

CONSERVATION COMMISSION MINUTES

Date: Thursday, February 17, 2022

Time: 7:00pm

Place: This meeting was held as a virtual meeting via Zoom.

With a quorum present, the meeting opened at 7:00 pm with Dan Green presiding as Chair.

Members Present: Dan Green, Susan Lunin, Leigh Gilligan, Kathy Cade, Jeff Zabel, Ellen Katz

Members Absent: Judy Hepburn and Associate Member Sonya McKnight

Staff present: Jennifer Steel, Ellen Menounos

Members of the Public: not recorded due to remote nature of the meeting

DECISIONS

I. WETLANDS DECISIONS – none at this time

II. CONSERVATION AREA DECISIONS

1. Review and approval of Eagle Scout Boulton Yanhs' Flowed Meadow Boardwalk Project

- **Owner:** Conservation Commission
- **Request:** Approve completed Eagle Scout project
- **Project Summary:** Construction of boardwalks at Flowed Meadow
- **Presentation and Discussion:**
 - Scout's PowerPoint presentation showed 128' of new boardwalks, which are well-designed and installed.
 - Commissioners applauded the robust construction and the great improvement the project provided.
- **Jurisdiction:** Flood Zone
- **Vote:** To have staff sign Eagle Scout workbook. [Motion: Lunin; Second: Cade; Roll-call vote: Green (aye), Lunin (aye), Gilligan (aye), Cade (aye); Zabel (aye); Katz (aye); Vote: 6:0:0]

2. Commemorative plaque for Ira Wallach

- **Owner:** Conservation Commission
- **Request:** Install the plaque on a granite post rather than a metal post
- **Documents presented at meeting:** plaque rendering and cost estimate
- **Presentation and Discussion:**
 - The plaque will say: "The Ira Wallach Deer Park Trail is named for Ira Wallach, member of the Conservation Commission for 28 years from 1991-2019 and its Chair for 23 years. Ira was passionate about preserving Newton's natural environment and loved the Deer Park, in particular. This trail is named in his memory so that all may know our deep appreciation for his contributions to the City of Newton and the Conservation Commission."
 - Commissioners approved of the wording and agreed that the more delicate metal post was most appropriate.
 - Staff felt that a policy should be established to ensure equality regarding the thresholds for and the nature and scale of commemorations. The Commission discussed a number of considerations for thresholds for commemoration of members, including: years of service, nature of contributions, and nomination by others. The Commission also discussed possible types of fitting, individual commemorations such as: gift cards, trees, benches, kiosks, and boardwalks. Staff will compile a summary document for the record.
- **Vote:** To ask Green to work with Steel to place a purchase order for an installed plaque as detailed and quoted (\$620) in the shop drawings. [Motion: Zabel; Second: Gilligan; Roll-call vote: Green (aye), Lunin (aye), Gilligan(aye), Cade (aye); Zabel (aye); Katz (aye); Vote: 6:0:0]

III. ADMINISTRATIVE DECISIONS

3. Minutes of 1/27/22 to be approved

- **Documents in packets:** Draft 1/27/22 minutes as edited by Kathy Cade
- **Documents presented at meeting:** none



Mayor
Ruthanne Fuller

**Director
Planning &
Development**
Barney Heath

**Chief
Environmental
Planner**
Jennifer Steel

**Assistant
Environmental
Planner**
Ellen Menounos

**Conservation
Commission
Members**
Kathy Cade
Dan Green
Judy Hepburn
Ellen Katz
Susan Lunin
Jeff Zabel
Leigh Gilligan

**Associate
Member**
Sonya McKnight

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- Vote: To approve the 1/27/22 minutes. [Motion: Zabel; Second: Gilligan; Roll-call vote: Green (aye), Lunin (aye), Gilligan(aye), Cade (aye); Zabel (aye); Katz (aye); Vote: 6:0:0]
- Leigh Gilligan offered to review/edit the draft 2/17/22 minutes

IV. ISSUES AROUND TOWN DECISIONS

4. Upper Falls Riverwalk Connector Stairs to Upper Falls Greenway

- Owner: Parks, Recreation & Culture and Conservation Easement
- Request: Provide feedback on project and consensus on next steps
- Documents in packets: none
- Documents presented at meeting: none
- Presentation and Discussion:
 - Staff noted that the first design/build bid was for \$147,000.
 - Staff then worked with the City Engineering Department who helped determine: (1) that steel stairs would be the most appropriate given the steep and “bony” terrain, and (2) that BETA engineering, the City’s on-call engineer, should assist with geotechnical borings and assessment and design work. BETA has provided an \$18,000 estimate for such work that will culminate in 100% construction plans.
 - Construction costs are unknown.
 - The City’s Chief Operating Officer agreed that the Commission should proceed with this important project.
- Vote: To have staff move forward with the assessment bid from BETA engineering. [Motion: Cade; Second: Lunin; Roll-call vote: Green (aye), Lunin (aye), Gilligan(aye), Cade (aye); Zabel (aye); Katz (aye); Vote: 6:0:0]

5. Stream name signs

- Owner: DPW (Newton City Streets)
- Request: Provide feedback on the project and consensus on next steps.
- Documents in packets: Newton stream sign mock-up (12”x18” horizontal, white letters on green background), road crossing database.
- Documents presented at meeting: Natick sign photo, road crossing photo log.
- Presentation and Discussion:
 - Staff have identified a sign design that meets DPW standards (see Natick photo and Newton mock-ups)
 - Staff have received from DPW estimates of costs (\$100/sign and post) and installation (overtime). DPW would be willing to install the first 6 signs for free. Installations beyond that would have to be paid for by the Commission.
 - Staff identified 27 high priority stream crossings as most appropriate for signage (see database).
 - Commission discussed their criteria and possible locations.
 - Commission discussed their interest in being able to add QR codes that would provide information about the stream. Space for QR code stickers should be considered in the design.
 - Commissioners felt that signs should be placed where the stream is visible and where foot traffic is common.
- Consensus: The Commission approved the proposed sign design. Staff will follow up with DPW to order and install the first 6 stream signs as a pilot program (not the Charles, possibly Cheesecake @ Watertown, Laundry, and South Meadow) and consider doing more in the future.

