York Conservation Commission Meeting Notes from 2/12/20

**In Attendance:** Steph Byrne, Laura Brogan, Cameron Frecker, Alan McDonald, Mary Dopart with special guests Dylan Smith (York Planning Director), Doreen MacGillis (York Land Trust Executive Director) & Alica Johnson-Grafe (Staff Member of Brixham Montessori Friends School).

**Next Meeting:** March 11<sup>th</sup> @ 5pm, York Library

**Reminder:** Dylan Smith invited the Commission to attend the Planning Board’s Town Comprehensive Plan meeting this February 26<sup>th</sup>-27<sup>th</sup>.

**Brixham Montessori Friends School Neighboring Development**

- The Montessori School is concerned about the proposed development on the neighboring property on Brickyard Court.
- The school uses the neighboring property for educational purposes, exploring the habitat in wet areas and possible vernal pools.
- The school reached out to the Maine DEP about registering this possible vernal pool and making sure it is protected.
- The Maine DEP is coming out this spring to analyze the site.
- All information has been passed onto the Planning Board. They will review the situation after the Maine DEP has come to a conclusion.
- The Conservation Commission will wait to hear from the school after the Maine DEP conclusion and reassess the situation.

**Open Space Ordinance 7.6**

- The Conservation Commission’s purpose for its proposed amendments to the Open Space Ordinance is to address the specifics regarding ‘reasonability’ and make further clarifications.
- The commission would like to address that space that is not feasibly able to be developed should not count towards open space if it doesn’t meet a certain set of requirements. Such requirements or guidelines could include connection to other ‘open space’ areas, accessibility, etc…
- The commission also wants to stress that a proper site analysis is done before the design process starts. Possible additions to the site analysis that were discussed included showing a septic system and potential building outline.
- Rural areas vs. growth areas is an idea the commission will take a further look at regarding different development guidelines. An example would be to promote a larger buffer area in rural areas.
- An economic feasibility proposal for the construction of things such as roads would be helpful in determining the design of the development.
- The idea of the Conservation Commission “owning” or “managing” easements in a new development was brought up.
- Proposed new developments in town are required to be ‘Open Space’ themed.
- The Conservation Commission would like to be included in new proposed development site walks with the Planning Board.
- Although the commission does have an overall written outline, the creation of a Chapter was mentioned. This would enhance and clarify the commissions role in the town. We will look into this further.
- It was mentioned that beginningwithhabitat.org maps can be a great resource for future research regarding land use and important site features.
Now that the commission is fully established and the Planning Board is made aware of this, we look forward to working closely with them in the future. One way to ensure this will take place is that the commission will be notified when a plan application is filled by the Planning Board or Planning Director.

**Pesticide Policy**

- It was brought to attention that the Town of Stratham Conservation Commission has been very successful in implementing a pesticide policy and increasing community awareness. They state that they are “willing to help” organizations with pesticide information and policy/ordinance organization. Members of York’s commission will reach out to Stratham’s commission.
- HealthyYards.org also has great information on pesticides.
- The commission wants to stress education in forming this policy. Getting information on pesticides into schools would be a great first step.
- Our policy draft was sent to York’s Code Enforcement Officers including Amber Harrison and Leslie Hinz to review and make comments.
- At the time of this meeting the only comments/revisions the commission got back were to add a section of York’s existing Lawns to Lobster Program. Also to think about the policy from the viewpoint of mosquito control. And to mention that there are many handouts with useful information about Lawns to Lobsters and Yardscaping from the Town.

**Field Mowing**

- The commission recently learned about proper times to mow a field to decrease habitat destruction for native plants, pollinators and birds.
- A member attended a Meadow Workshop this past fall presented by Heather McCargo of the Wild Seed Project. She stressed that determining to mow and when to do it depends on the expectation of the owner. Mowing is not necessary unless it is desired to keep the area a grassland meadow. A grassland meadow will turn into a woody shrub habitat and eventually a forest if not cut year after year.
- Further research has also backed this up, as Heather pointed out she is currently working with the Maine DOT to adjust mowing times to promote native plants.
- The Massachusetts Audubon also has great info regarding reasons not to mow until after a certain date to allow for bird nesting.
- Overall if a grassland meadow is desired, the best time to mow in order not to disrupt native plants, pollinators and birds is in late fall “after the last asters have released their seeds”.
- Members of the commission would like to reach out York’s Park and Rec Department about how they manage town owned fields. The goal of this would to be to gather information and make them aware of these concerns regarding mow timing.
- Links regarding this topic will be sent to Conservation Committee members.
- The commission is open to having someone such as Ryan Coite (YPR Foreman) attend one of the Commissions monthly meetings to further discuss this topic.