

Morristown Conservation Commission

October 21, 2021

Meeting opened at 6:30 pm. Meeting was held at the Town Offices.

Attendance: Ron Stancliff, Jim Pease, Richard Sargent, Brent Teillon
Jennifer Andrews, Dave Stevens, Jess Zehngut, Mariah Keaghy, Kristen Connelly.

Guests: None

The September meeting minutes were approved. There was no treasurer's report.

Meeting minutes will be reviewed 10 days after they are sent or revised by the Chair at the next meeting.

Old Business:

1. **Town Forest License** – the license was given to Town legal for review. The license for the parking lot will have to be renewed every 10 years. Brent made a motion to send the license to the Selectboard for approval, Kristen seconded it. The motion was unanimously approved.
2. **Jens Hilke Meeting** – the meeting has been postponed until Spring and will be with Andy Wood. The committee reviewed the online presentation and provided the attached follow-up points along with this discussion.
3. **Conservation Fund** - The group agreed that we should tell the Selectboard we would like to petition for a vote on the Conservation Fund. We would like to put ½ cent tax on the Town Meeting agenda. The group also agreed that we need to put the TF logging sales into a separate MCC account and not be in an account with other Town income. Brent made a motion that we tell the Selectboard we would like to petition for ½ cent on the grant list for the Conservation Fund. Kristen seconded it. The motion passed unanimously.
4. **Sullivan Land** - Dave made a motion that we investigate buying the Sullivan land, Brent seconded it. The motion passed unanimously.
5. **Potash Brook** – Dick made a motion that investigate protecting Potash Brook and Jen added that we continue to develop a plan for the brook. Kristen seconded it and amended the motion to include the plan. Brent seconded the amended motion. The motion passed unanimously. Ron will appoint a subcommittee later.
6. **Bugbee Springs** – project is already a priority for MCC.
7. **Clark Park** - project is already a priority for MCC.
8. **Bryan Pond Parking Lot** - project is already a priority for MCC.
9. **Demars Trail** – Kristen made a motion to continue contacting landowners for easements between Morristown Corners Rd and Bridge St. Brent seconded it. The motion passed unanimously.
10. **Koper Property** - project is already a priority for MCC.
11. **Miles Property** – there may be no room for a trail given that the property has a 25' buffer along the top of bank that borders Potash Brook. Mr. Miles needs to go to the Selectboard about his concerns about safety on Washington Highway.

New Business:

1. **Archive of MCC records** – Kristen asked Sarah if we can store our shared documents on the Town computer. She will follow up with Sarah. If the Town says no, we may buy space on Google.
2. **Conservation Fund** – Jen stated that we should get the need for creation of a Conservation Fund into the Town Plan. The next meeting on the plan is 11/15. Kristen stated that she will submit the idea to the Planning Council.
3. **Beaver Meadow Parking Lot** - Kristen noted that the Town Forest Trails map at the parking lot has been vandalized.
4. **Winter MCC meetings** – the plan is to have hybrid Zoom-Town office meetings this winter. Jess and Mariah will help Kristen out with this and setting up the monitor at the Town offices.

The meeting adjourned at 8:10 pm.

Respectively submitted,

Jim Pease

Secretary

Morristown Conservation Commission

Report from the Conservation Fund Committee

The committee meeting with Andy Wood was cancelled due to Covid restrictions and is slated for next spring, if needed. The committee members reviewed his webnair on "Starting a Conservation Fund" individually. The purpose of this review was to learn more about starting a conservation fund from Andy's presentation and to compare where the MCC is to his starting points.

The following is a brief summary of results. Bold print is headings from Andy's presentation followed by our remarks or reactions.

