

Montague Conservation Commission

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MEETING MINUTES

Thursday April 14, 2022- 6:30pm

Meeting Held In-Person AND via ZOOM

Commissioners Present: Mark Fairbrother, Anthony Reiber, Sean Werle, Toby Carter, Sean Werle, Donna Francis, Al Averill

Absent: Margaux. Reckard.

Staff: Suzanne LoManto.

6:30PM: MOTION by T. Carter to accept the minutes of February 10, 2022. Seconded by S. Werle. VOTE: Fairbrother (AYE), Werle (AYE), Reiber (AYE), Averill (AYE), Fermann (AYE), Carter (AYE), Francis (AYE). MOTION PASSES.

6:30PM PUBLIC HEARING Notice of Intent #2022-01 filed by William Brule for construction of a single family home in the buffer zone of wetlands. The work will occur on West Chestnut Hill Road at Assessors Map 52 Lot 71.

Present: Bill Brule, Ms. Brule (Owners), Ward Smith (Wendell Wetland Services)

108 is not the official number of the property.

Commissioners visited the site on 4/6. M. Fairbrother visited the site on his own time. Commissioners were surprised to see clear cutting and grubbing within presumed wetlands on the north side of the parcel (not where the house is proposed). Mark Fairbrother found evidence of frog and other amphibian eggs within the cleared area. The wetlands does not show up on MassDEP wetlands mapping layer, however, the south boundary of the wetlands on the property have been delineated by Ward Smith.

Ward Smith was hired by the couple to figure out the wetlands issue as related to the location of the house location (subsequent to the north segment of the property being clear cut). The couple acknowledges unintentional mis-step and have volunteered to restoration the affected wetlands area.

Ward Smith makes the recommendation to break the project into two parts- an order of condition for the new house and an enforcement order to comply with the restoration plan for the unauthorized cutting.

The couple presented the plan of the proposed home, driveway, septic and wetland buffer. This updated plan identifies a retaining wall, designed to avoid adding fill in the 50' buffer. The nature of the retaining wall, infill and grading changes were discussed at length. The retaining wall was not part of the initial submittal.

Al Averill asks about Title 5 septic requirements. Ward Smith states that if the plan meets Title 5 it's presumed to meet the Wetland Protection Act. It is legal to put a leach field within a 100' buffer zone provided the Town does not have a more stringent bylaw (Montague does not).

Through previous conversation with Ward Smith, the Conservation Agent asked for an increase of the buffer.

Al Averill asked about the how surface water moves across the site. Ward Smith responds that the water drains southwest and clarifies wetland jurisdiction regarding draining and direction.

Sally Pick (resident) asks where the salamander/frog eggs were seen. Ward Smith believes the egg masses were not in vernal pools, and likely in manmade pools of water. Fairbrother continues that restoring the buffer zone for eggs (etc.)

will be part of the restoration plan.

J. Fermann requests to see an updated plan, which shows that the homeowners are attempting to limit the contour changes outside of the 50' buffer area.

Mark Fairbrother states that he understands the plan changes as discussed, but will require the applicants to supply the Commission with an updated plan at the May meeting.

Ward Smith agrees with the Commission and he will consult with the engineer, Shawn Kimberly, about changes to the plan. Mr. Brule requested that hearing be continued so that the plan may be revised.

Mark Fairbrother declared the hearing continued to May 12, 2022 at 6:30pm.

7:15 PM PUBLIC MEETING RDA #2022-01 filed by NSTAR Electric Company d/b/a Eversource Energy to conduct invasive plant management within jurisdictional resource areas. The work is located along the Eversource 312 Line right-of-way on the Montague Plains.

Present: Brett Trowbridge (VHB) Simon Hildt (Eversource)

Brett Trowbridge (vhb) presents for Eversource. The intent is to mitigate the invasive plants and encourage rare plants, some of which are within the 100' buffer. (Map) The site is north of Plains Road. The aerial images indicate the habitat management area as selected by the Division of Fisheries and Wildlife.

There are two intermittent drainages on the plan. The locations of the invasive species are labeled.

The proposed treatment is herbicide use by licensed applicators. The treatments will be targeted (backpack) spraying rather than broadcast spraying. There is a "no spray order" around standing water and the project will have oversight from a biologist.

Sue Richardson (resident) asks for the name of the herbicide.

B. Trowbridge does not know the suite of chemical, but they are the same that Eversource uses in their management throughout the right-of-way. He can get that information, if requested.

Simon Hildt from Eversource confirms that vhb will not be applying the chemicals. He expects that the licensed applicator will use a chemical recognized for sensitive areas because of its shortened life. This work is at the direction of Natural Heritage.

J. Ferman asks if physical removal of vegetation is an option.

Shawn Hildt answers "yes, where it makes sense."

Al Averill asks what they hope to gain, in light of the nature of invasive plants.

B. Trowbridge comments that the Division ordered the work to create a buffer for rare plants.

S. Pick asks if the rare and endangered species are in the right-of-way or in the forested areas.

B. Trowbridge comments that that the rare plants are in the right-of-way.

Tony Reiber comments that pulling out invasive plants by the roots out can make space for more invasive plants.

MOTION by S. Werle for a negative (Box 2) determination for RDA #2022-01 filed by NSTAR Electric Company d/b/a Eversource Energy to conduct invasive plant management within jurisdictional resource areas. The work is located along the Eversource 312 Line right-of-way on the Montague Plains. Seconded by T. Reiber. VOTE Fairbrother (AYE), Reiber (AYE), WERLE (AYE), Fermann (AYE), Carter (AYE), Francis (AYE). MOTION PASSED 7:34pm

INFORMATIONAL BRIEFING- Asian Jumping Worms

Present: Paul Lipke, Sally Pick (residents)

Paul Lipke participated in a 5 hour training at UMASS about Asian Jumping Worms. There is no known solution to this emerging invasive. The worms eat leaf litter quickly, which causes local plants die. Dry soil and erosion is the result. Human activity is the main way that worms travel- through contaminated plants and soil. Good hygiene is important to mitigate the spread. Maple leaves are their favorite. Worms are found in the top two inches of soil.

Sally Pick shows a fact sheet from the University of Minnesota, which describes how to identify the worms, their behavior, and the result of their activity. Sally details how to kill the worms through various methods.

Paul shows images of damage done to soil due to Asian Worm invasion. Paul encourages education about hygiene.

T. Reiber asks about commercial composting operation. Paul responds that worms are destroyed through heat, but the aging piles of compost are problematic

The Commission will keep this in mind when permitting projects.

The Agent's Report

FirstLight wants to take out two hazardous trees at One Gatehouse way. The Conservation Commission gives FirstLight permission to remove and replace the trees.

The rest of the Agent Report was postponed until May due to Walter's unexpected absence.

MOTION by D. Francis to ADJURN Seconded by J. Fermann VOTE: Fairbrother (AYE), Reiber (AYE), Fermann (AYE), Carter (AYE), Francis (AYE), Werle (AYE) MEETING ADJURN 7:58pm.