Conservation Commission Minutes
January 11, 2016

Present: Joe Houston, Susie Houston, June Cook, Carly Brown, Emily Diaz, Carol Maroni, Diane Morgan, Elinor Osborn, Steve Wright

Absent: Farley Brown, Leah Szafranski

Minutes: Minutes of November 23, 2015, were approved.

Commission Organization and Operation:

Joe explained the commission is allowed to have 9 members, and one of the three new members would serve as alternate. Carol volunteered to be the alternate. He welcomed the new members and noted they bring an interest and areas of expertise to the commission.

Discussion of the question if an alternate can vote when a regular member is absent was not resolved. Susie as select board liaison is a non-voting member. June will check with Town Clerk or Secretary of State's office, and Susie will check other avenues.

Carly will fill Rhoda Sweatt's position, which expires in 2016; Emily will fill John Bailey's position which expires in 2018. Carol will serve as alternate, which expires 2019.

Meeting protocols were reviewed. Consensus was to wait until after town meeting and appointments to re-organize. It was noted the commission terms should be 4 years as outlined in Chapter 18 legislation, which is a topic for future discussion with select board.

Discussion of keeping on agenda for efficient use of time: Designate items as "Action Items" or "Discussion Items" to keep focus. Assigning time limits to topics. Avoid meandering off target.

Conservation Fund: Can commission create a fund on its own? Interpretation of law which establishes conservation commissions indicates that may be done. It was noted under V.S.A. Chapter 18, one role of the commission is to create a fund and receive money from donors. Discussion centered on going to the select board to establish a fund and/or not seeking it through town meeting. Question should we do so or ask select board do so on its own.

Suggestion, a special town meeting could be held in connection with election in November. A fund could be established with zero dollars but would be a venue for donations and outside gifts other than receiving tax dollars.

Consensus it was important to have a fund and follows community visit comments on land protection and high energy currently in town on the issue. Future question: Should select board have final say on expenditures from a fund? If receiving money and directive on how it should be spent, should there be a time limit? From where funds will come? How will Conservation Commission Fund be managed?

Flexibility is important key in establishing a fund. Time limits on directed funds is important or money could languish in an account. At the moment , the commission is not seeking public funds but hoping to give people a place to donate for that purpose. Come up with concrete guidelines in the future.

Steve moved that Joe be authorized to meet with the select board and explain the Chapter 18 role of commissions relative to conservation funds. Seconded by Diane and voted unanimously.

Treasurer's Report: Diane made a treasurer's report: 2015 Conservation Commission Expenditures: $10, laminate sign, June; $50, Association of Vermont Conservation dues; $300, assessment project on upper Black River, Scott Lanham; $133.58, tarps for Knotweed workshop, Joe; $214.20, assessment project on upper Black River, Farley.

Recommendation: Future expenditures should be documented, voted to have complete accountability, and follow proper accounting procedures. Select Board has a general account for committees and basically on a first-come, first-served basis.

Town Meeting Report: June distributed a draft.

Public Comment: None

The commission will meet on Monday, February 22, at 7:00 p.m. in the town offices.

Submitted by: June Pichel Cook, Secretary