

Town of Newington, NH
CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Meeting Minutes, Thursday, November 10, 2022

- Call to Order:** Chair Jane Hislop called the November 10, 2022, meeting at 6:30 PM.
- Present:** Vice-Chair Derick Willson; Andrew Meigs; Laura Rogers; Jim Weiner; Alternate Member, Jane Kendall; and Town Planner, John Krebs
- Absent:** Alternate Member, Bill Murray
- Public Guests:** University of New Hampshire Research Professor, Ray Grizzle

1) NHDES Minimum Impact Wetlands Application: by **University of New Hampshire Eastern Great Bay Estuary** to monitor, assess and restore 6.8 acres of oyster reef

University of New Hampshire Research Professor, Ray Grizzle appeared before the Conservation Commission to present an application to proceed with an oyster restoration project in two areas of Great Bay.

Mr. Grizzle stated that the University of New Hampshire (UNH) would be primarily partnering with The Nature Conservancy, and oyster farmers, and had secured funds from the Natural Resource Conservation Center and The Nature Conservancy.

Mr. Grizzle said the City of Rochester had also approached them regarding bio-extraction of nitrogen levels in order to address the Environmental Protection Agency's (EPA) requirement for wastewater nitrogen reduction, so they worked on it for them to pass through National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration (NOAA) funding.

Mr. Grizzle explained that they were buying larger oysters from the oyster farmers to place in their restoration site for successful spawning. Mr. Grizzle stated that there had been a harvest of a million oysters in 2020, and they might top that number in 2022.

Commissioner Jim Weiner asked about their total budget, and Mr. Grizzle replied that their total budget was over \$1,000,000.

Commissioner Weiner asked about diseases in the oyster population. Mr. Grizzle explained that disease had cut the population's longevity from 10-20 years to five years. Mr. Grizzle went on to say that some of the six-to-eight-inch farmed oysters come from stock that was too large for market except perhaps for use in stews, appear to be MSX and dermo disease resistance.

Mr. Grizzle stated that the southern reef that was seeded last year with the assistance of New Hampshire Fish and Game had degraded badly for some reason, so they were allowing UNH to try something new this year.

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Chair Hislop asked about the eel grass status in Great Bay. Mr. Grizzle replied that there has been a drop off of the eel grass population over the last ten years, but it has been fairly stable recently. Mr. Grizzle added that they have observed that the ammonia from oysters that have spawned among the eel grass has helped the eel grass, so they were hoping aerial coverage will help.

Vice-Chair Willson asked if passing boats would disturb their work area. Mr. Grizzle replied that the oysters were well below the low water mark, but it still could happen occasionally. Commissioner Weiner said cages often came up in low tide, and some got caught or hit by wind surfers.

Mr. Grizzle said there were markers on the to assist with protection, but he would like to see a larger float that is heavier and higher. Mr. Grizzle added that there had been some poaching too, and New Hampshire Fish and Game could do more to monitor, and enforce. Commissioner Weiner said that he had observed Lieutenant Brown from District 6 in the area.

Vice-Chair Willson asked how sensitive oysters and eel grass were to changes with climate change and rising tides. Mr. Grizzle replied that the three-inch oysters were too large for the invasive green crabs, but the southern blue crab has showed up, and is a voracious predator. Mr. Grizzle said fortunately, two breeding pairs were caught, and they don't expect them to overrun Great Bay. Mr. Grizzle explained that the Southern Virginia species they used stopped feeding and growing when temperatures were below 40 degrees, and could survive to zero degrees, but the blue crabs had difficulty surviving below 40 degrees.

Mr. Grizzle went on to say that the eel grass beds seemed to be getting larger, but a lot of things would change in next 50 years, though he didn't expect that they would go extinct.

Commissioner Andrew Meigs asked about horseshoe crabs disturbing the eel grass beds. Mr. Grizzle said horseshoe crabs did disturb newly seeded eel grass that was not well established, but they thought that the oysters might help prevent that problem.

Jim Weiner moved to recommend the NHDES Minimum Impact Wetlands Application by University of New Hampshire Eastern Great Bay Estuary to monitor, assess and restore 6.8 acres of oyster reef. Andrew Meigs seconded the motion, and all were in favor.

