

Conservation Commission MINUTES

Draft until Approved

Feb 3, 2020

5:30 PM, Town Office

Members present: Tom Seidel, Jeff Sires, Ken Kimball, Brian Byrne, Mike Dufilho, Bill Terry, Pam Smillie

Visitors include: Don Johnson and Tim Doyle, Forest Land Improvement., Dick Bennett, Selectboard, Bruce Curtis-McLane

Hank Benesh filmed. Susan Ross-Parent took notes based on Hank's film.

Review Minutes - approved with noting that minutes reflect the discussion of the 2021 budget during the last CC meeting but these numbers have since changed.

New Business

- Carbon Cash-Back Warrant Article / Bruce Curtis-McLane

Bruce returned to the CC to discuss the Carbon fee (not tax) to clarify and correct the minutes from last month. (Susan's emphasis on changes marked as CAPS.)

Heading he suggested: Warrant article to support action on climate change

Carbon fee vs carbon tax: Bruce clarified that the warrant article concerns a carbon FEE - collected funds that will go into a trust fund for a specific purpose as opposed to a tax that is collected by the government that puts those funds in the government coffers to be used as it sees fit.

Fees would only be charged to PRODUCERS of fossil-based fuels coming into the state from out of state. Individual users/car owners would not be charged but they would notice an increase in costs of fuel and that's where the free market and supply and demand would come in and make the adjustments.

This fee would be on large CARBON producers. Industries would be paying more for the fuel that they used. Bruce expanded on the statistics comparing NH families' increased costs with cash-back gains with the carbon fee system: 60% would break even or come out ahead each month with the amount they would be paying out and the rebate they would be getting. Bruce corrected the use of the word tax in the question, "How much do you expect the tax to be incurred at the pump?" It is not a tax but an increase in PRICE at the pump. The fossil-based fuel producer would pay the fees. NH produces no fossil fuels and biofuels, like wood, would be exempt. A further clarification: the OIL companies/producers of the carbon producing fuel would be setting the costs, not individual companies within the state. Bruce offered another example in addition to the oil tankers coming into Boston: coal trains from Pennsylvania would be charged the carbon fee. Bruce clarified that NH will sign on with two other NEW ENGLAND states (not specifically border states) to make an impact. There would be exemptions for farmers and military. They would be rebated to offset the increase in costs. Fees would be charged to importers but rebated to exporters in order to protect American industries.

Bruce continued with further presentation of the carbon fee proposal, reading from notes: Through the warrant article the citizens of Jackson are asking the state and federal elected officials to put a fee on carbon and rebate all the money collected back to the households. He continued: Why a warrant article? The climate emergency is old news. Our government's response has been completely inadequate up to now and it's time for citizens to demand action.

The warrant article does not obligate the town to make any immediate changes or spend any money. Up to 75 other towns are now considering this same warrant article and the more towns that pass the warrant article the louder the message will be. Scientists tell us we are warming the planet and that we need to stop before hitting catastrophic tipping points and basically keep fossil fuels in the ground and that solutions are to use solar, wind, hydro, energy storage, more energy efficiency. Economists are also weighing in on it: thousands of economists agree that a carbon fee and dividend program is the best (NH calls it Carbon Cash-back, the federal government calls it Carbon Fee and Dividend - they are exactly the same thing.) Reduce carbon pollution by 33% in 10 years. It's the most cost-effective way to reduce carbon pollution by creating incentives to use less fossil fuels and more renewable energy, increase efficiency and develop new clean energy technologies by unleashing American innovation. Other benefits would be growing the economy by creating the estimated 2.1 million net new jobs in 10 years and saving up to 90,000 premature deaths due to reduced pollution.

A fee is assessed on fossil fuel producers for each ton of carbon pollution that their product will produce. Border adjustment will protect American businesses for imports and exports: Fees will be assessed on imported fuels and products that don't pay for their carbon pollution and rebate the fees paid by American exporters to keep them competitive in foreign markets. This creates incentives for businesses to invest in innovative clean solutions. It is not a tax as the government keeps none of the money.

Dividends: all the fees will be put in a trust fund for rebate to households. Each legal US resident, 18 years or older, will get their share of the fees returned. Lower income households are likely to benefit more. It can be spent any way you want - it's a check given monthly. Anyone can benefit from it because the more you reduce your carbon footprint the bigger your net benefit will be.

