

Franconia Conservation Commission (FCC)

Meeting: July 2, 2024, 3 pm

Members present: Chris Nicodemus, Ginny Jeffryes, Julie Weisman, Michelle Sauque; Art Daily at 3:15.

Guests: Robin Ross

FCC membership: Chris introduces Robin Ross, who is interested in being an alternate. She studied Environmental Sciences in college a few decades ago. She explains that she's away January through mid-April. Chris explains process of appointment. Ginny explains state law specifying number of voting members as being 3 to 7. Discussion about what would happen if 2 alternates showed up when there were members missing – who would be elevated to voting for that meeting, the first alternate? Not sure, but possibly both if we had 5 or fewer voting members present. Michelle is interested in joining meetings via Zoom when she's traveling. Ginny says mentions we've done speaker phone call-ins sometimes when a member can't be present but wants to be, or when we need a quorum. After discussion about technology and apps, it appears we can do an audio or audiovisual if needed for individual members.

Minutes: Julie moves to accept the June 4, 2024 minutes. Chris seconds. Unanimous vote in favor.

New alternate member: Julie moves to make Robin Ross an alternate member on the committee. Michelle seconds. Unanimous vote in favor.

Town Forest ACT Easement: Chris says Select Board and Town attorney need to agree on easement language, based on last month's discussion with Rosalind Page of Ammonoosuc Conservation Trust (ACT), so we need to give them guidance. June 2024 minutes contain detailed description of what Rosalind explained, and our preliminary discussion. Discussion today about how to finalize and communicate to them our suggestions about what we would like modified in the ACT's first draft. Chris and Julie think it's important to not modify it much, and keep the language broad for the most part. Chris clarifies that overall purpose is for it to be a sanctuary with no bicycle or motorized access. Ginny thinks that Section III, General Use Limitations, should eliminate the "de minimis commercial activities" portion which enables the town to rent the property out to a third for weddings, parties, and other for-profit classes. Julie agrees. Chris suggests we review the document page by page to annotate it.

Page 4, Section III A: Land Use: Julie suggests striking the phrase "...and for de minimis commercial activities as specified in Paragraph III F,..." Agreed.

Page 4, Section III C: Division:

Chris notes that the property is actually 2 conjoined lots – 17.2 and 17.3, not a single lot. Will suggest modifying a few words in the first sentence to "...as 2 single conjoined lots..."

Page 5, Section III F: De Minimis Commercial Activities.

Discussion and agreement that Franconia has multiple other conserved open spaces available for events, and that eliminating this section altogether makes sense to protect it. Agreed that we recommend striking the entire Section III F.

Page 5, Section III G: Water Rights. Discussion, and agreement it's OK, but relabel it as Section III F.

Section IV: Structures.

Page 6, Section IV B 1: Minor Recreational Structures:

Discussion about reasons to whether to retain restrictions on tents and portable toilets. General agreement that since we're recommending striking III F, we do not need to amend this to permit portable toilets. Agreed to keep this subsection unchanged.

Page 7, Section IV B 5: Minor Gardening Structures: Discussion results in deciding that since we don't know how climate change will affect the land in future, such as perhaps less of it being forested wetlands, that we will leave this section permitting hoop houses and the other low impact structures. We do not anticipate using the land for gardening, but don't want to restrict this is it's needed non-commercially in 50 years. Requires easement holder permission.

Will leave this paragraph unchanged.

Page 8, Section V, B 2. Surface Alterations: Trails. Discussion about how we have been clear that at present we don't want trails, but we agree we need to preserve the option for the future. Ginny thinks that allowing maintained trails 8 feet wide is too much. Michelle asks if that would preclude bringing in equipment to do restoration or forestry. Julie thinks the forestry clauses in the document protect that use. Discussion results in agreement to change "...eight (8)..." to "six (6)".

Page 8, Section VI, B. General Vegetation Management Rights. Ginny thinks fungi should be protected, in addition to "vegetation" not being cut. Explains briefly that the conservation science does not support the current view by many mushroom foragers that cutting all the fungi is harmless. Explains that fungi aren't actually covered scientifically or culturally under the term "vegetation". Thinks paragraph 7 would allow us to remove samples for scientific study, if that need arose, with ACT written permission. Discussion results in consensus to add "and fungi", to read: "Vegetation and fungi may not be cut, disturbed, altered, or removed...."

Pages 9 through 12 – ok.

Page 13, Section VIII A: Recreational Uses and Motorized Vehicles, Limited Right of Public Access. Discussion that we do not want to permit ATVs or snowmobiles for recreation, either now or in the future. Forest management use if needed is permitted in Section VI, and isn't a "recreational use". Brief discussion of bicycles and e-bikes, which we currently do not want to permit since land is mostly wetlands. Unknown how land ecosystem will change in future, so will leave in future options of bicycles with written permission by ACT. We agree to strike the words "all-terrain vehicles, snowmobiles", and the words "and other high-impact recreational uses...", with the goal to exclude them as future options.

Page 14, Section VIII C 4: Recreational Uses, Motorized Vehicle Uses. Ginny thinks permitting golf carts doesn't make sense. Julie and Michelle thinks that motorized wheel chairs should be permitted if at some point FCC wants to create accessible trails, and agrees that we don't need to include golf carts. We agreed to strike the words "golf carts".

Section IX Definitions: C. Low-Impact Outdoor Recreation. Discussion about the words "all-terrain vehicles, snowmobiles" being part of the list of what is not low-impact, and stating they need written approval of ACT. Ginny thinks leaving these words in contradicts the change we made to VIII A, in light of the "with written permission" statement. Michelle points out that this is simply a definition. Chris and Michelle think we can comment to have the lawyer to look at this and decide. Agreed.

Remainder of the document reviewed: no changes.

Ginny will send our agreed upon suggested document changes to Town Admin and Jill.

Natural Resource Inventory progress: Ginny briefly reviewed the last walk with Elise, attended by Ginny and Julie. Chris says the final fieldwork walk with Elise will be July 15, mainly looking at upper Weisman Brook. Ginny says Elise mentioned possibly doing the upper part of the south branch of the Gale River off the Gale R Loop Road. Ginny bushwhacked up there a week ago and it's a very long way, with multiple stream crossings, so doubts there will be time. With help of Elise's town boundary file, Ginny refined our I-Naturalist "Franconia NRI 2024" data collection project to grab only I-Nat observations – photos or audio - within town boundaries. It requires actually "joining" the project on I-naturalist.

Fox Hill Park Forest Society easement: Chris says that per the SPNHF easement monitor last spring, there are deficiencies in the corner posts from Chris Collman's house to around the corner past where

the trailhead parking lot is. Chris communicated that to Libby and Jill. It's difficult to know whether we're being encroached upon. Chris says that there's a propane tank behind Hillwinds that might be on the easement but unknown. Julie wonders if this means the town needs a new survey. Chris doesn't know what the plan is.

Next meeting: Tuesday, Sept 3, 2024, 3 pm - tentative due to holiday.

Minutes by Ginny Jeffries