1. **Create a conservation commission** – Morristown has had a CC since 2000, currently at full strength with 9 members.
2. **Develop a close working rapport with Select Board in conservation matters** – our meeting with the select board last week showed interest and respect for our work, (also pointed out some areas we need to follow more closely). Support on donations to Brownsville, and the Valcour and Ricketson farms indicate interest in preserving land. Improvements to the town forest were recognized. Select Person Jessica Graham was assigned as liaison to the MCC to ensure better communications.
3. **Create a Town Forest** – Morristown has had a town Forest since 1958.
4. **Develop multi recreation uses on town forest** – We have developed trails, maps and held walks on town forest. Getting a very good response from people who have used the forest. While forest use is increasing we still need to make more people aware of the forest and its amenities.
5. **Develop a fund to deposit timber sale receipts for use by the MCC for conservation activities** – The town finance office create a fund (Forest Land Investment Fund) but it is not exclusively for MCC use for conservation activities, and can be used for any town expense, WE NEED TO WORK WITH ERIC AND TINA TO CHANGE THIS AND HAVE THE TIMBER SALE RECEIPTS FROM THE TOWN FOREST PUT IN A SEPARATE ACCOUNT. Brent will get the dollar figure from Fran Sladyk and compared notes with Tina to make this retroactive to our previous timber sales.
6. **Develop parking and bridges to aid accessibility to Town forest** – we have constructed a trail and stepping stone bridge across State land from the Beaver Meadow parking lot across Mud Brook to access the Town Forest. (Morristown Highway maintains and plows the Beaver Meadow parking lot). We are currently working on approvals to construct a parking lot at the Bryan Pond Trailhead. We have received approval from the Dept of FPR (have an unsigned license which has been sent to Morristown Legal Counsel for review and approval as to legalities, then to Select Board for approval to spend the funds.
7. **Develop a list of overall priorities that needs attention or future funding** – not done
8. **Develop a list of at risk areas to protect or conserve** – not done
9. **Expand town forest** – we need to give serious thought to purchasing or preserving the Sullivan property. It is one of our only adjoining wild land areas to expand the town forest. Once its gone, its gone. Other adjoining land areas are attached to developed lands. The price is so expensive that it scared us into thinking we couldn't buy it. However, the Selectman an Eric keep pointing out that it is for sale and show an interest in it. Purchasing this land would be a large undertaking, require a lot of work, especial

the funding but deserves serious discussion. A good carrot to approach the taxpayers for more funds!

10. **Develop an Inventory of the Town's Natural Resources** – not done

The following is a partial list of items and thoughts triggered from Andy's presentation and gives us an idea of where we will need funds and the process of obtaining funding. Its a starting point. Also we reviewed subjects talked about at previous meetings but not have had time to follow up or complete. **The high point is that we have a Morristown Conservation Commission fund in place**, similar to what Andy talks about, but it needs some clarification.

Existing Conservation funds and how they are Used to pay expenditures.

First, in the MCC Bylaws Section 9 Administration it states" the Commission shall have two accounts for handling funds. One fund shall be the account maintained by the town, which holds annual operating funds appropriated by the town. The second fund, established by resolution of the Select Board (4-28-03) and called the **Morristown Conservation Commission Fund** shall hold funds which are appropriated, donated to, or otherwise raised for the purposes of land acquisition, land management, inventory, education, information, and other activities consistent with the Commission's function defined in Section 2".

2nd . Tina Sweet, Town Finance Director send me the following email: "we have 2 Conservation funds as you mentioned. The Union Bank fund has \$8,243.26 and it is used for expenditure that you have during the year. This includes any donations to the Stowe Land Trust or forest trail supplies(the funds in the CD are not available as they were re-invested). The \$23,553.82 is the current amount in the CD that was re-invested for a year. Sales for timber that was sold was put into another fund by the Selectboard called the Forest Land Investment Fund".

This seems consistent with the Bylaws but the expenditures don't match the intent of the Bylaws. Brent did not discuss this any further with Tina as this is still unclear but needs a meeting with Town Administrators to clarify

Other Finance Information from Town Report

The current town annual report (FY ending June 30, 2020) on page 29 lists the following: Committed Funds, Land Conservation \$33,654 with a statement : " These funds can only be used for specific purposes determined by the town's highest level of decision-making authority- the voters." Not sure if this is MCC funds but we read that to mean not available without a full town vote. Not a good place to access funds for a quick land acquisition if that is MCC Funds.

Also in the town annual report: page 29, Assigned Funds, Forest & Land Maintenance \$17,013. Not sure what this is but think its where the timber sale receipts went. We will try to get these accounts figured out.

Funding Plan for present and future:

This is our recommendation to the MCC board to **discuss and vote on at the October Meeting**

1. Develop an annual Budget for MCC- We need to develop an annual budget for everyday kind of expenses. This would cover trail maintenance, bridge repair, sign replacement, build a Kiosk, continue inventory on open land obtained under the Conservation

Subdivision Bylaw, etc. We propose \$1000 -1200 per year. This is in line with other town groups.(see town report)

2. Increase MCC Conservation Fund – do this by asking for one-half (1=2) cent on Grand List to be dedicated to the MCC conservation Fund. Often called the **One-half Cent for Conservation**. (Money could be used for Bryan Pond Parking lot.) This would raise approx \$35,000 or another approach
3. Increase MCC Conservation Fund- do this by asking for one-half cent on Grand List to be dedicated to the MCC Conservation Fund for Land Acquisition (Expansion of town Forest by purchasing Sullivan Property) or another approach
4. Increase MCC Conservation Fund – do this by asking for 1 cent on Grand List to be dedicated to to the MCC for conservation purposes, This would raise about \$70,000

We have discussed this idea to raise money by increasing the tax rate but no plan is actively in place to carry this out. We suggest this be assigned to this committee to make it happen at town meeting, First shot would be to ask Select Board to put in warning, If they elect not to, go the signed petition method, **Discuss and vote on this subject at October meeting.**

Priorities for MCC (not all require funding, some are in the works, this list will keep these items on our screen) and will help us sort out priorities that need to be worked on.

