

MINUTES
Conservation Lands Review Committee
Tamworth Conservation Commission
Friday, August 30, 2013

Draft minutes to be reviewed and approved at a subsequent meeting.

Present: Ned Beecher, David Little, John Mersfelder, Chele Miller, Kate Thompson. Also: Susan Bryant-Kimball, Nelson O'Bryan, David White. Susan Ticehurst arrived later and left before the second vote.

Meeting called to order at 9:15 am by Ned Beecher (Committee Chair).

Bearcamp Valley Farm – Southern Lots Conservation Project

1. Ned reviewed developments since the last CLRC meeting regarding the negotiations with the landowner of the two lots in question – Lots 7 and 9. He noted Mr. Floyd was disappointed that the Committee was not accepting the per-acre price that had been discussed between he and Ned. He then offered to sell a conservation easement on both parcels for a lower price.

2. Once again, there was discussion regarding whether or not the Committee and TCC should consider offering to purchase a conservation easement on the two lots at a price above the opinion of value provided by Tom Howard. During the discussion, it was emphasized by several that it is a challenge balancing the responsibility to the Town and donors to pay a price determined by a market assessment while also working to be fair to the landowner. We reiterated the need for the landowner to have independent financial advice; Ned agreed to recommend this to him again.

Vote 1: John moved and Chele seconded a motion to accept the landowner's offer of a lower per-acre price for conservation easement on Lots 7 and 9; this number was what Ned reported to the Committee (see item 1, above). The motion was defeated, 4-0.

3. John raised the suggestion of possibly purchasing a conservation easement on just Lot 7 (the eastern lot). This was briefly discussed, but went no further.

4. Several Committee members reported on a meeting they had yesterday, Thursday, with Don Berry at Lakes Region Conservation Trust (LRCT). They say LRCT does not seem to see this property as a high priority. What would make it more valuable to them is if the two neighboring properties to the east could be included. They all discussed the idea of LRCT taking fee ownership of these parcels, but they could not figure out a reasonable way to work this kind of transaction. In the end, it did not seem that LRCT can provide much, if any, help. A good idea that came from the discussion was this: To generate funds now for the landowner and keep open the conservation option, someone could purchase a right of first refusal on any or all farm assets. This was suggested by Don Berry as a way to provide some more value to the landowner now and stave off development of the front lots. Would need to identify who would be the formal purchaser.

5. There was discussion regarding the value and hopes of conserving the farm as a whole, to be useful as a complete farm in the future. However, it was noted that it does not have the best land, but that it might best be a portion of a larger farmed area that included land across the Bearcamp River eventually. Nonetheless, the Committee would like to keep open the option of it being a viable, stand-alone farm in the future, if at all possible.

6. The Committee discussed the possibility of turning our ideas over to private individuals to try to get this next conservation step moving forward. Maybe somebody could purchase Eastern Field in fee simple and donate it to LRCT, since they own the Western Field too. Concern is that that would send it into different ownership, separating it from the larger farm. In the end, the Committee decided not to go in this direction any further.

Vote 2: Motion by Chele, second by John: That the Committee offer Bob Floyd \$500/acre for the conservation easement on Lots 7 & 9. Survey and other transaction costs would be covered by the Conservation Fund, all details pending approval by the full Commission.

It was discussed that this per-acre price offer is 31% above the opinion of value estimate by Tom Howard. The Committee members were comfortable with going this high above that estimate, given the assumptions behind the estimate and the value the Committee and TCC place on preserving this property. It was agreed that the conservation easement should include frontage along Route 25 both to the east and to the west of the existing buildings. Committee members agreed that this is as far as they can go; we have tried hard over many months to find a solution that would work for all involved. The Committee understands that the landowner is likely to reject this offer.

Vote on the motion: it carried 4 – 0.

Ned agreed to convey this latest offer to the landowner. The offer will be good until the end of October (although we could consider something again later, if the landowner comes back to the Committee and accepts the offer at a later time).

If the offer is accepted, the Committee is ready to move forward expeditiously, pending TCC approval, since a draft P & S was created already. But there are details that have to be set: agreement on total price being based on surveyed acreage, timing, deposit, etc.

Adjournment: Moved by Chele, Katy second. All approved at 11:05 am.