Why are we supporting this? Let the market determine which non-polluting energy source to use.

Bruce continued by listing the bipartisan support of 3600 US economists, all four previous Federal Reserve Chairmen, 27 Nobel Laureate economists, James Baker and George Shultz, Republican icons, 77 US House members have signed on to the federal bill, including Congresswoman Annie Kuster from NH.

It will lead to a transition to a clean energy economy without hurting the most vulnerable people and the majority of households will get a net benefit.

In summary, scientists tell us we're experiencing a climate emergency and are warming the planet and we need to stop burning fossil fuels. We have solutions. Economists agree that a carbon fee and dividend will help solve the problem while enhancing the economy. We want our legislators to act decisively and act now. If we delay it will be harder and if we start charging a carbon fee, it will cost more. Carbon is invisible and free, so no one is making an effort to stop it. If the same amount of money spent on the Iraq war had been put into alternative energy and conservation, we'd be at our recommended levels now. Now, we are nowhere near.

Bruce answered questions from CC: that there are two bills: NH and federal. They are slightly different in the amount of the fee - NH charging \$20, the federal fee would be \$15, going up \$10 a year.

The request is to support the NH bill.

CC members question whether to vote to support the federal or state or both bills, and whether such a vote is in the purview of the commission and whether CC taking a stand on this warrant article is “mission creep?”

Discussion ensued based on a reading of the CC’s mission from the town website, <https://www.jackson-nh.org/conservation-commission>, with “protect the town’s natural resources” and “educate the public on environmental and conservation issues” in general to bridge the grey areas of the CC’s work on specific issues in Jackson.

The CC have discussed if they would support the warrant article. The article will go to the selectmen. Bill does not feel that a vote to recommend the warrant article to the town is in the purview of the CC as it is not from the CC. The CC can help educate the public through the minutes.

Pam suggests recommending it to the selectboard.

Ken proposed the CC pass a resolution that they are in favor of efforts and strongly encourage the town to reduce impacts of greenhouse gas emissions because it does affect town resources and that it’s up to the town and the selectmen to pick the mechanism of how to reduce emission. (He noted that while it’s a “wishy washy area,” there is no question that climate change is affecting the resources the CC manages.)

6 CC members vote for. 2 abstain.

Mike notes that the Exchange on the NHPR did a segment on carbon cash back.

<https://www.nhpr.org/post/former-energy-sec-ernest-j-moniz-nuclear-threats-and-climate-change>

Tom wrapped up with a bit of history that the CC has voted to support warrant articles that were more specific to Jackson.

Prospect Farm - the warrant article about proposed rules for Prospect Farm use has been taken out of consideration for this year. Questions remain and Tom suggests that CC would like to lead/take part in the discussion about the rules of use. This has come up over the years. CC created a draft of rules at one time. Rule clarification is needed, even with the idea of the fewer rules the better.

- General Management Plan process - Question: who is the area to serve, Jackson residents or the general public? There were trails and other broad public use before the land was given to the town. Reading the will, it gives the land to the “inhabitants of Jackson” for use as a “public park.”

Bill states that there are private parks and public parks in the state.

Ken notes that the rules in the latest warrant are Chief Perley’s interpretation and that the selectmen have treated the area over the years as a public park. Do they continue as it is, or hire legal counsel to sort it out? Bill counters that the Chief was basing his interpretation on a written document and in an effort to enforce the rules established long ago. Tom disagreed slightly explaining that the problem is the interpretation of “public” and that this confusion is new - that previous discussions of rules did not include the discussion of the broader public except for town resident-specific use list: use of snow machines and using the key to open the gate, and Jackson residents can ski on the town lands at Prospect Farm with a pass that they can pick up for free from JSTF. These Jackson resident-only uses did not limit further use of the land by the broader public (hunting, hiking...) Bill stresses the need for understanding the original requirements and clarity of the rules. Ken reminded the group that they have proposed to the selectmen that the CC wants to update the Forest Management Plan --including a recreation plan. Does CC need to ask

the selectmen to get legal counsel to determine the intent of the will regarding “public” or is the CC comfortable with their interpretation to continue on the plan update?

