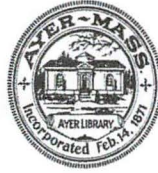


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TOWN OF AYER
TOWN CLERK



Town of Ayer Conservation Commission

Town Hall * One Main Street * Ayer, MA 01432 * 978-772-8220, ext. 143
Minutes for 11/10/2022

Location: Ayer Town Hall, 1st Floor

Present: Jon Schmalenberger (Chair), Mark Phillips (Vice-Chair), George Bacon (Member), Jessica Gugino (Member/Clerk), Heather Hampson (Conservation Agent)

Not Present: Jen Amaya (Member)

APAC taped: YES

7:00 PM – Open Meeting

- **Confirmation of Agenda**

- G. Bacon moved to confirm the agenda as posted; M. Phillips 2nd.
 - Motion approved unanimously 4-0.

- **Approval of Meeting Minutes**

- G. Bacon moved to accept the minutes for 10/27/2022 as written; M. Phillips 2nd.
 - Motion approved unanimously 4-0.

- **Public Input**

- Frank Macklin, of 43 Groton Harvard Road, was present to bring to the Commission's attention that 'Flannagan Pond' was misspelled as 'Flannigan Pond' on the Waterways Signs installed in late summer.
 - Commission members were grateful to have this error pointed out and M. Phillips will see about ordering replacement signs.
 - It was also noted that the QR codes are now working on the signs to link to the Town website for more information on each waterbody.

- **Request for Certificate of Compliance (COC) – 138 Washington Street, Lot A, Northeast Site Development, MassDEP # 100-0461**

- H. Hampson did a site inspection on 11/4 with Joe Levine, of Northeast Site Development, and saw no issues.
 - Grass has grown in to stabilize open soil.
- From photographs provided, M. Phillips asked if the spacing was sufficiently tight enough between the boulders placed to demarcate lawn from buffer zone where permitted activities were limited because of the presence of nearby wetlands.
 - Ideally, the boulders should not allow for passage of a lawn mower, etc.
 - H. Hampson will double-check that the boulders are approximately 6 ft. apart, not 8-10 ft.
 - She said there are extra boulders on site so if more are needed, it should not be a problem.
- G. Bacon moved to issue a COC for 100-0461, with the caveat that H. Hampson will ensure the required boulders are adequately spaced; M. Phillips 2nd.
 - Motion approved unanimously 4-0 and the COC was signed.



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- **Request for Certificate of Compliance (COC) – 136 Washington Street, Lot B, Northeast Site Development, MassDEP # 100-0462**
 - The same details apply as in the above Request for COC.
 - G. Bacon moved to issue a COC for 100-0462, with the caveat that H. Hampson will ensure the required boulders are adequately spaced; M. Phillips 2nd.
 - Motion approved unanimously 4-0 and the COC was signed.
- **Discussion: Alternative Pond Treatments for Invasive Aquatic Weeds**
 - Susan Tordella, of 5 Hedgeway, addressed the Commission about her concern over the use of chemicals to treat Sandy, Flannagan, and Pine Meadow ponds in order to control invasive weed growth.
 - In her view, chemical treatment is not working (a view not shared by Commission members); weeds become resistant to chemicals over time; and the buildup of organic matter creates more problems.
 - Her concerns have risen more following the severe toxic blue-green algae (cyanobacteria) bloom that closed Sandy Pond at the beginning of September and only recently has begun to reach levels below the requirement of a Public Health Advisory.
 - Ms. Tordella distributed a handout detailing alternative methods, some used by the towns of Harvard and Littleton.
 - For Spectacle Pond in Littleton, Rob Hartz was used to provide information in the handout about eco-harvesting to mechanically remove weeds that are then composted and resold, in their case by Dirt Doctor in Acton.
 - For Bare Hill Pond in Harvard, Bruce Leicher was used to provide information in the handout about their strategies of drawing down the pond and pulling weeds once or twice a year as well as installing rain gardens to capture phosphorous runoff in high use areas.
 - The handout also cited Mr. Leicher's suggestion that ConCom figure out how to enforce the existing state law (MGL Section 65A) under the jurisdiction of the Mass. Department of Agricultural Resources (MDAR), perhaps through the use of significant fines.
 - Ms. Tordella also urged starting a social marketing campaign to educate people on the harm caused by the use of the wrong fertilizer and other practices.
 - The handout brought up but acknowledged that Ms. Tordella's previous suggestion on the use of irradiated (sterilized) Chinese carp was illegal in Massachusetts.
 - Lengthy discussion followed.
 - H. Hampson said she was interested in reducing the use of chemicals and doing more education; she will research some of the strategies used by other towns, including the use of crushed stone around driveways to provide additional filtration.
 - Some points of clarification were also made:



Town of Ayer, Massachusetts

Town Hall * The Main Street * Ayer, MA 01432 * 978-777-2330 ext. 142
Attention: Mr. William J. ...

