

**Town of Blandford
Conservation Commission Minutes
April 12, 2021 6:00 PM**

Commission Members in attendance: Dick Gates, Colleen Doyle, John Piper, Jon Letendre, Nate Maynard (via telephone conference line)

Others in attendance:
None

New Business

Long Pond Conservation Area – Establishment of trails and parking area

J Piper, R Gates, and Chuck Benson (former ConCom member) performed a site walk at the Long Pond Conservation area from the beaver pond on N. Blandford Rd. They reported a navigable potential trail along Wheeler Brook that avoids unnecessary stream crossings. A future scouting trip will be conducted along the western end of the property to complete a loop trail. There are waterfalls along the brook and potential opportunities to develop side trails. There was discussion about potential mountain biking opportunities onsite in addition to hiking.

A potential parking area site was identified on the left side of the road on Rt. 23 prior to Gibb Rd. with flat access and little need for clearing. R Gates spoke with Renee Senecal, Hwy Superintendent, who offered his crew to assist with desired improvements as the site could serve as a turnaround for highway maintenance crew when plowing.

R Gates made a motion to proceed with development of a loop trail at Long Pond Conservation Area and parking lot off Rt. 23, J Piper seconded motion, motion accepted by Commission unanimously.

Knittel Conservation Area – Haying of fields

The fields within the Knittel property require yearly haying to maintain them as open space. The Commission would like to continue the arrangement that was made last year with two individuals to continue with haying operations in 2021.

R Gates made a motion to allow Dave Hobson to hay the northern section and for Dave Ripley to hay the southern portion of the Knittel fields. J Piper seconded the motion and the motion was accepted unanimously by the Commission.

Shepard Farm – Potential for trails and passive recreational access

An Expression of Interest was submitted to the Commonwealth on behalf of the Town of Blandford and PVPC to begin the process of applying for a grant to initiate a feasibility study to assess potential options. Questions arose concerning a portion of the submittal that discussed a potential land swap:

Section 3-P1.4

“Land has already been identified for a potential Article 97 Exchange and a local proponent was working with Kurt Gaertner of the EEA but additional research is needed to determine clear title for the proposed swap and if this is the best way to proceed.”

The Commission would like to be more involved in such proposals and the future of the Shepard Farm property. It is unclear what town entity has control over the parcel and the Commission is interested in its value as a recreational space for town residents. This parcel was included in the OSRP from 2004 as a potential environmental education center and hiking area (previously described as the Dover Land Trust). Precedent has established this site as having high recreational value but little has been done since the OSRP’s stated goals. Questions remain regarding the historic value of the building and how to proceed with either demolishing or maintaining the building onsite. The Commission will continue to work with the town to determine if and how the site can be utilized for passive recreational opportunities.

Continuing Business

Blandford Sun Solar Project on Otis Stage Rd. – Update on status

There has been recent communication between the Planning Board and Next Era regarding the status of the solar site. Blandford Solar is in the process of finalizing the Administrative Consent Order being issued by Mass DEP.

The Commission would like clarity on how to resolve the previously submitted NOI vs. what has actually occurred at the build site. There is question as how to close the loop on this process and ensure that the NOI on file is in compliance with actual site conditions. The Commission will be carefully reviewing the Administrative Consent Order once it has been finalized and issued.

Richard W. Gatz
John Piper (RMC)
Nathan Maynard (RMC)