

Nelson Conservation Commission
Hearing December 2, 2015
Notes

Draft

The following are notes from the public meeting held jointly with the Board of Selectmen regarding the proposed purchase of approximately 580 acres of land on Osgood and Hurd Hills for conservation and recreational purposes with funds put aside for that purpose and under the control of the Nelson Conservation Commission (NCC).

Present were selectmen: Maury Collins, Susan Hansel and David Upton. NCC members present were Kathy Schillemat, Tom Newcombe, David Patek and Rick Church. (Susan Hansel also serves as a NCC alternate.)

David Upton opened the meeting at 7:03PM indicating that the selectmen intend to purchase the property in question using their authority under RSA 41:14-a and that this, and another meeting, were required by that RSA before the purchase could be made. He indicated that no current town tax money would be used for the project. He said that this was a meeting to discuss a matter that the Conservation Commission had been leading and turned the meeting over to Kathy Schillemat, chair of the Commission.

Kathy opened saying that the Nelson Conservation Commission proposed to use money from the Partridge fund (\$261,000) and the Conservation Fund (\$39,000) to purchase a fee interest in the property from the Harris Center for Conservation Education (HCCE) with a conservation easement held by that organization. The authority to do this is contained in the terms of the will of Sidney Partridge as accepted by Town Meeting (the Partridge Fund) and by the provisions of 36-A:5 in the case of the Conservation Fund.

Kathy gave a brief report of the history of the land conservation successes in Nelson including land and easement purchases by NCC since its inception in 1970. Land has been protected in the Great Meadow and around the village center. She talked about the attributes of this parcel that recommend it for the substantial expenditure of conservation funds. This piece on Osgood and Hurd Hills is the highest ranking parcel in town as identified by a Natural Resources Inventory completed just after the Partridge Fund was established.

She discussed the partnership between NCC and HCCE that brought this about and reported that a grant of \$150,000 from the Land and Water Conservation Fund had been secured to help with the purchase and certain improvements to the property required by the LWCF Grant to make it accessible for public recreation. She spoke passionately about the Town of Nelson and its citizens having a beautiful unfragmented piece of upland forest to hike, hunt, snowmobile, practice agriculture and timber management.

Tom Newcombe explained where the money came from, how it would be used. The purchase price of the restricted fee interest will cost approximately \$300,000

exhausting the two funds involved. There are certain transaction costs that will come out of these funds as well. Tom also explained that the LWCF grant was a reimbursement grant that could replenish our conservation funds if the town votes to establish an expendable trust fund to hold those monies at the March 2016 meeting.

In summary Kathy said the benefits of the purchase were:

The protection of the top conservation priority in the Nelson Natural Resource Inventory.

No use of current taxpayer dollars required

In fact, David Upton reported, there is a memorandum of understanding between the selectboard and NCC to this effect.

The protection of the clean waters of Nubanusit Lake and Spoonwood Pond

Very good wildlife habitat

Preservation of the rural nature of Nelson

Land open to the recreational use of Nelson citizens.

Kathy opened the meeting to comments and questions.

Q: What kinds of other costs are involved?

A: Grant required improvements totaling \$30,000 including two parking lots, two kiosks and a forest management plan. Closing and legal costs including title insurance, legal work, appraisals, survey work.

Q: How much are those closing costs?

A: They are known and we'll bring them to the next meeting.

Q: How were the costs estimated for the grant items?

A: We called a forester and asked what a forest management plan would cost. We estimated \$15,000 for two parking lots and asked Mike Tarr if he thought we could do it for that. He thought we could, comfortably. We asked the Monadnock Conservancy what they paid for kiosks and used that number. We can bring the exact costs for legal work and closing to the next meeting.

Q: That's a lot of money. What else could we use it for?

A: It is a lot of money and the burden for the town is lessened by the fact that HCCE is paying for more than half of it. There are no other pieces of land available to buy at the moment that are high conservation priorities.

Q: What else does NCC send money on?

A: Milfoil prevention activities at two lakes in town

Q: How much tax revenue will be lost? And how much will this add to the % of the town that's protected?

A: The current taxes on the land are approximately \$3,000. Dennis Delagrecca reported that his research finds 26% of the town is now protected and this would raise that to 28%

At this point Kathy introduced Geoff Jones, a professional forester, who is on the Conservation Commission in Stoddard. He spoke of the impact of having 66% of Stoddard protected. He said property values have increased as a result. Stoddard has one of the lowest tax rates in the state. In spite of the fact that much of Stoddard

has been protected at no cost to the town, the Conservation Commission has sought town funding to support recent projects. He cited one where the warrant article asked to appropriate \$5,000 and that was amended on the floor to \$50,000 and passed with wide support. He urged us to ask for town money for this project.

Q: Do you have estimates for the running costs of managing this land and any associated revenue?

A: No, but we expect to harvest timber some day and that should pay the costs and return some to the town.

Q: We need a budget for the running costs.

Q: How much of the grant would be returned to a conservation fund?

A: About \$100,000 would be available.

Q: Concern expressed that the costs of maintaining the property would dry up the fund.

Q: What about the costs of rescue and fire? What is the town's liability?

A: People use that land for hunting, walking and other casual recreation now. We hope for heavier use, but do not expect a dramatic increase. "It is not Mt. Monadnock." If anything the trails and roads we make over time should make access for those activities easier than it is now.

A: Tom Murray offered that state law shields landowners from liability unless they charge a fee for use. The one exception: open wells.

Q: Is this a done deal or will the town have a say?

A: We have signed a purchase and sale agreement, so it is pretty much a done deal.

Q: Shouldn't the town meeting have a say?

A: The Partidge Fund was given for the Conservation Commission's use and accepted by town meeting on those terms.

Q: Who will own and maintain Homestead Lane? It costs the Voymas' about \$1,000 a year to maintain it now.

A: Ethan Tolman will continue to own it. The town will get a right of way just as the cell tower people, the Voymas' and Lucy Daniels now have. We expect to agree with the neighbors on a fair process for the maintenance required and how the costs should be shared. There will be a 4-5 car parking lot built on the new town land on the east side of Homestead Lane before you get to the Voymas' property

Q: I'm still concerned about annual carrying costs.

A: Geoff Jones said his experience in Stoddard is that it would be a little costs for things like refreshing boundary markers. Forestland isn't expensive to maintain. It might cost you \$2-3,000 per year and timber sales should cover that easily even if you have to wait a few years for that.

Bud French: Some years ago we spent \$50,000 toward purchasing an easement of the Black swamp area cutting a 19-lot subdivision down to 4 house lots. It is good to see a plan to have money go back into a fund.

Q: If the Harris Center is willing to buy it, why would Nelson put up any money?

A: Jeremy Wilson of the Harris Center: We don't have that kind of money and could not do this without the town.

Q: The Harris Center posts against hunting. Will this land be posted?

A: The Harris Center gives free passes to hunt to those who apply for a permit. Nelson will own the land and has no intention of posting it against hunting.

Q: Won't there be a safety issue having hikers and hunters out there together?

A: There is today, but both wear safety orange to prevent accidents.

Q: Do we have to make the area wheel chair accessible?

A: There's no requirement to do that.

Q: People were urged to help the process by thinking of uses they'd like to see.

Next meeting: December 15th at 7PM. People are urged to bring suggestions for uses and a name the place.

Karen Tolman thanked the Conservation Commission for their work.

Meeting adjourned at 9:20PM

Rick Church
Secretary