

Town of Jackson
Conservation Commission Minutes
Regular Meeting - January 2, 2024 - 5:30PM
(Unofficial Until Approved)

Present: Dick Bennett, Brian Byrne, Ben Halcyon, Ken Kimball, Pam Smillie, Tom Seidel via Zoom, Mike Dufiliho

Attendees: Emily Benson, Hank Benesh

Approval of Minutes:

December 2023 Meeting Minutes

Pam amended the meeting minutes to clarify that there are no spots currently available at the community garden. **Motion to approve made by Brian, seconded by Dick. Ken abstained, Mike not present. All others approved.**

Storm Damage Review:

Emily Benson the town Emergency Management Director, discussed the ongoing process from the December 18th storm and flooding. She had toured the damaged with various officials from Homeland Security, FEMA and the Emergency Response Management Office to do an initial damage assessment of town properties and some private residences. The extent of damage to the region generated a great deal of interest and she would be taking other regional officials on additional tours. The next step is for the State to bring \$2.5 million in total damage claims for the State of NH and \$300,000 for Carrol County to qualify for federal disaster funding. Emily would be meeting with additional representatives from FEMA and Congresswoman Kuster's office in the next week. In order to help document damage to town properties she asked the Commission to provide estimates for damages at the town park/River Walk, Jackson Falls and Prospect Farm. Road Agent Gary Allen had estimated it would take around \$5,000 to restore the access road to the fire pond which is maintained by the Highway Department. The Eastside Walk Foundation which maintains the River Walk just spent around \$27,000 this summer with Recon Trail Design to resurface the walkway. After a brief discussion with the contractor he felt that it would take at least that amount to repair the damage but did not feel confident to redo the work in the same manner and would want to take additional measures to protect against future storms, Ben will follow up to get a more precise estimate. This led the Commission to discuss whether the purpose of the emergency funding was to replace as it was before the storm or would be an opportunity to build back to withstand larger storms, and account for the increase in cost of materials. Emily said this would be taken into account with the new Hazard Mitigation Plan but the communications from FEMA officials would only fund for pre storm status but the situation is currently fluid and it's most important to document damage for the state so the claims process can proceed for municipal and residential claims. Ken presented some photo documentation of the damage that occurred at Jackson Falls, he felt additional work would be needed to preserve trails and trees and not to just bring back to pre storm status. He said it would be very hard to estimate a replacement cost for the path protection work that had be done over the last 5 years because all the labor and wood chips had been donated. He estimated that it could take \$30,000-40,000 to harden the trail surfaces to protect roots from foot traffic and to resist the inevitable flood damage. Pam stated the sod surfaces that had been established resisted washing out and

that some other trail covering materials may be easier than the wood chips to spread. Ken felt that the sod was good for directing foot traffic but a more robust trail surface is needed. Emily said this was an opportunity to look for additional long term funding separate from the FEMA funds. Dick and Brian felt there may not be a stable long term option that would resist flooding and the commission should plan on replacing the low cost materials when they wash out with a contractor providing labor to do work in a timely manner. Ken said he would provide an estimate for Emily that would price the costs of path materials and contractor labor to install them and to also account for the plantings that were lost. Emily then discussed the damages that occurred at Prospect Farm and the work Gary Allen has done to provide temporary access. Ken said most of the damage repair on Prospect Farm will be done by the Highway Department since JSTF had spent time this summer repairing the drainage ditches and water bars on the trails at Prospect which kept damage to a minimum. There was widespread damage on Forest Service Roads in town with multiple overlapping jurisdictions. Jackson Ski Touring will handle some of this work along with the Highway Department but additional resources for the areas of National Forest would be needed. Dick asked about the FEMA/BRIC funding that would be going towards culvert repair, Ben said this was in its initial phase and there was no funding attached for specific projects yet but the commission had signaled support for the plan and would provide more information when it is available. There was also a brief discussion on rain gauge locations and how to provide information on the water flow from storms in the summer versus when the ground is frozen. Dick wanted to know if the emergency funds would be used for reimbursement to the town or if we would need to wait until they are approved to spend. Emily said that from past experience everything needed to be well documented and since much of the emergency response work has already been done it would be a mix of the two but there may not be flexibility to modify or innovate how funds are spent beyond replacing things as they were prior to the storm.

Jackson Falls:

Following the discussion of damage to the trails Ken felt it important to protect the tree roots that had been exposed from foot traffic to limit damage and to preserve as many trees as possible. The additional erosion which occurred made walking on the paths and accessing the rocks much more difficult.

Ken made a motion to recommend the Select Board temporarily close the trails at Jackson Falls for protection of exposed tree roots and public safety until a full assessment can be made. Mike Seconded, All In Favor.

Gray's Inn:

Nothing to report

Community Garden:

Nothing to report

Wildcat River:

No VRAP information this month

Conservation Easements:

Please Submit monitoring reports by the Jan 15 deadline.

Wetlands:

Nothing to report

Dundee Community Forest:

MOA review

The Bartlett Select Board was discussing the addition of an at large member to the MOA language which would increase the board from 12-15 members. Town representatives would nominate an at large member and the management board would vote to approve. Dick was opposed to this change and felt it made the board too large. Since the Conservation Commission is not a signatory to the MOA we would recommend to the Select Board not to change the MOA to include an at large member.

New Business:

2023 Year End Report

Ben submitted a draft for review, and the Commission discussed the ideal length and purpose of the report. Ben will edit to make more concise and to fit the format of the printed Town Report.

Water Quality

Dick would like to bring the idea of Water Quality to the topics we discuss. Brian supported this idea and felt it was a good topic to help educate residents on how to minimize runoff from their properties and limit storm damage by keeping ditches properly maintained and check dams clear in order to keep roads from washing out. Ditches need to be regularly cleared from accumulated debris and sediment removed when full to keep from over-topping or blocking culverts.

Public Comment:

There were no additional comments.

Dick made a motion to adjourn. Pam Seconded. All approved.

Respectfully Submitted by Ben Halcyon

To view the full video recording of this meeting visit www.jacksonflicks.com/Jackson