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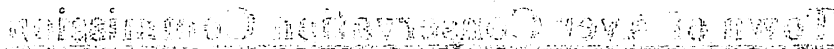
... and ...



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- The two boards at Balch Dam (aka East Main Street Spillway) are removed in November (and put back in the following May) in order to seasonally draw down the water level in Sandy and Flannagan ponds to a small degree.
 - This is as much as the ponds can be drawn down; physically there is no other way to adjust water levels without removal of the dam itself.
- Most of the land around Sandy and Flannagan ponds is privately owned, which would impede the Town installing more rain gardens.
 - H. Hampson also said a lot of the land immediately abutting the ponds is naturally vegetated already.
- It was noted that even if the Fertilizer Bylaw passed by the Town a couple years ago, but then rejected by the Attorney General's office, had gone into effect, the question of how it was to be enforced was substantial.
 - While the Commission would not want to encourage a situation where neighbors spied on neighbors, J. Schmalenberger suggested ConCom could make requests about kinds of fertilizers used to local distributors.
 - With the failure of the attempted local bylaw, ConCom was also given to understand that enforcement was in the hands of the State/MDAR.
- H. Hampson spoke of sending educational pamphlets out, especially to residents living on or near the ponds.
 - She also suggested Ms. Tordella look at MassDEP's website for raingarden information, as well as checking out the U. Mass. Amherst Extension for other suggestions.
 - G. Bacon said the University of New Hampshire program on rain gardens should also be looked at.
- Ms. Tordella asked what if Ayer had a Lake Association, similar to Littleton.
 - While Ms. Tordella was appointed to the Pond & Dam Committee (initially created by the Select Board back in 2011 and under their jurisdiction), it has not met since her appointment was made.
 - One suggestion was that Ms. Tordella seek to revitalize that Committee.
 - She said she had spoken to DPW Director Dan Van Schalkwyk about this a bit and he had mentioned the possibility of incorporating the committee into the DPW's sustainability commission.
- The Commission is not averse to considering other methods, but as a volunteer board whose resources have already been stretched thin in recent years, it would be helpful to have other entities contributing more.
 - J. Gugino noted that Joe Onorato, of Water & Wetlands, has offered in the past to hold an informational public meeting about ponds and maintaining their health and this might be a good educational step for the Commission to take in the spring, especially now that pandemic restrictions have eased.
 - Water & Wetlands has done the pond treatments in Ayer for the last two years.



1. The first question is whether the Commission should be asked to consider the possibility of a new program on the grounds should be established. The Commission is not in a position to consider this at this time. The Commission is not in a position to consider this at this time. The Commission is not in a position to consider this at this time.



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- Certainly the recent toxic algae bloom that closed Sandy Pond to public use can be used as an incentive for encouraging neighbors to the ponds to take even simple steps to better protect these natural resources.
 - J. Schmalenberger thanked Ms. Tordella for her input and invited her to come back for more discussion with ConCom when more information has been gathered.
 - He also noted that any changes to the treatment program would likely not take effect in the coming treatment year as arrangements start to be made over the winter.
- **Discussion: “Ayer-Devens Neighborhood Pocket Forest Planting Pilot Project”**
 - This joint project was the recipient of a 2022 Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness (MVP) Action Grant from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs.
 - An overview of the project was presented by Jim Newman, of Linnean Solutions (Cambridge, MA), and Landscape Architect Casey-Lee Bastien, of BSC Group.
 - Alan Manoian, Director of Ayer Office of Community & Economic Development, will act as administrator of the project, coordinating also with the Devens Enterprise Commission.
 - The Regenerative Design Group, Greenfield, MA, is involved with the project as well.
 - The grant funds a pilot project meant to engage residents to guide, plan, design, and plant “Neighborhood Pocket Forests.”
 - At its current stage, the project is seeking input from residents as well as boards like the Conservation Commission or Planning Board in order to identify optimal sites for these small forests, generally a quarter to a half acre in size.
 - It doesn’t take a huge number of trees to make a big difference.
 - Two sites currently under consideration for Ayer are at the Town Depot and behind St. Mary’s Church while information on other potential sites is also being sought.
 - Criteria considered in the selection of sites include:
 - Is the site feasible? – whether public property or private with the agreement of the landowner?;
 - Is the site strategic? – who does it serve? what value does it bring to a neighborhood?
 - Is it a location where these actions taken will positively change the trajectory of a property and surroundings?
 - The project addresses the growing challenges of climate change through the planting of small, dense pockets of trees that will locally:
 - maximize carbon sequestration;
 - contribute to the absorption of particulate matter, nitrogen, sulfur, and ozone, thereby improving air quality and reducing pollution;
 - provide natural filtration of stormwater runoff, improving water quality;
 - have a cooling impact to counter the effects of ‘heat islands’ produced when impervious surfaces overly dominate an area.



