

Minutes
Hogback Preservation Commission
Marlboro, Vermont

The January 30, 2015 Special Meeting of the Hogback Preservation Commission was called to order at 3:00 p.m. at the Marlboro Town Office by Hal Himmelstein, Chair.

Members Present: Hal Himmelstein, Ed Metcalfe, Mike Purcell, Bob Engel, Lauren MacArthur, Jim Tober

Members Absent: Christine Colella

Others Attending: HCMA board members: Diana Todd (President), Bob Anderson, Nancy Anderson (Secretary and Treasurer), Patti Smith, Mike Clough

I. The Chair announced that Commissioners Bob Engel and Jim Tober were leaving the Commission with this meeting, at the conclusion of their present terms, and thanked them for their five years of exemplary service on the Commission.

II. The HPC and HMCA and their respective roles.

In response to expressions of concern on the part of some HPC members and others that the division of responsibilities between the two organizations was confusing and possibly overlapping, the following points were made in a spirited conversation among those present:

--The HPC Chair reported that the Town Selectboard, having been apprised of the concern, expressed its view that the current organizational structure seems to be working well and should be continued, including the provision that at least 5 HPC members be Marlboro residents.

--HMCA members present reported that the HMCA board, having recently discussed this matter, was unanimous in wishing to continue as an independent voluntary organization which hopes to move toward 501(c) 3 status.

--All agree that the HPC is responsible for developing and putting forward to the Selectboard budgetary and policy proposals, but there is some confusion and disagreement as to the thresholds that divide HPC and HMCA authority on these matters. More conversation is warranted, ending in greater clarity and the possible development of guidelines.

--There is need to assure the presence of requisite expertise—e.g., natural lands management and preservation-- both on the HPC and HMCA board. More conversation is required to determine the types of expertise and the means to assure its representation on both bodies.

--There was some sentiment expressed that volunteers should be encouraged to join HMCA if they are interested in “boots-on-the-ground” activities in the Conservation Area; others with a particular interest in policy development and oversight should consider becoming an HPC commissioner. It was noted that HMCA does not permit HPC commissioners to serve as HMCA board members.

III. Request of UMass Graduate Student to install a temporary tower to track migratory songbirds.

A motion to approve the proposal (which came via the HMCA website) by a UMass Graduate student to install, “in conjunction with the U.S. Fish and Wildlife Service,” a temporary 25-foot tower to track migratory songbirds in the Connecticut River Valley was made, seconded, and unanimously approved (6-0) by the HPC.

Under terms of the VLT Conservation Easement, the Selectboard must obtain written approval of VLT prior to installation.

HMCA will work with the applicant to locate the tower in consideration of ongoing conservation activities on the land.

IV. HMCA’s Summer Intern Proposal

The 2015 Conservation Area budget submitted by HPC included an HMCA request for \$3,000 to fund a summer intern or site manager, with duties to be specified. The Selectboard deferred approval of the budget pending clarification of the proposal to assure that duties would be additional to, and not duplicative of, existing programs and activities. There is the additional question as to whether an intern would be contracted to the Town or to HMCA, the latter of which would require additional insurance and an increase in the budget request.

This proposal proved to be a useful—if frustrating—case in point as to the division of responsibilities between HMCA, HPC, and the Selectboard as well as of the importance of shared understanding of process and clear channels of communication.

It was reported that some HMCA board members, in view of delay and confusion, had withdrawn their interest in overseeing an intern and in moving forward with the proposal this year. Diana Todd indicated that she would ask the board to vote on whether to proceed at this time.

Bob suggested that there are many specific and valuable projects that could be undertaken by an intern that would be difficult to accomplish through volunteer efforts and that could result in useful products for long-term use, e.g., a pictorial guide to flowering plants on the property. He noted, however, that projects of this sort would require specific knowledge/expertise on the part of interns, which would have to be specified in a job description.

V. Conservation Area Forest Management Plan

In that the hour was late, and in that the April application deadline for the Vermont Urban and Community Forestry Program's "tree canopy" grant is fast approaching and the availability of funding is uncertain, we agreed that we would not move forward with a grant application this year. We hope to receive additional input from Windham County Forester, Bill Guenther as to the availability and cost of consultants who might undertake the kind of resources inventory we have in mind.

The question was raised as to whether there is an existing Vermont Department of Fish and Wildlife survey of the land that could serve as a starting point for our inventory and plan.

VI. The meeting was adjourned at 5:01

Respectfully Submitted
Jim Tober
Secretary Pro Tem