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Rockingham Conservation Commission

MONDAY, April 18th, 2016

7:00 pm

Rockingham Recreation Center Williams Terrace in Bellows Falls

MINUTES:

Mike Called to order at 7:00. Present: Mike Ghia, Chair; Devin Smith; Peter Bergstrom; Guy Payne; Amy Howlett. Absent: Paul Wilson, Fred Bennett, Tom Hernon.

1. **Approve Minutes of March Meeting** –Devin moved, Guy seconded, passed.
Alteration to the Agenda and Guests Introductions -- None

2. Recruitment and Logistics

Paul Wilson was reappointed by Selectboard; we are looking for someone for the vacant slot left by Alan Fowler. Guy Payne was reappointed as Energy Coordinator.

3. **Annual Meeting Business**—Elections of Officers and Planning for the Year

Peter as Secretary ran the meeting briefly; we do not have a Co-Chair. Amy nominated Mike as chair and Devin seconded it. He was re-elected and took over the meeting. Mike nominated Amy Howlett as co-chair, Peter seconded. Peter was nominated as Secretary by Guy, seconded by Devin. Guy nominated Devin as Treasurer, Amy seconded. The slate was approved. The new officers are:

Mike Ghia, Chair; Amy Howlett, Co-Chair; Devin Smith, Treasurer; Peter Bergstrom, Secretary.

We discussed what sorts of RCC educational events to offer, that are not too hard to plan, and also attract a good number of people. The nature walks we offered on the last two Saturdays worked well for this, and Mike mentioned that the photos of them that Peter took and posted generated more interest in the RCC, including more likes on our Facebook page. Guy brought a list of suggested “sustainable living” talks from the energy committee that we might offer at the library, or possibly a house tour. We agreed that Guy should proceed with planning a series of talks to offer at the library, and that Guy should plan a workshop on PACE funding as part of one of the programs on home energy improvements.

Other RCC goals for the coming year: increase participation in Green-Up Day; raise awareness of mandatory recycling and compost laws; improving communication and coordination with the Planning Commission; continuing to develop new trail connections, especially to the Pinnacle network; continue to improve our website; recruit more members for the Energy Committee; increase our connections with local schools; Peter suggested that a tree planting like the one on May 6 might become an annual event if this one works well.

Municipal solar update: still on the table but Guy has not had much time to work on it. Gravel pits are favored as sites, but Chip Stearns has been opposed to using the one in Rockingham for solar.

4. **Coordination with Planning Commission**

Possible Joint Meeting—we have not heard from Chuck about when he wants to hold this.

Expanding Natural Resources Zoning District -- this was an issue when the Justice Center was planned for near Herricks Cove, but that proposal was dropped so the issue became less urgent. However, the southern part of Herricks Cove is vulnerable since it's not part of the Natural Resources Zoning District, so we may want to work towards that change, especially if that site gets developed for something else.

Rewriting the Natural Resources Chapter of Town Plan – Waiting to hear from Chuck about next steps on this.

5. **Trail Connection possibilities** between Pinnacle Lands and Rockingham. We reviewed the research Peter did on current landowners and Mike said he and Margo knew quite a few of them. Mike agreed to co-chair the trails effort with Peter, and will have more time for it after June. We agreed that the first step is to approach landowner for permission to organize a walk to assess whether the VAST trail would work as a hiking trail.

6. **Herrick's Cove**

Wildlife Festival Sunday, **May 1** – Devin asked Alma for a table, Tom is bringing tables and chairs, Devin is bringing an EZ-Up tent, we'll promote Green Up Day with bags, and the May 6 tree planting. Guy and Amy are both going, Peter may be able to come in the afternoon.

7. **Natural Resources**

Vernal Pool and Wildflower Walks Review—13 people at first, 14 people at second, lots of good education going on. See the RCC Facebook page for photos. Peter said he'd like to offer one or both walks again next year, probably spaced 2 weeks apart to get more spring amphibians (earlier) and more wildflowers (later).

Saxtons River Watershed Collaborative Grant Follow-up: Tree planting **May 6th**
We have 21 volunteers so far; Peter, Devin and Guy are coming from the RCC. We hope to get more volunteers. Peter will ask Jolene if we might have a rain date.

Update on Stream and Water Body Naming Project –Getting Approval and Follow-up
--Marie was just drafting the letter for Deb Markowitz (head of ANR) to sign the letter Library Board will act on them on July 12, probably in Rockingham.

Green Up Day for Rockingham Planning Sat. **May 7th** – Amy and Guy are coordinating this year; they said they have a press release and flyer, and a pizza lunch lined up. Devin said there's a group that does it along Parker Hill Rd. and he will forward a contact for the group to Amy and Guy. We discussed where to hand out bags.

Review of Windham Joint Conservation Commissions Meeting—Peter went and gave a report on RCC activities. One presentation was about an ash tree survey in Putney using a smart phone app; Peter will ask Alma Beals if she is doing ash surveys in Rockingham. Next meeting of the group will be in November in Guilford and will include a talk about a proposed schist quarry in Halifax.

8. Energy Committee

Watershed Concerns relative to Grafton Commercial Wind Operation Proposal: There was concern at the meeting Peter attended in Grafton that the stormwater practices used by this developer in past projects may not work on steep slopes; they are not approved by ANR. If they did not work, the project could increase flooding in the Saxtons River. There is a vote planned in both towns (Windham and Grafton) on the wind project. While Grafton is susceptible to flash flooding from localized strong thunderstorms, such as those in June 1996, almost all of the damage from those storms was limited to Grafton (according to two members who lived here at the time), so this does not appear to be as important an issue for Rockingham. Peter will relay this to Ann DiBernardo, who wanted to know if the project might impact Rockingham.

Rockingham and Rutland Resolution on Energy Siting; -- at least 50 towns (including Rockingham, according to Chip Stearns) have signed on to the Rutland Resolution, or a variation of it, asking for more local control in energy siting. Mike wondered why Rockingham officials did not consult the RCC and especially the Energy Coordinator before signing this. We would like to be consulted in the future before action is taken on similar issues. VT Bill S230 on energy project siting is still under consideration, just taken up by the House, so it would need approval by the projected adjournment on May 8.

PACE in Rockingham- Implementation and Follow-up: Education is the next step; Guy will draft a press release to explain the loan process and the costs and benefits.

9. **NEXT MEETING** Monday, May 9th (Mike needs to miss but will send agenda, Amy will lead, need to ensure a quorum—the rest of us here can make it)

Adjourn –Guy moved, Devin seconded, done at 9:15 PM.