

Conservation Commission
Minutes of the December 15, 2004 Meeting
Conference Room B, Audrey P. Beck Building

Present: Robert Dahn (chair), Jennifer Kaufman, Quentin Kessel, John Silander, and Robert Thorson.

Absent: Denise Burchsted, Lanse Minkler, and Frank Trainor.

Town Staff: Grant Meitzler

Guest: Edward Pelletier

1. The meeting was called to order at 7:30 PM.

2. Members had not received the usual meeting packets with the minutes of the November meeting so the approval of these minutes was tabled until the January meeting.

3. IWA Referrals (taken out of sequence to accommodate Mr. Pelletier).

a) W1280 - Highland Development Associates, LLC - Browns Road/Crane Hill Road. Map date, 10/01/04. This application is for a 13 lot subdivision, "Sawmill Valley Estates," with frontage on both Browns Road and Crane Hill Road. Pelletier reviewed the planning process for this subdivision, including a 15 lot plan that might have been possible prior to Town's recent zoning revision and the proposed 13 lot subdivision. It was agreed to split the discussion into two parts: first, the three lots of a shared driveway off Brown's Road and second, the ten lots off Crane Hill Road.

Brown's Road, Lots 1,2 and 3: Pelletier discussed the layout with lots 2 and 3 sharing a pond. He pointed out that where feasible, they used existing stone walls for natural boundary lines and that the conservation easement was a generous one, approximately twice the required area. Kessel still questioned the easement, which includes only a portion of the pond and wetlands and asked why the pond and a buffer area, including the wetlands near the western boundary of Lot 1 should not be included in the easement. He also suggested that the easement should contain provisions for the maintenance of the man-made pond. Silander thought protections for the pond might provided by writing specific protections into the subdivision approval, e.g., including a buffer area and provisions to prevent lawn/garden fertilizer runoff into the pond (which is reportedly clear and devoid of green algae and duckweed). Kessel moved, and Thorson seconded that the proposed construction on lots 1,2, and 3 should not have a significant negative impact on the wetlands as long as the pond is protected and appropriate sedimentation and erosion controls are in place during the construction and removed after the site is stabilized. The motion passed unanimously.

Crane Hill Road, Lots 4-13: The discussion centered on the number of structures and septic areas within the regulated areas. The northern boundary of this part of the subdivision is bounded by wetlands which intrude in several places into the area to be developed. Thorson moved, and Kessel seconded, the following

motion: The CC commends the reduction in the number of curb cuts in the overall subdivision and the alignment of property boundaries with existing stone walls where possible. With regard to lots 4-13, the CC expresses concern for potentially significant negative impacts resulting from this concentrated land use in such a steep, rocky area interspersed with wetland areas. Specifically, it was noted that Lots 10, 11 and 13 all have both the structures and septic systems located in regulated areas. The motion passed unanimously.

b) W1278 - Kielbania - Brown's Road. Map date, revised 11/9/04. This application is for an office addition to an existing dwelling with the work to be carried out approximately 70 feet from a wetland. Kessel moved and Silander seconded that there should be no significant negative impact on the wetlands if sedimentation and erosion controls (not indicated on the map) are in place during the construction and removed after the site is stabilized. The motion passed unanimously.

c) W1279 - Fredericks - 69 Circle Drive. Map date 11/17/04. The CC declined to comment on this application to construct the already existing structure.

d) W1281 - Abramson - Wormwood Hill Road. Map date 12/1/04. This application is for a studio/office building approximately 25 feet square in a regulated area. Meitzler pointed out that a corner of the proposed building would be approximately 10 feet from the wetland's edge. Kessel moved, and Silander seconded, that because of the closeness to the wetland, a significant negative impact on the wetland was possible, especially during the construction phase. Also, although CC members had not visited the site, from the map there appear to be alternate sites available for this project that would be further from the wetlands. The motion passed with four in favor and one opposed.

4. Plan of Conservation and Development: The CC reviewed and discussed the PZC's Plan of Conservation and Development Committee's December 9, 2004 minutes. The CC noted with approval the decision to eliminate the interior forest roadside buffer areas where appropriate.

In response to the CC's recommendation that the Town develop a system of classification for stone walls within the town, for inclusion in the Town's revision of its Plan of Conservation, the minutes reflected a lack of information of a system that might be used for stone wall classification.

Thorson suggested a simplified classification system (in comparison to the more extensive taxonomy in his upcoming book). This is:

a) Abandoned Walls - those that are enmeshed into both the woodland ecosystem and our cultural heritage. These are the most evocative, especially to those seeing them for the first time. With regard to their conservation they should be left as is, and developers and builders should minimize cuts through them.

b) Heritage Walls - those which grace historic properties and are usually well maintained. They resonate with local culture and help to link scattered historic sites into a coherent whole. With regard to their conservation, they must be identified, inventoried, maintained and protected.

c) Recent and Rebuilt Walls - these usually honor the folk art traditions of the past. The simple authenticity of the unmortared fieldstone wall is most common and helps link us moderns to the past. Many of these walls are owner-built, and the Town should encourage the use of quarry stone and local traditions for these walls.

Implementation of such a classification and the protection of existing walls was discussed. It was pointed out that the PZC presently requires stone walls to be indicated on the maps used during the approval process. It was agreed that the above classification is simple and obvious enough that it should not be a major hardship for applicants to indicate which of the three categories apply to their stone walls. One value of requiring this would be to raise applicant's awareness of the value to the Town and its residents and visitors of the stone walls on the properties being developed.

Thorson agreed to meet with Town Planner Padick on behalf of the CC to assist in the Town's efforts to preserve its stone walls.

10. The meeting adjourned at 9:01 P.M.

Respectfully submitted,

Quentin Kessel
Secretary