

Town of Danby Conservation Advisory Council (CAC)

Minutes of Video Conference (Zoom) Meeting on
Tuesday, July 14, 2020
Danby, New York

Council Members present: Clare Fewtrell (chair), Joel Gagnon, Don Schaufler (late entry into Zoom), Ruth Sherman, Katharine Hunter, George Adams, Jonathan Zisk, Mary Woodsen

Council Members absent: Bill Evans

Others present: Jason Haremza (Town Planner – attended for 10 minutes), Ronda Roaring (Danby resident and member of Planning Group)

Zoom Meeting was called to order at 7:05

Deletions or Additions to Agenda

Secretary Keokosky asked that some research she had done on availability of grants from Community Forestry Funding in relation to sale of Aaron St. John property be added as a report. It was added as separate item before Planning Group and working subgroups report. Fewtrell added a DAN article discussion as item #1.

Privilege of the Floor (PoF) - None

Approval of Minutes for May 12, 2020 still deferred until Gagnon had an opportunity to review his report on CAC history given that meeting.

Approve Minutes MOTION for June 9, 2020
Gagnon moved to approve
Fewtrell seconded
Unanimous approval

REPORTS AND UPDATES

1) DAN (Danby Area News) article discussion

Fewtrell has been writing a summary of monthly CAC meetings for submitting to the DAN. She checked in with the group to make sure that all agreed that anyone who publishes in the DAN and speaks in the name of CAC understands approval is first needed from the group. She apologized for being guilty of not doing so previously, and would make it an ongoing consideration. However, the deadline of the DAN following so closely the date of our meetings makes this difficult. PoF:Roaring suggested just asking editor Ted Crane to hold the space. Gagnon suggested sending potential articles out to the group and giving them a deadline for objecting.

2) Tax abatement discussion documented for Town Board

To document the CAC discussion of the Planning Group proposal, "Tax abatement in exchange for conservation easement," for the benefit of the Town Board, Fewtrell asked if the information could simply be copied and pasted from the relevant section of the June minutes. Members agreed on this.

3) Easement signs

Adams led continued discussion of layout, picture, and lettering of Danby Easement signs for posting on a Danby Easement property. Adams asked questions: Does this have the message we want? Does it have a nice composition? Thirdly, is it the right picture?

A new feature he added was a small QR Code that replaced a lengthy website reference. When taking a picture with a smart phone it will optionally take you to the webpage. The group discussed the use of black and white vs. color, how to give the sign a clean look without too much detail, problems of public access vs. private property (group decided maybe two signs were needed but, for branding recognition purposes, it was important to keep a single image for both). CAC members voted on a monochromatic format with black to gray shading. Adams, taking these decisions and ideas, will go back to the drawing board and will get back to others by email before next meeting. Remaining question: how much will this cost?

4) Logging Ordinance –Don Schaufler and George Adams

Adams reported that he had gone through copies of logging legislation, written from 1995 -2012, from other local towns, and they were very similar. “They present a known formula that is enforceable,” he said. “Since no one has struck them down we shouldn’t be afraid to make our own law”. He noted that the advice of Elizabeth Thomas, Trumansburg Town Supervisor, was to just to go ahead and do it. His comment was to take simplest and least intrusive legislation, since laws vary mostly on severity of their penalties. At a minimum, the Town needs notification for big logging jobs.

Schaufler reported that Scott Davis, former logging ordinance group member, had now rejoined the committee. Gagnon commented that Matt Ulinski wanted to be included, which was recommended for the connection to town board he provides. Fewtrell noted that this was the original intention.

Adams quoted Schaufler’s news that timber sales are now recorded like land transactions. (see <https://www.dec.ny.gov/lands/70906.html> Tompkins County is in DEC Region 7)

He added that this is a good source to use since loggers don’t usually self-notify to towns - although this is required by all the legislation. Adams said he sent letters to 60 Loggers (concerning another problem) and got phone calls back from 6 of them. Reputable loggers will have insurance already and put everything back to rights and had actually even written some of the ordinances. The need is to make rules applicable, but not too onerous. Important to choose a reportable job filter based on job area size or board feet (or other quantifiables – such as minimum bid?) to select only jobs that require further town and/or professional forester oversight.

