



TOWN OF PELHAM CONSERVATION COMMISSION Pelham, Massachusetts

Minutes for April 11, 2019

Present: Dana MacDonald, Meredith Borenstein, David Gross, Richard Seelig

Also present: Mark Stinson (Mass Dept. of Environmental Protection), Gordon Clark, Karen Riberio (on phone, Select Board)

The meeting was brought to order by Chair MacDonald at 7:04 PM.

Discussion of a proposed solar array in North Pelham

Select Board member Riberio described a project by W.D. Cows Inc. to construct a solar array on land it owns including a large parcel in Pelham. The plan calls for about 200 acres of forest to be cleared and the array constructed on it. She asked the Commission what regulations would impact such a project. Chair MacDonald noted that such an array is about 200 times larger than the size permitted in our solar bylaw. Additionally, the area in North Pelham where the proposed site is located has a considerable array of wetland features, and thus would also be under the jurisdiction of the Wetlands Conservation Act as well as the Pelham Wetlands Bylaw.

Mark Stinson, the Western Mass Circuit Rider from the Department of Environmental Protection (DEP) noted that other small towns in the area also have restrictive solar bylaws (Chesterfield allows no solar farms in wetlands jurisdiction and Buckland requires solar farms to be under 5 acres). Chair MacDonald pointed out that the portion of Pelham that would be part of the proposed Cows solar project contains multiple cold water fishery streams. Mark Stinson note that town bylaws or the Wetlands Protection Act generally can be used to prevent large area panel installations within resource areas, but access roads to panel sites generally must be approved. He mentioned a useful memorandum of understanding from the DEP that covers review of solar installations (MassDEP Wetlands Program Policy 17-1: Photovoltaic System Solar Array Review).

Discussion of forestry in Pelham

Select Board member Riberio asked about forest cutting plans within the Quabbin watershed, particularly concerning monetary return to Pelham from such activities. Chair MacDonald said that logging on the Amherst watershed produces money for the landowner, in this case the Town of Amherst: Pelham receives no money for such cutting. Amherst does pay Pelham an annual amount in lieu of taxes. Chair MacDonald noted that the logging currently ongoing at the Hawley Reservoir is part of a long-term plan to diversify the forest of the watershed ecosystem.

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Discussion of culvert maintenance in Pelham

Select Board member Riberio asked about the role that the Commission plays in planning for culvert repairs. The Commission pointed out that its role is to review applications for such repairs insofar as the proposed work might impact resource areas. It was suggested that funding reserve for culvert restoration and damage mitigation would be worthwhile. Such a fund would improve the town's resilience for major tropical storm damage.

It was noted that the Pelham Municipal Vulnerability Preparedness fund allows \$60K for a survey of all of Pelham's culverts. Select Board member Riberio said that the town will use the survey to prioritize culvert repair. Mark Stinson of the Mass DEP pointed out that MassGIS maintains a stream continuity database that includes the locations of culverts across the state.

22 Amherst Road Senior Housing Project

The Commission asked Mark Stinson's opinions on the proposed senior housing project at 22 Amherst Road, which abuts on Buffum Brook. He said that, being a 40B project, the town's wetlands bylaws do not apply although the state wetlands regulations do apply. He noted that the DEP has a best practices list for such projects, a copy of which he will send to Chair MacDonald.

Well-Away Farm parking

The Commission discussed the site visit on April 10 with DPW Head Adamcek. It was agreed that Agent Borenstein will contact the Kestrel Trust, which is preparing the RDA application for the site work, with details about the planned parking area/drainage work to be done by the DPW when conditions permit.

The Commission discussed the timing of the public hearing for the Pemberton Memorial Forest and Well Away Farm parking area RDAs. It was decided that the hearing should occur at the Commission's May 9 meeting.

Open Space Plan completion schedule

Due to the lateness of the hour, this agenda item was not discussed.

The meeting adjourned at 9:06 PM.

Respectfully submitted by David Gross.

