

**HARVARD CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MINUTES OF STRATEGIC PLANNING SESSION*
AUGUST 22, 2023
APPROVED: SEPTEMBER 7, 2023**

Chair Don Ritchie called the meeting to order at 6:43pm in the Hildreth House under MGL Chapter 131 §40 Wetland Protection Act and Code of the Town of Harvard Chapter 119 Wetland Protection Bylaw

Members Present: Don Ritchie, Eve Wittenberg, Jaye Waldron, Joanne Ward, Jim Burns, Mark Shaw**, Jessie Panek and John Lee (Associate Member)

Others Present: Liz Allard (Conservation Agent), Paul Willard and Wendy Sisson (Land Stewardship Subcommittee)

Election of Officers

Don Ritchie made a motion to elect Eve Wittenberg as chair of the Commission for fiscal year 2024. Joanne seconded the motion. The vote was unanimously in favor of the motion by a roll call, Don Ritchie, aye; Jaye Waldron, aye; Joanne Ward, aye; Jim Burns, aye; Jessie Panek, aye; and Eve Wittenberg, abstained.

Eve Wittenberg made a motion to elect Don Ritchie as vice chair of the Commission for fiscal year 2024. Joanne Ward seconded the motion. The vote was unanimously in favor of the motion by a roll call, Don Ritchie, abstained; Jaye Waldron, aye; Joanne Ward, aye; Jim Burns, aye; Jessie Panek, aye; and Eve Wittenberg, aye.

Election of Representatives & Liaisons

Jim Burns made a motion to appoint Jessie Panek to the Deer Management Subcommittee and John Lee to the Community Preservation Committee until June 30, 2024 as the Commission's representatives. Don Ritchie seconded the motion. The vote was unanimously in favor of the motion by a roll call, Don Ritchie, aye; Jaye Waldron, aye; Joanne Ward, aye; Jim Burns, aye; Jessie Panek, aye; and Eve Wittenberg, aye.

Conservation Restrictions & Baseline Reports

With the assistance of the chair of the Land Stewardship Subcommittee and the Conservation Agent, Joanne Ward has volunteered to assist in the process of completing the necessary conservation restrictions and developing a plan to complete the associated baseline reports.

Town-wide Japanese Knotweed (JKW) Control

The Commission agreed that being involved in a town-wide project for the control of Japanese Knotweed (JKW) is beyond their scope. However, as suggested by Wendy Sisson, chair of the Land Stewardship Subcommittee, the Commission will further investigate the use of Community Preservation Act (CPA) funds to conduct such a project. John Lee volunteered to investigate this further and will look at CPC funding options. There also may be opportunities for grant funding. Liz Allard suggested that, if allowed, CPA funding should be requested for the on-going treatment of the JKW along Mass Ave and Stow Road.

Amendments to the Wetland Protection Bylaw and/or its Regulations, Chapters 119 and 147

Minor Activities – The Commission agreed not to include minor activities as part of the proposed amendments but asked the Conservation Agent to provide the Commission with the process Lunenburg uses for Agent review along with the process in other communities.

Waiver Process – The Commission agreed to continue to issue or not issue waivers on a case-by-case basis. It was agreed that when waivers are voted upon the motion should be clear as to why the waiver is or is not being issued, to provide clarity for applicants as well as documentation in the minutes for future reference.

Climate – Liz Allard is working on revisions to the Bylaw and its Regulations as part of an MVP grant received by the Climate Initiative Committee, to be included on the warrant for the Spring town Meeting.

Invasive Plant Management – Liz Allard and Jessie Panek will work on these revisions to be included on the warrant for the Spring town Meeting.

Monitoring Conservation Restrictions

Don Ritchie and Jim Burns volunteered to create a monitoring program for approval by the Commission. Once approved the Commission can determine which members will assist in the monitoring of these lands.

Deer Management Goals

Don Ritchie and Jessie Panek volunteered to update the Mission of the Deer Management Subcommittee (DMS) with input from the members of the DMS and the Land Stewardship Subcommittee.

Jim Burns made a motion to stagger DMS membership terms starting with the July 1, 2024 (re)appointments in the following manner: two (2) three (3) year terms, two (2) two (2) years, and one (1) one (1) year term. Don Ritchie seconded the motion. The vote was unanimously in favor of the motion by a roll call, Don Ritchie, aye; Jaye Waldron, aye; Joanne Ward, aye; Jim Burns, aye; Jessie Panek, aye; and Eve Wittenberg, aye.

Wetland Protection Bylaw Fees

John Lee volunteered to research previous Town Meeting votes to determine if terms for use of this fund were ever established. If not, the Commission will need to determine the use and submit a warrant article for the Spring Town Meeting.

Authorization of the Conservation Agent

Invoices – Don Ritchie made a motion authorizing the Conservation Agent to include invoices that total less than \$500.00 on the bi-weekly bill warrant without prior approval from the Commission, except for mileage reimbursement for said Agent. Jaye Waldron seconded the motion. The vote was unanimously in favor of the motion by a roll call, Don Ritchie, aye; Jaye Waldron, aye; Joanne Ward, aye; Jim Burns, aye; Jessie Panek, aye; and Eve Wittenberg, aye.

Comments for Planning Board (PB) and/or Zoning Board of Appeals (ZBA) Applications - Jessie Panek made a motion authorizing the Conservation Agent to independently evaluate applications provided by the PB and the ZBA and to notify the PB and/or the ZBA when wetland resource areas are not impacted. In the case(s) where wetland resource areas are impacted, the Agent shall provide a written report to the Commission for their approval prior to submitting said report to the PB and/or ZBA. Jaye Waldron seconded the motion. The vote was unanimously in favor of the motion by a roll call, Don Ritchie, aye; Jaye Waldron, aye; Joanne Ward, aye; Jim Burns, aye; Jessie Panek, aye; and Eve Wittenberg, aye.

Public Outreach/Engaging Residents

Website News & Announcements – The Conservation Agent is seeking suggestions from the Commission for monthly items that can be shared with residents under News & Announcements on the Town website. Current announcements include:

January: coyote breeding season

March: black bears becoming active, amphibian crossing, mud season

May: No mow May September: controlled archery hunting program

November: Snow mobile activity on conservation land

Natural Heritage Endangered Species Program (NHESP) - Joanne Ward and Eve Wittenberg volunteered to develop a plan using interns and volunteers to regain habitat under the State's Natural Heritage Endangered Species Program.

Involving Interns

Eve Wittenberg volunteered to manage unpaid interns to assist the Commission with certain tasks such as those listed above under Public Outreach/Engaging Residents.

Meeting Logistics: In-person vs. Virtual

Although not ideal for all, the Commission agreed to remain on a virtual platform for their public meetings. Assistance with these meetings, such as co-hosting and/or maintaining screen sharing, will be provided by the members on a rotating schedule.

Adjournment

Jim Burns made a motion to adjourn the meeting at 8:59pm. Don Ritchie seconded the motion. The vote was unanimously in favor of the motion by a roll call, Don Ritchie, aye; Jaye Waldron, aye; Joanne Ward, aye; Jim Burns, aye; Jessie Panek, aye; and Eve Wittenberg, aye.

Respectfully submitted,

Liz Allard,
Conservation Agent

*The following items were listed on the posted agenda for this meeting for informational purposes only. No votes or action were taken on these items unless otherwise noted:

- Primary Objectives of the Commission
- Action Items of other Plans
- Funding
- Training and Continuing Education

**Mark Shaw had not taken his oath of office as of the date of the meeting; therefore, he was unable to participate in any votes taken during this meeting.