Fewtrell affirmed this is what committee should be looking into. Schaufler wanted to do more research. He asked that all CAC questions be sent to either him or Adams. Adams will bring a progress report to next meeting that includes a matrix of options. Both wanted feedback at the next meeting.

5) Management Plans for Town-owned Lands

Zisk reported on his progress with Management plans. He said that NRCS (Natural Resources Conservation Service – USDA) has a template. He had no prior management plan for Deputron Hollow but he folded in all the information summarized by previous draft plans so far and pulled out headings from Sherman’s paper. Considering conservation vs. preservation aspects, he noted that a fair amount of work has been put into a plan for the Sylvan Lane property. However, he decided to work on Deputron Hollow property first since the general format would apply to both.

Continuing disagreement was voiced by Roaring on her part, access, and contribution to the plans. Gagnon said that CAC should be allowed some internal discussion before plans are put before the public – though Roaring felt she was not “the public” due to previous involvement. Zisk reported that he would be closer to final draft by next meeting.

- 6) PoF: Keokosy(secretary) reported on the Community Forestry Grant program monies available in the next several years from USDA and DEC for municipalities to buy forest property. There is a delay in the availability of both of them. DEC requested money for funding but reduced NY State money available, due to Covid 19, made their budget passing questionable, and, in addition, it might take a year to implement. USDA pays a matching grant of 50% if basic requirements are met but it has a timetable each year. Still they were worth pursuing. Further contact information is attached to these minutes in Appendix A.

Discussion followed on the controversial question of whether the Town should try to purchase Aaron St. John properties on Deputron Hollow Rd. The 3 parcels of around 33 acres are now up for sale on NY Land Quest for \$54,900. The road is seasonal and so far has remained undeveloped, but Gagnon re-iterated the problems voiced by the town lawyer of using a seasonal road to protect property. To comments that land purchased requires too much oversight, Zisk responded that conservation also required stewardship and CAC needs to spend time checking maintenance of either type of property.

Gagnon said the question was whether the Town wants to or ought to acquire land. This question had made him hesitate to follow through when Roaring first acted as intermediary earlier in the year. There were mixed responses. Some people felt it was rewarding a bad actor to pay St. John now after he has decimated the timber on the land. Other people felt that it was important to buy the land for future generations while we could, since it would only become more of a premium resource. Because Deputron Hollow is a unique natural area (UNA) within a proposed protected open space, near other easements it was generally felt worth considering. But people were concerned it would lose the town tax money and increase CAC overhead to buy them. Ideally, the idea was to buy the parcels, put easements on them, and then resell them.

As a first step, CAC members agreed that Gagnon should approach St. John about a “bargain sale,” which allows the owner to sell more cheaply and gain immediate tax deductions, and feel out how amenable he is to sale to the town.

7) Fewtrell Easement – next steps

This discussion was skipped for lack of time.

Instead there was some discussion about items on agenda for next meeting

There was no Executive session

Next Meeting through Zoom is on August 14 at 7p.m.

Adjournment

The meeting adjourned at 8:54 p.m.

Submitted by Elizabeth Keokosky (Secretary)

Appendix A: Funds for town buying land

Contact in DEC (Community Forestry Grant Program in proposed budget)

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Contact in US Forest Service

Neal Bungard

Natural Resource Program Leader

Forest Service

State and Private Forestry

Eastern Region

p: 603-868-7719

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271 Mast Road

Durham, NH 03824

www.fs.fed.us

Community Forestry Grant Program

Matching 50% grant for half of land price

requirements: more than 5 acres, 75% forested, public access, actively managed