

**RICHMOND CONSERVATION COMMISSION MINUTES**  
**Tuesday June 13, 2023**  
**7:30 PM**

**Members of the public:** Lou Borie, Gary Bressor, Wright Preston, Dan Wolfson

**Commissioners:** Alison Anand, Kit Emery, Bob Galvin, Max Krieger, Jeanette Malone, Bob Low and Judy Rosovsky

**Minutes** taken by Judy Rosovsky. May minutes approved.

**Added** defining the meaning of conservation to the agenda. State statutes may have a definition.

Review and vote on Gillett Pond additional monies proposal – overview of Gillett Pond by Wright Preston:

The Girl Scouts of the Green and White Mountains owned the land by the pond but as the dam failed the State of Vermont notified the Girl Scouts (GS) that they must fix or remove the dam. Neither the pond nor the dam are essential to the GS operations. Richmond Land Trust and others in Huntington and Richmond formed the Friends of Gillett Pond (FOGP) with the goal of keeping the pond by fixing the dam. Ensuing fund raising collected \$80,000 to purchase the pond from the GS. Spent \$50,000 on permits. FOGP reviewed plans and chose a concrete gravity dam of the same height as the current dam but wider due to dam safety and flood prevention concerns. FOGP has raised more money since 2016.

FOGP are asking the Richmond Conservation Commission (RCC) for some additional money to complete the dam building. In the first request to the RCC, FOGP had asked for \$200,000 but the RCC gave \$150,000 with the idea that if more money was needed towards the end of the project it might be available. The actual costs to complete the dam via JA MacDonald construction are slightly higher than anticipated.

To remove stumps, the dam, rebuild the dam and re-seed the area will cost \$770,000. A contingency fund of \$40,000 for cost changes due to things like ledge work and unstable soils on the north side of the dam has been established. There is another \$40,000 towards engineering oversight, so the current total is \$850,000.

The FOGP has \$498,000 in cash including \$150,000 from the Conservation Reserve Fund, (CRF), \$75,000 from the Huntington Conservation Reserve Fund, a \$250,000 grant from Senator Leahy, and money from 5 years of fundraising, for a total of about \$750,000. The project still needs about \$102,000. Northfield Saving bank provided a short-term loan [check this with Wright], and FOGP is asking for \$50,000 from the Richmond CRF.

Questions from commissioners: Has the RLT looked into the Better Places Program or BGS [find out what this stands for] for money? No, they have not though Lou knows about BGS because that's what funded the Willis Hill parking lot.

Comment from Wright Preston: See the site plan on the last page of the proposal. There will be parking off road created from the construction site. FOGP has all of the permits in hand. That includes local, state, Federal and an Army Corps of Engineers permit due to wetland fill-in. The latter permit requires extensive work including an historic resource review and an archaeological study. The study was completed early in the project and no artifacts were found.

The plans show current and future renditions of the dam which will have a 'form liner' as seen on the recent Huntington Gorge work (an irregular pattern of simulated rock).

There will not be a sandy beach but there is a gently sloping ledge on the south side of the dam. RLT does not control the entire shoreline, just the dam and the area south of the dam.

Bob Low remarked that years ago the GS used to swim in the pond but the abundance of leeches was a deterrent. Alison Anand remarked that this is a worthy project as Huntington Gorge is a dangerous swimming area and Gillett Pond is an alternative.

The following **motion** was made:

“The Richmond Conservation Commission recommends that the Selectboard approve \$50,000 in Conservation Reserve Funds to cover recently incurred costs associated with rebuilding the Gillett Pond dam, as described in the Richmond Land Trust proposal dated 7 June 2023. The request fits an extensive number of CRF criteria, as enumerated in detail in the proposal related to providing access to and preserving recreational opportunities and describing the historical and natural resource value of this important natural area and associated wetlands. These funds must be expended within 3 years of the date of final approval, thus by June 13, 2026.”

Bob Low and Alison Anand abstained; Kit Emery, Bob Galvin, Max Krieger, Jeanette Malone, and Judy Rosovsky voted yes. **The motion passed.**

Discuss Gary Bressor proposal on bike/pedestrian route from village to Riverview Commons – how can RCC help? Potential funding sources?

