

WESTMINSTER CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Meeting, Thursday, 4/27/23 at 7:15 P.M

Join Zoom Meeting

<https://us02web.zoom.us/j/88695611667>

1. Call to Order
Tatiana called the meeting to order at 7:18. Present: Tatiana Schreiber, Rachael Shaw, Sarah Waldo, Kestrel Craig, Kathy Kingston.
2. Adjustments to Agenda: Added a mention of the forest pest workshop to New Business.
3. Acceptance of Minutes: 3/30/23 –Minutes accepted by unanimous approval with the following change: the line “for flow devices in Halifax and Westminster”, referring to the purpose of the Broadreach Grant Application, has been struck, as is inaccurate.
4. Communications and Public Comment:
Tatiana forwarded an email to the WCC re: removal of the Blake Higgins Dam which is under the Saxtons River Bridge on Route 5 just south of Bellows Falls. There is a site visit on May 12 at 1 pm. The Rockingham Conservation Commission is actively involved in this.
5. Unfinished Business (Discussion / Action) –
 - a) Invasive species brochure –Tatiana sent Kestrel documents that she has on the brochure. They will work on it this summer.
 - b) Website for Conservation Commission – progress – Tatiana shared our WCC google drive with Kelly at the Town Hall. If anyone has anything to add photos or documents to add to the WCC Google drive, we can do so.

c) Report back of sub-committee re BEEC/Broadreach proposal - Sarah forwarded Patti Smith's preliminary proposal : Denise Burchsted, beaver hydrologist, (who had many wise things to say about engaging the road crews in problem-solving) will spend a few hours visiting a couple of sites with the road foreman (and others?) to assess risk and suggest ways to mitigate.

She will also put together a map showing the possible extent of pre-fur trade beaver wetlands in Westminster. This will be included in a presentation on Beavers: Past, Present, Future that will include what she has learned about the very different ways rivers behaved in the past, and ways that we, the people, who now occupy the lands of the beaver, can learn to live with them.

If the BWG decides to do this, she would also participate in a panel discussion on beaver problem-solving that also includes Skip and the road foreman. I would be there to talk about beaver ecology. This is a "possible program." It might be that the BWG decides that there is a better way to do this.

With your help, I will lead/co-lead a couple of field trips to beaver wetlands to admire the habitat and handiwork of beavers. I'm hoping one could be at the Henwood Hill marshland.

Fhar Meiss will get some drone video of a Westminster beaver flowage that will be included in a family-friendly presentation I will give on beaver ecology and my lessons from years spent with beavers.

The BWG will table at the Church Fair and (what's the other Westminster festivity?). This could be an opportunity to share Denise's beaver map, identify conflict sites, teach about how cool beavers are, and . . . ? Jana Zeller is busy designing a large beaver to attract visitors to the table. Should be fun!

Denise has got me thinking that changing how beavers are managed by the town might work better if it comes from the grassroots rather than the top, and in this case she means working with the roadcrew to create solutions they feel good about rather than having policies imposed by the selectboard. If it turns out that can't happen, then we can try to work on the selectboard.

Maybe the kids at Studio Y can make beaver kits.

Skip will be paid to install a flow device and lead a field session to tell people how it works and how beaver-proofing culverts can save the town \$\$\$. Maybe it can be a deluxe device with an observation deck and interpretive signage, or maybe that's a project for next year.

d) update on May 2 program on riparian buffers – Cory Ross will do a program on riparian buffers in general. 7 pm, Rockingham Free Public Library. Alma will introduce Cory. Sarah will field questions afterwards.

e) update on May 6 wildflower walk –Rachael and Sarah will preview possible routes on April 28. Flowers should still be plentiful. The publicity came out in the Gazette today. We will meet at the Westminster West School at 1 pm on Saturday May 6 and carpool to the trails we decide to walk. Sarah may send a press release to the Front Porch Forum. Participants will be limited to 12. So far we have about 7, including our members.

f) Comments on Natural Resources section of Town Plan- Tatiana wonders if there is a way to include any of the findings from our Wetlands/Upland Forests Report in the Town Plan. Tatiana will upload a PDF of this report to the WCC google drive. We spent some time making comments on the Town Plan draft document. We will all make some comments by the next meeting. If Kathy determines that certain sections require more attention, she will let us know to focus on these.

g) Welcome Kathy Kingston - official CC member – We are all very happy to welcome Kathy as an official member of our Conservation Commission.

6. New Business:

a) Comments on agriculture section of Town Plan- Seroya Crouch had sent us a draft of the ag section and asked for our comments on it. That is available in the WCC google drive. To open, Open in Google Docs on our drive.

b.) Kestrel will share about information about Ginger Nickerson's forest pest workshop. Conservation Commissions are invited to attend and Kestrel signed up. During a session, someone asked about potential Westminster involvement in the Ash Tree Survey as Westminster has not participated in this surveying yet.

7. Other Business:

a.) Add a discussion of the Ash Tree Survey and our possible involvement in it to the agenda for the next meeting.

b.) Kathy would like to add a discussion about beaver deceivers and best spots for them for the ARPA proposal.

c.) APPS: Vermont Reptile and Amphibian Atlas is actively looking for reports of activity. The Roadkill App (through the VT dept of fish and wildlife) is also actively looking for incident reports. We should all download these apps and start using them.

8. Date of Next Meeting: 5/25/23 7:15 Location, TBD. Possibly an in-person meeting if it works for everyone.

9. Adjournment. Meeting adjourned at 8:35 pm.

Minutes respectfully submitted by
Rachael Shaw, secretary