Chair Hislop asked Mr. Grizzle if he would consider doing a community education discussion in the next year, and Mr. Grizzle said he could do an hour or two discussions on eel grass, oyster farming and reefs in the spring.

Town Planner, John Krebs asked Mr. Grizzle if they expected any impact to the oyster beds from the water main replacement that the City of Portsmouth was installing from Madbury through Durham and under the Bay to Fox Point. Mr. Grizzle replied that it might impact Kristen Ward's farm, so they were in negotiations.

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2) 2023 Project Development and Community Education Outreach

Chair Hislop informed the Commissioners that the 2023 budget had been accepted by the Board of Selectmen, and they had no problem with the request to maintain \$1,000 in the Community Education Outreach line item.

Chair Hislop said she hoped the Commission could plan something for the Spring of 2023.

Mr. Krebs commented that many residents didn't know where conservation lands were in town. Chair Hislop said a map had been done around five years earlier, but many of the lots were misnamed. Mr. Krebs added that there was a map in the Master Plan, but he didn't know if it was current. Commissioner Weiner suggested that an updated map be included on the Town website.

Chair Hislop suggested that the Commission could put up identifying signs.

Commissioner Weiner suggested that the new Recreation Committee director could work with the Conservation Commission.

Mr. Krebs suggested that each Conservation commissioner could present information on each of the conservation areas. Chair Hislop added that they could also put something on the Town website.

Vice-Chair Willson asked how commissioners would get the information, and Chair Hislop replied that they would need to look it up.

Mr. Krebs said he knew the Adams Homestead, Baird easement, and Trickey's Cover were all held by Southeast Land Trust (SELT), and Fox Point and the Saba easement were held by the Town, but he didn't know about the Beane Farm or Hislop easements. Mr. Krebs said he wondered if the Commission should do something with the Town held easements. Alternate Commissioner, Jane Kendall agreed that there were concerns with legal protections and the lack of monitoring the easements. Mr. Krebs suggested they approach the Board of Selectmen on the subject.

Commissioner Meigs asked what benefits there were in having SELT hold an easement. Mr. Krebs said the Town would still own property, but an easement provided legal protection, adding that SELT would get a flat fee to establish the easement, and for yearly monitoring.

Commissioner Jane Kendall suggested they check the existing easement agreement for uses, and discuss monitoring terms with SELT.

Commissioner Meigs wondered if Stoneface Brewing, or other applicants might sponsor a pollinator garden. Chair Hislop said the problem with community gardens was that no one was willing to maintain them once they were planted.

Commissioner Weiner suggested spraying open areas with wildflower seeds which had been successful.

Mr. Krebs said the Beane Farm easement might be a good area, but he wasn't sure it would be very visible to passersby.

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3) Other Business:

Chair Hislop said the Board of Selectmen said they would talk to Town counsel later in the month regarding a perpetual fund and the Conservation Fund parameters under State law.

Mr. Krebs said he didn't think there would be that many lots sold and taken out of current use to create a lot of current use change tax, and he didn't think there would be that much interest in new conservation easements. Vice-Chair Willson responded that Board of Selectmen, Brandon Arsenault had talked to the Commission at the last meeting, and said there would be over a dozen lots that had been approved for development earlier in the year.

Commissioner Kendall went on to say that Mr. Arsenault had suggested they look into a perpetual fund for any current use change tax received that was more than what was immediately needed for the Conservation Fund, so that the principal would be protected, but interest could be used for Conservation projects, some of which might be outside the Municipal Conservation Fund criteria.

Chair Hislop and Vice-Chair Willson encouraged asked the Commissioners to read the New Hampshire Municipal Conservation Fund guidebook.

Minutes: *Andrew Meigs moved to approve the October 10, 2022, Minutes with corrections as discussed. Derick Willson seconded, and all were in favor.*

Adjournment: *Vice-Chair Willson moved to adjourn. Chair Hislop seconded, and the meeting adjourned at 8:20 p.m.*

Next Meeting: Thursday, December 8, 2022

**Respectfully
Submitted by:** Jane K. Kendall, Recording Secretary