1. **Accepting Gifts of Land** -Obtain the know how and experience in accepting a gift of land – “The Island” will serve as the first piece of donated land, It is being given to the town by LCPC and has been approved by the Select Board. It is currently in the town attorney office waiting a deed and other needed paper work. Eric said it will be awhile before completed. Hopefully more donations will be forthcoming.

2. **Purchase Sullivan land.** Start with conversation with Eric and Bob Beeman to determine their interest and support. Start process of town appropriation for future town meetings. Contact Mr. Sullivan to let him know the town’s interest. Discuss buying options; conserving options, price reduction, possible donation etc. Determine if we need to use a realtor. The land was recently logged, get inventory of standing timber from Fran Sladyk, and discuss the possibility of future income from a timber sale. (We believe it was marked and cut to release sugar maple for possible sugaring operation.) **This should be discussed and voted on at the October meeting,**

3. **Protect Potash Brook** – Ron has researched and mapped most of the land that abuts the brook and has a list of owners. Develop a plan to protect this environmentally sensitive strip of land thru easements, buffer strips, and possible purchases. Now is the time to act as village development is rapidly increasing. Discuss with Select board and Village Trustees. Contact large land owners along the brook to get understanding and support, Funding may be needed. **. This should be discussed and voted on at the October Meeting.**

4.**Bugbee Springs** – Ron has started the initial contacts on the possibilities for future use of this property. Need to continue to support this effort

5.**Clark Park** – need to continue to stay alert to developing opportunities on Clark Park, Too early to think of funding for future development of the park, but must stay on our screen for the future. This will probably be a total town effort, if and when it gets turned over to the

town. There is a lot of interest in Clark Park from a lot of different groups, all wanting a piece of the pie.

6, Open Space Parcels of Land via the Conservation Subdivision Bylaw – we currently have 6 open space parcels of land created by the subdivision bylaw. They vary in acreage and ownership. Some are or will be deeded to the town, others will stay in ownership of local homeowners associations. The MCC will be involved in managing the Town owned parcels and may be asked to assist in management of the other parcels. Fran Sladyk has begun creating an inventory of these parcels and we will add other types of conserved lands in the future. Mapping of lands conserved will allow us to further develop some contiguous corridors for wildlife, an important feature stressed by most conservation planners. Inventorying conserved land was approved at a previous meeting and is continuing, and will take annual funding.

7, Bryan Pond Parking Lot – We have received approval for the parking lot to be built on State land at the end of Bryan Pond Road. Approval is in form of a license that must be approved by the town. The license has gone to Town Legal Counsel for review and approval. Then it will go to the Select Board for funding approval. Construction would be in 2022 at the earliest. We are working on cost sharing with ANR since the parking will service State Forest visitors as well as town forest. Also, is the possibility of the Bryan family making a donation in honor of Dr. Bryan who built the pond years ago. We could also name the parking lot for him. Construction cost is estimated at \$20,000. Plus will have signage costs.

8. The Sonny Demars Trail – much discussed but little done. We need to meet with Sonny and other land owners to agree if trail will become recognized and accepted as a trail, who will manage it, parking etc. Lets do it or forget it! Funding may be needed for legal expenses to drawing up easements, agreements etc, **Discuss and vote on this trail at October Meeting.**

9. Inventory of Morristown's Natural Resources – there is a need to inventory and record the Natural Resources of the town. This probably should have been done first, but Andy Wood says it is often done later after some projects are completed and support is gained. Require hiring a specialist and funds will be needed.

This committee was charged with looking into starting a Morristown Conservation Commission Fund. We expanded our charge to more fully understand the existing financial system and to explore future finance needs and how the MCC might obtain necessary funding.

Committee report submitted by:

Dave Stevens

Jennifer Andrews

Jessica –ehngut (This program will not print the last letter in the alphabet. Sorry)

Brent Teillon

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TOWN OF MORRISTOWN