

Monkton Agricultural and Natural Area Committee Meeting—Minutes for 2/23/2011

In Attendance

Members:

Sue Regier, Sam Burr, Wendy Sue Harper, Laura Farrell, John McNerney, and Deb Gaynor.

Guests: Marty Illick, Josh Phillips

Absent: none

- 1) Sue called the meeting to order at 7:40 pm.
- 2) Laura introduced Marty and Josh to the committee; they are present to update us on the new forest aggregation initiative.
- 3) Story Jenks is the board president for MALT; Keith Ross and Story work for Land Vest, which handles large timber and open properties (they're high-end realtors, basically). Keith also works as a consultant for New England Forestry Foundation. Aggregation means taking a group of parcels that present an opportunity to span a system or region; a facilitator like Keith pulls together landowners to gain efficiencies for appraisals, etc, and to attract federal money, because there is no local money for forest conservation. Some states have made big investments; Massachusetts put together a very big fund to get the process started. They are about to close on a project involving 7 land trusts, which identified 80 land owners that might be interested in conservation. The group did the mapping, and 47 agreed to have the mapping done. The fund plan would offer 75% of the appraised values; the group is going to have to raise \$20 million to cover the difference. As of last August, they had already raised \$7 million. Appraisals, legal fees, and due diligence work can realize great cost-savings by being grouped together. They have already completed a big project in Maine, they're about to complete the MA one, and they're searching for the right place to make one happen in Vermont. They're working through New England Forestry Foundation (NEFF) as consultants. Marty brought the handouts from their recent meeting in Montpelier. NEFF is also focusing on a timeframe that is expecting climate change legislation and money that could be available for this kind of project; it's not clear if they would insist on this being in the easement or not. John Roe from Vermont Land Trust (VLT), and Kate Wanner from Trust for Public Lands (TPL) were very interested in the climate change aspect. There is some concern that payments for easements might undercut donations of easements; regardless, it is unlikely that VT public funding for forest conservation is enough today to meet the perceived needs.
- 4) Josh brought the book from Harvard Forest "Wildlands and Woodlands" for us; this lays out a plan for New England forest lands (see www.wildlandsandwoodlands.org for pdf copies). The goal is to tailor any project to local needs, with mostly working forests but some wildlands. Marty brought a copy for us of the Prospectus for Land Trusts put out by NEFF.
- 5) Marty is proposing that we set the scope of our hopes at connecting the Green Mountains to the lake. Other groups who share this vision are The Nature Conservancy (TNC) and Northeast Wilderness Trust (Jim Northrup in Bristol). Marty would like to have all of us (ANAC, VLT, LCA, HLT, MALT, Northeast Wilderness Trust, and TNC) get together to identify on a map what areas and landowners we should be talking to. Josh asked if we think that we could find a significant amount of acreage locally, and Marty added that we also ask the state level folks about their target area priorities and their interest in holding easements. We would need to hold easements with VT NGOs. For local outreach by town, perhaps a letter saying, "Should funding be available, would you be interested in conserving your forested lands?" would be a first pass at screening for need. We need to learn if V/TPL can do this work, or do we need outside groups like NEFF..

After identifying need/interest, we are going to have to develop thresholds/parameters that work for us; that might be that we do fund-raising to cover project costs (appraisals, etc). For instance, we might end

up with a model that says, “if you have >100 acres, we’ll cover the appraisal cost, but less than that you have to pay for the appraisal yourself”. Josh brought up the question of who would hold the easements, and we should be prepared to see this done by only VLT, due to the scope and geographic area this could encompass. We need to establish if MALT can/would hold easements in our area; can CLT or TNC hold easements for this kind of project? That is the general extent of VT easement holders.

Thanks to Marty and Josh for coming in to talk to us, and also for reviewing and editing these notes on their discussion with us.

- 6) We can ask Kevin at RPC to generate a list of parcel IDs for all forested (>50% forested) parcels or parcels >50 (?) acres within the Monkton town boundaries. We can then mail a letter to the list (on the order of \$600).
- 7) Bob Heiser or Al Karnatz is scheduled to come to a meeting on 3/2/11 to talk about this, but we’re not ready yet, so we’ll ask them to postpone their visit.
- 8) Our next meeting is March 2nd.
- 9) Wendy Sue announced that she is not going to seek reappointment to this committee. Sue Regier, ANAC Chair, spoke for the committee: We thank Wendy Sue Harper for her exemplary service on the Agricultural and Natural Areas committee since its inception. Her considerable experience with town and regional planning and her expertise in soils and farming have proven invaluable to our work. Wendy Sue’s vision for how this committee could best help Monkton families was instrumental in developing the application process and materials and in solidifying the role of ANAC. Monkton is fortunate to have such a good citizen and steward of our community and we wish you well in your next endeavor, Wendy Sue.
- 10) Sam moved and Wendy Sue seconded that we adjourn; we unanimously adjourned at 9:45 pm.

Respectfully submitted on 2/23/2011,

Deb Gaynor
ANAC Secretary