Franconia Conservation Commission (FCC)

Meeting: Sept 26, 2017, 8 a.m.

Members present: Jill Brewer, Mary Grote, Ginny Jeffryes, Mark Ober, Kim Cowles, Chris Nicodemus.

Minute approval: Kim makes motion to accept minutes of 7/25/2017. Jill seconds. Motion passes unanimously.

Middle Earth (McKenzie Woods) conservation easement markers: Kim:

Most of boundary was walked late last winter by 4 FCC members. Most portions are marked with easement signs, but some parts need signs. Chris researched a sign company in Manlius NY a while back, sent Kim an email with the info. That company can print up a quantity of markers with a logo of our choice for modest cost. Jill will talk to Holly and Select Board about using a logo similar to town’s logo. Signs will say “Franconia Conservation Commission Easement”. Discussion re placement distance: Mark says law requires every 100 yards for No Trespassing signs, not sure about easement markers. Chris says ACT has chosen on their properties to go with approximately every 200 feet for easement signs. Discussion that some areas on easement may need more density, depending on specifics of location. FCC members agreed to walk remainder of easement boundaries on 10/12/2017, 8 am. It involves some bushwacking.

Fox Hill Park update: Kim:

Reports SPNHF will come for their annual walk of their conservation easement a.m. of 10/17/17 . Re the Gale River Trail accessibility grant: The landscape fabric with overlying gravel laydown is complete. Tucker Scheffer has volunteered many hours, along with Kim and a few other local volunteers. Gravel was less expensive than ledgepack, so was chosen as the base. On 10/2/2017 the ledgepack will be applied to the trail, using 12 student volunteers from White Mountain School. Easement holder SPNHF reviewed the project prior to applying for the grant and wrote a supportive letter. Bob Montagno is working on obtaining local business support to do something similar behind the Main St businesses on the River Trail there, to make for increased accessible walking trails in town. Ginny says she walked the trail and the work thus far is remarkable – easily accessible for frail elderly. Kim notes that the grant was funded for much less money than requested, so it doesn’t go as far as was originally proposed for the grant. But it covers what was the worst part of the trail – the wettest most uneven terrain.

MTAG grant update: Chris:

It has sort of stalled out since Kayla moved to RI. Waiting for the final map of the overlay, which has to come out of North Country Council. There haven’t been meetings since June. Once complete, there will need to be public hearings by the Planning Board, followed by a vote on the plan at Town Meeting.

Crocker Woods Preserve conservation easement: No recent update from Rebecca Brown of ACT on when ACT will close on the donation by Sarah Crocker’s family. Successful walk of the trails, old and new, led by ACT in August, with 25+ local participants. Ginny went, and notes impressive new walking trails made by Chris.

Meadow Brook Beaver dam update: Chris notes that in addition to the info in 7/25 minutes, that just before the July 1st downpour/flood, he spent time with a Federal hydrologist looking at computerized maps. It was the same day that Jill/Kim/Gregg walked to dam with Sean Sweeney (independent hydrologist). Chris pointed out to the Federal hydrologist that the Meadow Brook is misnamed “Tucker Brook” on the USGS maps, and that the Bridesmaid Falls watershed comes into Meadow Brook, not into the Ham Branch, also misidentified on USGS maps. Federal hydrologist is going to notify the State of NH, which is responsible for correcting this for water flow etc on the maps. It was also apparent at their meeting that a 2-acre-foot water pool from beaver dam is nothing, compared to the volume of water coming off the various upstream mountain watersheds. And the riparian buffer of the Lawrence property, including the alder habitat upstream from it, clearly mitigate flooding. Chris has been there since, and no beavers seen recently. On his previous walk, shortly after the July 1st downpour, there were multiple beavers. Ginny reports she walked to the beaver dam July 25th after the last FCC meeting: entirely empty, with a narrow gap in top portion towards the right side of the dam (when facing upstream), of unknown origin. Chris hadn’t seen a gap right after the downpour/flood of July 1st, when the dam was slowly draining. Ginny notes many long-dead trees in the surrounding area from the previous water level, suggesting beavers won’t return. There were no sign of beavers 7/25. She also walked downstream in Meadowbrook channel from the dam to the Franstead property edge, and was struck by how meandering/wandering the Brook is, with high banks along the way and wide flood plains on both sides. She thinks there was never any risk of Franstead flooding from this beaver dam reservoir location.

Other business:

Jill reports that Town is applying for available CMAQ program funds (Congestion Mitigation Air Quality funds) – due Oct 20. Jill wondering of FCC will agree to supply a letter of support. This is the first year they’re expanding from SE NH to the whole state. Franconia and Berlin are the only two towns applying from rural areas. Franconia’s eligible activity: bicycle and pedestrian improvements. Proposal will be a foot bridge across Gale River by Ham Branch, from Garnet Hill parking lot to Blodgett’s property across Ham Branch. Blodgett’s are on board. Then a walking and bicycle trail along the Ham Branch to Bickford Hill bridge. All landowners involved have been contacted and are supportive, except the little green house, so trail would need to bypass that property. 80/20% grant. The 20% town contribution can be in-kind services – volunteer hours. There is a lot of congestion and traffic to and from Lafayette School, which can be documented. Kim says she already has some data she can provide, accumulated about traffic flow to/from the school, from a previous “Safe Routes to School” initiative in 2009.

NEMBA info: Chris reports that NEMBA has a grant to update/improve Fox Hill park kiosk ($500 grant). Also, they got a Tillotson grant of $2500 towards the planned Angela’s Trail, (Bethlehem to Profile School to Franconia) so kids can bike from both towns to the school. So far they have been awarded $5000 funds. Franconia’s end proposes access along Scragg Mountain Road to its end, then across Indian Brook, then along/near power lines to the Profile School athletic fields. The Franconia/Sugar Hill piece is fairly doable. The harder piece will be the part of the proposal from Bethlehem Village to the school, due to a big hill, and crossing SPNHF land. More grants are being applied for since it will be expensive.

Chris reports that NEMBA et al is trying to arrange a presentation-roundtable to get multiple diverse players locally involved with a long-term vision to connecting to Franconia Notch. Jill mentions that Gale River Motel owner, Kevin Johnson, visited select board yesterday to emphasize economic importance of identifying a local draw, such as mountain biking. Chris agrees, but notes that this trail would be focused on being walkable, possibly cinders, not asphalt, and not specifically focused on mountain biking.

NH Wildlife Action Fund (F&G and UNH Coop Ext): Chris reports that a member from each organization gave a presentation to ACT Lands Committee, after already having met with Littleton CC and Sugar Hill CC. Chris asked them if they’d meet with us and they’re eager. The focus is to help communities to recognize their sensitive habitat, in order to prevent species from becoming endangered. They also want to help local communities to have access to their wildlife inventories. Chris notes they provide a nice laminated local inventory. FCC members indicate interest, and Chris will approach the Fund about possible dates in Nov or Dec; expect a 30-45 minute presentation. Mark notes he may also be able to obtain for FCC a state map of local wildlife inventory for our records, and will check into this.

Chris makes a motion: The FCC is fully supportive of Jill Brewer’s initiative for a CMAQ grant application in support of the Ham Branch trail as presented (actual trail name to be determined). Ginny seconds. Motion passes unanimously.

Ginny mentions the Nov 4th NHACC annual meeting presentation, which this year is on conserving land. She might be interested in attending. Will check further into the specifics of the presentation and contact Kim, if so.

Next meeting October 24th 8 a.m.

Minutes by Ginny Jeffryes.