

Montague Conservation Commission

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MEETING MINUTES

Thursday, October 13, 2016 – 6:30 pm

Upstairs Meeting Room, Town Hall, One Avenue A, Turners Falls, MA

Commissioners Present: Mark Fairbrother - Chair, Alex Peterkin, Deb Henson, Addie Rose Holland, and Sean Werle.

Commissioners Absent: Justin Fermann and Donna Francis

Staff: Walter Ramsey – Conservation Agent

Mark Fairbrother called the meeting to order at 6:30 PM

Approval of Minutes: Sept 8 minutes were not ready for approval. No minutes were approved.

Review Draft Conservation Restriction Documents for Mormon Hollow Landscape Project:

Guests: Jamie Pottern – Mount Grace Land Trust, Liz Smith – representing Smith property

The Town has partnered with Mount Grace to receive a Massachusetts Division of Conservation Services Landscape Partnership Program grant. This grant awarded April 2016. This grant involved protecting two different working farms in Montague through a Conservation Restriction (CR). The Smith Family Property consists of 48 acres and is a 5th generation farm. The Hunting Property is a 6th generation family farm encompassing 81 acres (the rest of the acreage will not be part of the protection due to title search results). There are also several other properties involved as “the match”. These are the Clapp and Emond parcels going into protection by the Department of Fish and Game. It is proposed that the Conservation Commission will jointly hold the CR with Mount Grace for the Hunting and Smith parcels.

The Working Lands title for the grant was chosen because it protects smaller farms and working forests that are hard to protect on their own. This project then can also be leveraged by a state grant if you have 500 acres or more. Preserving all the connecting lands which currently are in Chapter 61 which will help to preserve the scenic values and working spaces. This will be a collaborative agreement with Mount Grace where each group is held to the terms and conditions of this agreement.

The current work that Jamie Pottern has been doing is as follows:

- Meeting with each landowner and review timeline
- Sign Loan Agreements with Mount Grace to prepay expenses necessary to move the project forward
- Appraisals and title work
- Draft Conservation Restriction language with landowner and the Town
- Contract for landowners to sign purchase and sales agreement to sell their conservation restrictions to Mount Grace and the Town.

Mount Grace agrees to ensure compliance of the purposes and conditions of the Conservation Restriction through the monitoring and enforcement of the Conservation restriction while the Town will agree to cooperate with Mount Grace in ensuring such compliance, reserving the right to participate by ensuring that the purposes and conditions of the Conservation Restriction are monitored and enforced by Mount Grace.

The Commission reviewed the Smith CR parcel in detail (terms of both are virtually the same). Both CRs involve limited public access.

The Conservation Restriction Packet includes three main sections including but not limited to:

- Description of the landowners, references to the deeds, who the parties are and agreement
- Purpose – What purpose is it being protected and what is the conservation value (Agricultural resources, habitats, open space plan and cultural value.)
- Prohibited Acts – Takes away certain rights but then gives them back to be done under certain parameters.

The commission reviewed the 8 declared public benefits of protecting these parcels. Mr. Fairbrother questioned the CR's assertion that there is public benefit to protecting land for cultural purposes specifically pertaining to this area's Native American heritage as a ceremonial landscape. The ceremonial landscape referred to is supported by a National Park Service determination of eligibility to the National Historic Register. Jaime will review the language.

Jaime will formalize the CR documents and come back to Commission in the near future to execute the final documents.

Open Space and Recreation Plan Workshop:

Guest: Alyssa LaRose – FRCOG Land Use Planner

The commission reviewed Chapter 3: "Community Setting". Overall Alyssa tried to consolidate the Community Setting Section of the plan. Highlights of the discussion include:

- Included summary of Regional Plan for Sustainable Development
- Addition of Mormon Hollow Partnership along with an East-West Corridor of protected land North-South Corridor into regional context narrative.
- Clarification of the three watershed in Montague (Sawmill and Millers being sub watersheds)
- FERC relicensing information has been added. Updated recreation resources have been updated due to the improvements in Montague recently.
- Information added about obesity rates and the link between the built in environment, public health and physical activity along with the Mass in Motion program. This data was not available in 2010.
- Population Changes were updated both geographically and by age.
- Updated information on labor force and employment. Montague (residents) has generally higher unemployment rates than the county. Home based businesses are not included in this figure and Alyssa will check with the Building Department for the Home Occupation Permits.
- Data shows that Manufacturing, Education, Fishing and Hunting along with Agriculture have increased.
- Tourism – updated Millers Falls as it is a historic district and redevelopment is happening there currently. Added information about the livability plan and the recreational activities including whitewater rafting.
- Industrial Development – proposed new industrial park in the near future on Sandy Lane.
- Infrastructure – Includes pedestrian and transportation networks.
- Water Department information to be updated.
- Waste Water & Sewer service – Information has been updated and the department is in transition now so information might be hard to get a hold of.
- Zoning – Zoning Changes are in the process of being reviewed and updated.

- Survey- The survey has been released. There have been around 100 responses both on line and hard copy to date.

Alyssa will work on the revisions with Walter and there will be continued discussions at future Conservation Meetings.

Agent Updates:

November 10 meeting rescheduled to Wed November 9, 2016 at 6:30 PM due to Town being closed on Nov 10 in observance of Veterans Day.

Motion made by Addie Rose Holland to adjourn the meeting at 8:01PM. Seconded by Donna Francis.
Motion passed unanimously.

Approved by: _____ **Date:** _____

Exhibits:

Hunting property CR and Map (DRAFT)
Smith property CR and Map (DRAFT)
Open Space Plan Section 3 (DRAFT)