On X – Hunt uses this app to give parcel number
- Follow up – talk to Jason Haremza, C.J.Randall, or Jake Brenner to guide us.
- PoF:Keokosky (secretary) Was it ever clear why County couldn't put NRI GIS data on their website? Then it would be available from a browser. Needs follow-up with Haremza.

Other Tasks for Follow-up

- **Zisk and Adams return W. Danby report to Town Supervisor and Town Board**
- **Secretary contact Jordie van Ham about Danby email problems; make an appointment to work with him. Jon and Ruth need Danby email addresses and George has a password problem. The Secretary needs to have her computer set up so that messages to her town address are automatically forwarded to her.**
- **Jon will talk to Jake Brenner – how can we use his criteria?**
- **George will talk to Jason about overlaying maps from the NRI when working on the OSI.**
- **Secretary get minutes to Clare by Feb 24th since she will be out of town and miss the next meeting.**

Next Meeting is on March 10 at 7p.m.

Adjournment

The meeting ended at 8:52 p.m.

Submitted by Elizabeth Keokosky (Secretary)