

Monkton Agricultural and Natural Area Committee Meeting—Minutes for 1/26/2012

In Attendance

Members: Sue Regier, Sam Burr, John McNerney, Caitlin Cusack, and Deb Gaynor

Absent: Laura Farrell

Guests: Allen Karnatz, Bob Heiser, Gordy and Dorothy Muzzy, Marty Illick

- 1) Sue called the meeting to order at 7:05 pm.
- 2) Sam moved and Caitlin seconded that we approve the minutes of 1/5/12 as presented. All voted in favor.
- 3) We set the date of our next meeting as 2/8/12 at 7 pm.
- 4) Allen provided an overview of the Muzzy conservation project, of which 45 acres is in Monkton. They had an appraisal done by the person recommended by VLT, paid half that cost, and have a signed purchase and sales agreement on that basis, and are aiming at the March proposal deadline for VHCB for the May meeting. The conservation easement will forbid clear-cutting of the Monkton forest. No other restrictions regarding public access will be imposed by VLT; there is a provision for a camp that would not be visible from the road, but would be up on the hill. There is also the standard option to purchase at farm value. We talked at length about public access, and agreed that depending on the cost, we would meet in order to take a vote to recommend to the Select Board that Monkton's fund be used to pay for a share of the cost for the appraiser to set a value on formalizing public access to the forested piece. Allen agreed to get a cost estimate to us quickly.
- 5) We then went on to discuss the next few projects that are in Monkton through VLT. Project Norris: appraisal was too low to be attractive, and the conservation will probably not go forward. Project Russell: This would be a whole farm easement, including two houses and the entire farm, barn. VLT would allow the piece to be split along the road. There are special treatment areas at the seepage swamp (it would be a no-cut area). Phil and Marlene are willing to enroll in a CREP contract which is 15 years, and then it would revert to VLT. They are now ready to take the project to an appraiser. Marty said that Hinesburg Land Trust and LCA would be willing to help with project costs. It appears to be about 140 acres on the Monkton side. There is an area set aside for a septic easement which would be conveyed to a family member who wants to build a house for one of their children. Project Rotax: has passed pre-application. LuAnn and her sister want to conserve 269 acres of the farm (excluding a couple of houses, barns, etc). Project Orb Weaver: Justis DeVries is the Town Appraiser for Ferrisburg, so he can't do any farms in Ferrisburg. But he is doing the appraisal for Orb Weaver, and also did the Harvey Smith farm in New Haven. The site they want to hold out from the easement for a little retirement place is right on top of the best soils where the current heart of the market garden is now. VLT is concerned that this might negatively impact the appraisal. Also, this will be an expensive appraisal, and VLT is asking Monkton to help with the appraiser's fee to meet the higher cost. There is also some town-owned land surrounding the oddly shaped eastern border; we discussed whether the town might be interested in doing a quit-claim deed to add some of that forested wetland to the farm, making it more attractive to the VHCB. It might be as simple as straightening up the property line, which would just be 2 acres.
- 6) Next Marty presented some Pond Brook conservation projects. Pond Brook is the biggest sub-watershed of Lewis Creek, and a large portion runs through the Russell farm. The mile and a half between the Russell farm and the main stem of Lewis Creek is an impaired waterway, with high levels of phosphorous and coliforms (fecal and E. coli). Phil Russell worked with LCA several years ago to do a river corridor easement and has now accepted a VLT ~ 215 acre farm conservation project that includes a 17 acre river corridor and a 6 acre Hemlock Swamp Special Treatment Area in the VLT easement as well as a 15 year 12.8 acre CREP agreement with the state and NRCS for the river corridor.

LCA just got funding from the Vermont Ecosystem Restoration Program (the old Clean and Clear program) to study the entire Pond Brook watershed area for Phosphorus loading conditions and to pursue project conservation projects that will help reduce Phosphorus loading to Lewis Creek. LCA is asking ANAC and the MCC to help with landowner outreach in 2012. The first steering committee meeting will be in February. John McNerney and Sam want to follow the project. Steve Parren will be a steering committee member.

For many years, LCA has been assisting landowners, State groups and Hinesburg Land Trust on riparian protection plan for the middle section of Lewis Creek (Hinesburg/Monkton). Several hundred acres are finally being conserved including riparian lands, aquatic endangered species habitat, a hemlock swamp and Indiana Bat Habitat downstream from Tyler Bridge. A State public access location is now secured at Tyler Bridge. A combination of donated easements and land acquisition from several landowners along the Hinesburg line on Lewis Creek is all going to be conserved, protecting some high quality habitat in the middle section of Lewis Creek. This is also going to fill in the center of a ring of conserved parcels. No funding is needed from ANAC. Private and the State's "Landowner Incentive Program" funds were used.

Marty also spoke about the Cliffords, who have been participating in improved riparian area practice projects within the upper portions of the waterway in Starksboro for 20 years. Results have had limited success.

- 7) Sam moved that ANAC recommend to the Select Board to approve the request from Orb Weaver Farm for \$300 towards the cost of the conservation appraisal. Caitlin seconded. All were in favor. Sam will draft a letter to the Select Board and submit the VLT application to them before their next meeting.
- 8) John moved and Sam seconded that we adjourn; we unanimously adjourned at 9:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted on 1/26/2012,

Deb Gaynor
ANAC Secretary