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Contains the recent toxic algae bloom that closed Sandy Pond to public use and
be used as an incentive for encouraging neighbors to the pond to take even
simple steps to better protect their natural resources.
A. Administration/Finance/HR: The HR and Finance Committee has been authorized
to make the decision with the Commission when more information has been gathered.
The two noted that any changes to the treatment program would likely not take
effect in the coming summer year as treatments start to be made over the
winter.

The meeting was held on November 3rd, 2023 at the Town Hall, 143 Main Street, Ayer, MA.
The joint project was the recipient of a 2022 Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness
(MVP) Award from the Massachusetts Executive Office of Environmental Affairs.
A review of the project was presented by the Town of Ayer, Massachusetts
(Ayer, MA) and a representative from the Town of Ayer, Massachusetts
Ayer, MA, Director of a 100% of Community Development
Development will not be a continuation of the project, continuing it with the
Development Commission.
The Representative Design Group, Ayer, MA, is involved with the project in
well.
The project is a joint project with the Town of Ayer, MA, and the
"Neighborhood Project Review".
At its current stage, the project is seeking input from residents as well as from
the Commission. The Commission is currently in order to identify potential
sites for the small forest, generally a quarter to a half acre in size.
The project is a large number of trees to make a big difference.
Two sites currently under consideration for Ayer are in the Town of Ayer and
behind St. Mary's Church with information on other potential sites is also being
sought.
Options considered in the selection of sites include:
In the site located on the property of the Town of Ayer, MA, and the
the land is not.
Is the site strategic? - no does it serve what the town is trying to do
neighborhood?
Is it a location where these actions taken will positively change the trajectory of a
property and surrounding?
The project addresses the growing challenges of climate change through the planting of
small, dense pockets of trees that will locally:
maximize carbon sequestration
contribute to the absorption of particulate matter, nitrogen, sulfur, and ozone
thereby improving air quality and reducing pollution
provide natural filtration of stormwater runoff, improving water quality
have a cooling impact to counter the effects of heat islands, which are exacerbated when
impermeable surfaces such as roofs, parking lots, and roads



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- (Ideally, built urban/suburban environments should have at least 35% surface covered by tree canopy.)
 - It was noted that pocket forests as 'green infrastructure' are not primarily designed to be inhabited and used like neighborhood pocket parks.
 - They are, however, intended to establish healthier and more resilient environments, particularly to the benefit of less advantaged neighborhoods.
 - In addition, it is hoped that pocket forests designed with appropriate tree species will function both as support and as biodiversity feeders to larger nearby forests in the community – helping to restore and repopulate.
 - This is particularly useful in New England where most of the old forests were cleared in previous centuries, and while new forests have regrown in the last hundred years or so, they often lack the diversity of species that were originally present in the past.
 - A public forum is scheduled for 6 p.m. on Nov. 16 at Town Hall for residents to better understand the environmental benefits of these forests and learn of ways they can participate.
 - The project will also seek to hire local students to help with monitoring and maintaining sites for longterm protection.
- **Conservation Commission Office and Member Updates**
 - H. Hampson has been on vacation this week. However, she participated the previous week in a field trip into Cambridge to look at a model pocket forest. No work took place last week at Ayer Solar II and no updates have been received from Rohit Garg. She is continuing to work on developing the tree policy.
 - **8:50 PM – Adjourn Meeting**
 - GB moved to adjourn; MP 2nd.
 - Motion approved unanimously 4-0.

Minutes Recorded and Submitted by Jessica G. Gugino, Clerk

Date / Signature of Approval:

12/8/2022 