Gary Bressor revisited his plan and discussed options, owners and obstacles for the path that would parallel Route 2 and connect Riverview Commons with the town center. This would be the Western Gateway Corridor which has a steering committee. It would provide much needed connectivity and would provide a safer way for people to get to schools and transportation. Gary's meeting with the wetland specialist may determine if the plan is feasible or not.

Discussion: What does Gary want from RCC? Possibly letter of support and possibly funding for buying some of the hillside or other parts of the proposed path. Might be able to get ARPA funding for negotiating with property owners.

Is there a map? Yes, engineers from the steering committee may provide mappage. But there is no point getting too involved until Gary hears from the wetland specialist. How wide is the path? 10-12', so can plow with a pickup truck. Suggestion to use boardwalks over wetlands.

Need to explore cost and feasibility and options if landowners are not amenable to the plan. Underpasses could be used by wildlife; could add an insert pipe separated from the main path for critters to use.

Social media – RCC presence? Who will manage it? RCC Website – JR has asked for two members to have access to our town webpage. Thoughts on content?

Bob Galvin and Jeanette are interested in learning how to manage the RCC town website. Judy Rosovsky would like to know too. Judy needs to set up a meeting with Duncan Wardell and interested parties.

Discussion: Social media and open meeting law? Who would answer questions from public? Could use site as repository for relevant web information like Ancient Forests. We would need basic ground rules such as comments must be positive and constructive.

First step is to learn how to manage existing site. We can continue to discuss the pro's and cons of other internet communication with public later.

#### Report on Morse talk

Good talk, well attended. Basic points were the impact that humans have on wildlife, including on their physiology. Encounters with humans can cause wildlife to move out of optimal habitat. Morse emphasized the importance of maintaining core habitat (large intact forested areas) and connective habitat. Her talk normalized the conversation about the recreation boom and how to manage it. Importance of Chittenden County Uplands Project and connection to Andrews Community Forest. Push back, fewer trails, leave as much as possible wild.

#### Definition of conservation

How to define conservation? Could do panel of experts with academics and conservation organizations. Jeanette contacted Jennifer Esser.

#### Other

Ibit is leaving Friday.

Suggestion to have meeting with Huntington and Bolton CC's.

#### Housing

The triplex, quadriplex in village were built pre-car, not accessible to cars. Dept of Housing says greatest impact on climate change, area conservation and wildlife management is to infill [check with Max that I got this right]. May get more short term traffic but conserves outer places. Goal is to keep VT green, keep village active, work where you live.

9:00 Meeting adjourned

Cut this from Gary's piece – is Gary ok with this plan being made available to the public prior to negotiations?

If the town could buy the turnaround, and we could use the old road bed at the end of Tilden that would be helpful. The tightest area is around the cemetery due to the railroad and their ROW. It could be an Agency of Transportation project to move Rt 2 in that area over a bit. Then there's Willis Hill with the wetland. Gary will meet with the state wetland specialist to review the plan.

The Richmond Land Trust mentioned the project to the Vermont Housing and Conservation Board, who might view it favorably especially if it increased housing options. After Willis Hill come the Reaps and 8 property owners. Town could buy a 30' strip in front of their properties and zoning has 30'. Could add to density calculations or density bonuses. Plus [?] to businesses. Is priority to negotiate. Crate Escape and Degraf [sp?] from across the road own the land, the other side is the interstate. Owns hillside on Rt 2 side and 7 acres which could be made into a park.

Carpenter, Willis Hill, hillside wetland on Rt 2 to Mobil Station. Mobil owner might be ok with path going along interstate fence. Mobil has a wetland delineation and that area is wide enough to take the path along. The long term proposal is to tunnel under the highway access ramp or have a crossing at the south bound ramp. Could have a path for water and sewer if the [Riverview Commons] park needs it. Could keep the water and sewer at the car park level and take the path up to the fence, and go on top of the retaining wall. Then drop to the northern underpass and go right through to the circle of the entrance ramp, which is park-like. Then tunnel under the two lanes and get to Cleary's Stone. It's only 150' to Governor Peck Rd from there, and another 150' to Riverview Commons.

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