

Town of Newington, NH
CONSERVATION COMMISSION
Meeting Minutes, Thursday, February 8, 2024

- Call to Order:** Vice-Chair Laura Rogers called the February 8, 2024, meeting at 6:33 PM.
- Present:** Vice-Chair Laura Rogers; Commissioners Andrew Meigs; Jim Weiner; Derick Willson; Town Planner, John Krebs; and Recording Secretary Jane Kendall
- Absent:** Chair Jane Hislop; Alternate Member, Bill Murray
- Public Guests:** Bill Gregsak, P.E. with Gregsak and Sons, Inc.; Tim Ferwerder, NH Wetlands Scientist; John Bernier, President of Bernier Construction; Chris Cross

1) Preliminary Dredge and Fill, and Wetland Setback Review of variance relief from Article VIII for parking expansion within the 25' no-cut wetland buffer and within the 50' wetland structural setback, as well as a 180 s.f. dredge and fill permit for parking lot for **Wilcox Industries, 20 Piscataqua Drive, LLC** on property located at **25 Piscataqua Drive, Tax Map 27, Lot 2.**

Bill Gregsak, P.E. with Gregsak and Sons, Inc. presented the plan to create additional parking for Wilcox Industries on the corner of Piscataqua Drive and Woodbury Avenue. Mr. Gregsak that there would be a total of 590 square feet of wetlands impacts in one area, and 335 square feet of impacts in another area.

Mr. Gregsak said they had been before the Planning Board, and the Zoning Board of Adjustment (ZBA), and would return to the ZBA on Thursday, February 15, 2024, to present the remainder of their variance requests after their presentation to the Conservation Commission.

Commissioner Jim Weiner asked if there were any plans to have the wetlands flow to other wetlands rather than pave over. Mr. Gregsak said the regulations did not require them to do any mitigation because the disturbance was not over 5,000 square feet.

Tim Ferwerda, a certified New Hampshire wetlands scientist for the applicant pointed out that they would be required to install a culvert so that the wetlands would continue to flow toward the wetlands.

Commissioner Andrew Meigs commented that he would want to know more about snow storage because it was a wetlands area, so the applicant would need to return to address those questions along with landscaping after their design was completed.

Mr. Gregsak said they were hiring a landscape architect, and would return after they went before the ZBA.

Mr. Ferwerda provided a memo that went over the wetlands' value, but noted that the wetlands had little wetlands value after years of disturbance.

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Commissioner Weiner asked how many square feet of wetlands would be eliminated, and Mr. Gregsak said there would be 1,100 to 1,200 square feet filled in total.

Jim Weiner moved to recommend their Preliminary Dredge and Fill, and Wetland Setback Review of variance relief from Article VIII for parking expansion within the 25' no-cut wetland buffer and within the 50' wetland structural setback, as well as a 180 s.f. dredge and fill permit for parking lot for Wilcox Industries, 20 Piscataqua Drive, LLC on property located at 25 Piscataqua Drive, Tax Map 27, Lot 2. Andrew Meigs seconded the motion, and all were in favor.

2) Other Business and Discussions

Resident and Planning Board Vice-Chair, Chris Cross presented a preliminary proposal for recreational trails in town.

Mr. Cross said Nimble Hill Road, Little Bay Road, McIntyre Road, and Newington Road were heavily trafficked narrow roads for walking.

Mr. Cross proposed connecting trails of crushed gravel between cul-de-sacs, existing trails, and low impact roads that would be for daylight walking, but with balusters at the entrances to restrict motorized vehicles, and split rail fences to guide people.

Mr. Cross said there was a potential for permanent right-of-way easements through a portion of private properties that would be voluntary, and he was talking to the Board of Selectmen about incentives for those willing to allow any section of their lots to be crossed. Mr. Cross said Mr. Krebs had experience with the development of trails in Stowe, Vermont, and properties on the Stowe trails had higher value now.

Mr. Cross said he hoped that the Conservation Commission, Historic District Commission, and Recreation Commission could contribute volunteers for a focus committee.

Commissioner Weiner commented that utility vehicles and snowmobiles would need to be allowed to maintain trails, and Mr. Cross said he understood, but the details would have to be something that the town agreed upon considering that they might be crossing private properties. Mr. Cross added that the Town would not maintain plowing of snow during the winter, however they might use a snowmobile to pack snow for walkers or snowshoeing. Mr. Cross said the focus committee could designate trail masters to prevent motorized vehicles from crossing, as well.

Mr. Cross said could the focus committee could designate trail masters for inspection, and maintenance on voluntary basis to clear branches and maintain.

Mr. Cross said could start with one trail at a time.

Vice-Chair Rogers asked if Mr. Cross had talked with any other residents to get a sense of interest. Mr. Cross said there had been mixed responses to sidewalk proposals, but there was a still a strong interest in safety so he thought there would be an interest in connecting existing trails around forests and open space easements that has been saved over the last 50 years.

Commissioner Derick Willson asked if Mr. Cross had talked with any property owners in areas needing easements, noting that the concept of connections wouldn't work if they couldn't gain easements. Mr. Cross replied that he had not, but he also talked about going through the tennis court, past the fire department, and school as a good start to tie in Fox Point Road Extension to Arboretum Drive.

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Commissioner Weiner said some property owners seemed adamant about never agreeing to cons easements that would connect some of the existing easements.

Commissioner Weiner noted that it would be important to consider the impact of trails over the roots around Fox Point, and consult an arborist about building mounds or boardwalks to protect the trees and prevent further erosion.

Commissioner Weiner said the Conservation Commission had a perpetual trust fund that had accruing interest available each year that could be used for conservation maintenance. Commissioner Weiner said the Conservation Commission was working on invasive bittersweet management on Fox Point right now, but suggested that they look at creating trails on the Saaba easement on the corner of Fox Point Road and Old Post Road. Mr. Cross responded that he didn't think his proposal would work without looping connections, but there was more than one option.

Commissioner Weiner said he was suggesting that they consider placing trails in existing easements, and then look at connections as secondary because budgets were a Town issue that required support.

Mr. Cross said this was just an initial concept, and details had yet to be decided, but he hoped there would be younger participants for continuity. Vice-Chair Rogers commented that there were many ideas, and thought that they should put a task force together for further discussion. Vice-Chair Rogers added that she thought that the sooner the community bought in to the concept, the sooner they get working on momentum. Mr. Cross agreed that he would like to see involvement and participation.

Commissioner Weiner commented that they needed to find out about liability going through properties, and grants that would have stipulations. Mr. Cross said he worked with Rockingham Planning Commission that did grants, and agreed that many had criteria, but there were some that had potential with some that included matching funds.

Minutes: *Jim Weiner moved to approve the December 14, 2023, Minutes with corrections as discussed. Andrew Meigs seconded, and all were in favor.*

Adjournment: *Jim Weiner moved to adjourn. Derick Willson seconded, and the meeting adjourned at 7:53 p.m.*

Next Meeting: Thursday, March 14, 2024

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

These Minutes were approved and adopted at the March 14, 2024 Conservation Commission Meeting.