- Forest Management Plan Update

Dick Bennett requests a hold on the previous discussion so that CC can hear from Don Johnson from Forest Land Improvement about the Forest Management Plan before it got much later. Tom explains to Don that they are looking to update the Forest Management Plan in the broader context of a General Management Plan. Don compiled the current forest management plan. He explained that he has a form that all his clients fill out. The form guides them through questions of goals and objectives for the land’s use. This helps the forester to make recommendations as to how to keep the forest healthy and a more enjoyable place based on the goals and objectives of the client. FM plan good for 15-20 years out. The Prospect Farm plan is 17 years out. It’s a good time to update and to see what the work from 17 years resulted in: changes in wildlife, erosion, tree regeneration...Don started the update about 3 years ago - including a PDF downloadable map with update trail names - but this fell through. Don would like to do this work for the town. Don introduced Tim Dolan who will take over for Don starting this spring when he retires. Don reiterates that the current FM Plan is outdated - many of the recommendations have been implemented.

Ken had a question for Dick regarding hiring: is it town policy normally to contract out to a single individual and not put it out to bid? Dick explained that they researched foresters and felt that Don had the best sensitivity to the town needs. Dick feels that this is a continuation of the relationship and current plan, that Don knows the town and Prospect Farm, and that bidding it out would not be a savings.

Tom explained that there’s a cut off (Dick said it was \$25,000) for bidding. The CC will ask the selectmen to contract with a forester for the FM plan.

Mike asked Don and Tim if the company was comfortable working with the broader idea of recreational use, etc. Tim answered that he works with several municipal forests and each has a different set of goals and objectives. Pam asked if Tim knows the land well and he said that he has been involved with the projects implemented there, including creating the map.

Tom asked about the creation of the FM plan - did they look at the National Forest’s Management Plan? Don spoke with NFS about the area. Don thinks that the scope of the NSF Management Plan is beyond what he has done at Prospect Farm. Ken explains that because the Prospect Farm property is small in comparison to the neighboring NSF parcel so that it makes sense that some of the plan --the wildlife management plan, for example, work in concert. Don said that the parcel may seem small but that a lot happens on 450-500 acres and has impact on the surrounding area. In addition, he is not always in agreement with the NFS’s plans, and that the town needs to do what the town sees as their goals. Dick mentions that once the impact studies come in then there will be a clearer idea of what’s happening on the National Forest - abutters get the impact studies from NFS.

Mike suggests a goal of not having too much early successional forest as there is plenty of that in NH and that NFS is probably doing that, so maybe the Prospect Farm area should have a different goal. This is exactly what Forest Land Improvement is looking for on the goal form. Ken encourages the CC to come to agreement regarding the questions that have come up around who uses Prospect Farm and how they use it. FMI can offer information to guide that discussion and decision making but will not be making those decisions.

Don reminisces that working in the area was very rewarding. Forest management works and it's proving to be worthwhile over the years.

Ken makes a motion to recommend to the selectmen that CC go the next step to develop a Forest Management Plan with FMI minus the money for the maps which do not need to be updated - JSTF has done this. There is a need to coordinate the names of trails.

Final question from Mike: timber cut to length? Yes.

Tom: wants to revisit the map: the JSTF map shows winter use while the CC is looking for a 4 season map that can be downloaded easily and show all trails (names corrected.) Example: Hall's Ledge trail not well marked.

Motion: To have FMI prepare a forest management plan, holding off on the map, for now.

Approved.

Recreation plan will be separate.

Tabled for now:

Jackson Falls

- Spring work outline

Gray's Inn

Conservation Easements

Wetlands

Public Comment

Dick reminds the CC that they have \$70,000 in an account to use instead of going to the town for money. This could be used for the recreation plan. CC is the steward of this money and they should use it. Dick will check on the mechanics of accessing the money and any restrictions that are in place.

Adjourned.

Respectfully submitted,

Susan Ross-Parent

Thank you to Hank Benesh for posting the film of the meeting.

As always, the public is encouraged to attend and share their vision for the use of Jackson town properties and other conservation priorities. Our meetings are typically at 5:30 PM at the town office building on the first Monday of each month.