6. Native species lists for applicants and residents

- Request: Provide feedback on project and consensus on next steps.
- Documents in packets: Draft native plant list
- Documents presented at meeting: none
- Presentation and Discussion:
 - Staff shared with Commissioners a new version of the native plant list, based on horticultural availability, suitability for Newton landscapes, and wildlife value.
 - The list will be promoted for as a reference for mitigation planting plans.
 - Commissioners suggested adding graphics and providing a simplified “starter” list.
- Consensus: The commission generally approves of the new plant list. Staff will make the recommended changes and post to the Conservation Office website.

UPDATES

V. WETLANDS UPDATES

7. The Conservation Office – an overview

- Documents in packets: none
- Documents presented at meeting: A sample weekly planner
- Staff Notes: Staff would like to share with Commissioners the many arenas and projects in which they are involved

- Presentation and Discussion: The Commission thanked the Conservation Office for working hard on an array of projects including wetlands, conservation land management, climate planning, and issues around town.

8. “Newton’s Buried streams” PowerPoint Presentation

- Documents in packets: none
- Documents presented at meeting: PowerPoint presentation on the history of Newton’s drainage system and the regulatory implications.
- Presentation and Discussion:
 - Staff provided slides on the evolution of Newton’s streams and storm drainage system
 - All present enjoyed the presentation
- Consensus: Commissioners requested a shareable copy and suggested that it be shared with high school teachers, Historic Newton, and the Library.

9. “NO DUMPING” sign at South Meadow Brook (Oak Street)

- MassDOT will install “South Meadow Brook. No Dumping” sign for the duration of construction.
- The dumping incident observed by Ellen Katz was across the street from Anthony’s Coal Fired Pizza. Staff can inquire about MassDOT placing a sign there, too.

VI. CONSERVATION AREA UPDATES/DISCUSSION

10. Land Management – spring 2022 and looking ahead to FY2023

- Documents in packets: none
- Documents presented at meeting: Pending projects, CRs held by ConCom, Conservation parcels (w/ CRs)
- Presentation and Discussion:
 - Staff shared the running “Pending Projects” list and noted that new trailhead signs and consistent trail wayfinding should be added to the list
 - Staff shared the list of Conservation Restrictions Held by ConCom and noted that to date, monitoring had not occurred. Green suggested that he could share the list of CR’s held by Con Com with the Newton Conservators and ask about possible collaboration with / support from Newton Conservators for monitoring
 - Staff showed the list of Conservation parcels that have and don’t have CRs on them. CRs are the only way to ensure permanent protection of open space, but the process is long and involved.
 - Staff noted their desire to improve communication and coordination among
 - Stewards (possible monitoring of Conservation parcels)
 - Conservators (possible monitoring of Conservation parcels and assistance with monitoring CRs)
 - Eagle Scouts (possible infrastructure improvements)
 - Annual Contractor (focus on maintenance, not monitoring)
 - Staff are creating a new bid request for Conservation land management contractor for FY23
- Consensus:
 - Commissioners noted the importance of providing regular direction to the annual contractor (not relying on the contractor determine priorities)
 - Cade noted unsightly accumulations of brush at Norumbega and asked staff to consider having it removed.
 - Staff will send the list of City-held CRs to Green and Gilligan.
 - Katz would like to start the CR process for Riverwalk. Staff will send model CR language.

VII. ISSUES AROUND TOWN UPDATES

VIII. ADMINISTRATIVE UPDATES

- MACC’s virtual annual conference is scheduled for March 1-12, 2022) Commissioners should have received an email. Go to this link for details: https://www.maccweb.org/page/EDVirtualAEC-Conf_2022. \$25 per workshop or \$150 for a bundle of workshops. Fundamentals Units are offered and priced separately. Scott Jackson will give the Keynote address on Sat. Mar 5, 9:30am: “Looking Ahead: How Conservation will Need to Change to Cope with Climate Change.” Commissioners should let Menounos know if they would like to register, so that payment by the City can be arranged.
- The state approved remote meetings through July 15, 2022.
- Staff have revamped the Conservation Office website, and asked Commissioners to explore it and provide feedback.
- Katz noted that the Upper Falls Area Council was advised to use “newtonma.gov” email for all official business. Staff will ask IT if it is appropriate for Commissioners to be given City emails for all Commission communications.

OTHER TOPICS NOT REASONABLY ANTICIPATED BY THE CHAIR 48 HOURS BEFORE THE MEETING

ADJOURN Vote: To adjourn at 9:16 pm. [Motion: Gilligan; Second: Zabel; Roll-call vote: Green (aye), Lunin (aye), Gilligan(aye), Cade (aye); Zabel (aye); Katz (aye); Vote: 6:0:0]