

Whitefield Conservation Commission
Meeting Minutes
April 10, 2019
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Frank Lombardi called the meeting to order at 4:33 p.m.

Members Present: Frank Lombardi-Chairman, Valerie Yelton, Edith Worcester, Marsha Lombardi and Tina Wright-Secretary

Members Absent: Donald LaPlante-Vice Chair and Ken Jordan

Review of Town Meeting, town forest and future land use discussion:

Frank has written a letter to the Whitefield Selectboard, the Conservation Commission reviewed and talked about it. (see attached letter)

Frank Mai sent a letter to the Conservation Commission (see attached letter)

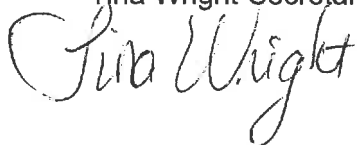
There will be no meeting in May. The next meeting will be June 12, 2019 at 4:30 p.m.

~~A motion was made by Valerie Yelton~~ ^{moved} to approve the minutes as is from the March 6, 2019 and March 20, 2019 meeting. Seconded by Edith Worcester, no further discussion, all in favor, motion carries.

~~A motion was made by Valerie Yelton~~ ^{moved} to adjourn the meeting at 5:49 p.m., seconded by Marsha Lombardi, meeting adjourned.

Respectfully Submitted:

Tina Wright-Secretary



Frank Lombardi-Chairman



Whitefield Conservation Commission
56 Littleton Rd.
Whitefield, NH 03598

April 10, 2019

Whitefield Select Board
56 Littleton Rd.
Whitefield, NH 03598

Sirs:

The Whitefield Conservation Commission has worked diligently on the proposal for a future town forest on the property located in the Whitefield Industrial Park abutting the Pondicherry Wildlife Refuge. With the use of Geographic Information Systems and recommendations from the U.S. Department of the Interior, as well as other community residents, we have concluded that the land would be better suited as designated Town Forest, rather than industrial, as it borders the very successful entrance to the Whitefield side of the Pondicherry trail system and we want to preserve that gateway.

Geographically, the two lots are primarily wetlands, and the high ground is divided from the industrial park by large tracts of wetlands. The high ground's proximity to the wildlife refuge is such that any industrialization would be detrimental to the wildlife habitat and to the beauty of this gateway. The Department of the Interior is in favor of our proposal, and states that it will be beneficial.

Upon proposing our warrant article to you in October, you (the Select Board) advised us to meet with the WEDC and Airport Commission regarding the Town Forest idea. We adhered to that advice, meeting with the WEDC personally and corresponding to the Airport Commission via e-mail. The WEDC was unwilling to even consider future land use for conservation. Chairman Pons stated that there was too much Federal land to begin with, and that he personally was against the idea. We asked the remaining board members where they stood on the issue, and they expressed no opinion. We asked that they look further into the issue, but have heard nothing since then. Also, we have not seen any proposed use of this land by the WEDC, nor by anyone else.

As a board we are disheartened at what took place at Town Meeting, and would like an explanation. We have complied with all that was requested of us, and communicated to all the groups in question. We have made huge progress in our eight month existence before Town Meeting. We wonder why we did not receive the respect and consideration from each of you that is freely given to other boards. Why was it stated publicly at Town Meeting that this land is owned by the WEDC, and not by the Town of Whitefield, when the land is owned by the town?

How could every member of our Select board stand by and not correct this information? Furthermore, and most concerning, is why wouldn't this information have been brought up to the Conservation Commission before Town Meeting?

The Conservation Commission, as a board, requests the following of the Whitefield Board of Selectman:

- A clarification of the statement given at Town Meeting stating that the land in question is owned by the WEDC, and to clearly state that the Town of Whitefield actually owns the land.
- As of now, the WEDC does not release their minutes to the public which does not allow for the Conservation Commission to assist and collaborate with future projects. In that our Goals and Objectives specifically state that we are to work with the "Planning Board, the Economic Development Corporation, the Selectman, the Historical Society, and other boards and/or committees" it would be appropriate for the Select Board to communicate to these entities the objective of participating in a collaborative relationship with the Conservation Commission. We ask that the WEDC share their minutes and future plans for any land with the Conservation Commission. This is appropriate due to the impact any project would have on our natural resources.
- That the Select Board put a hold on any transaction of the land until at least the 2020 Town Meeting, not allowing any sale or purchase of the land to take place until the public has time to consider, with accurate information, what they would like to do with the land.

As a board, we will continue to pursue the proposed Town Forest and educate the community on this issue. We are unanimously in agreement that this land would be better suited for recreational purposes, would economically benefit Whitefield and be more appropriate to the geography of the region as a Town Forest. With DG Whitefield wood chip plant's future unknown, we have even more doubt regarding the success of future economic growth in the Industrial Park. A decade ago, Mr. Presby proposed a wood pellet factory as well as a high-end restaurant/museum in the park, neither of which have transpired. If there is actually a structured plan in place for the two lots in question (other than simply continuing to attempt selling the lots and which does not negatively impact the entrance to the Pondicherry Trail System and/or other wetlands), we will stand down on the issue of Town Forest and work collaboratively with the WEDC to do what is best for the town and our region.

As of now, The Conservation Commission continues are primary goal of preserving and appropriately using the natural resources of Whitefield. We look to support economic growth through recreation and featuring the natural beauty that our town possesses. We feel our best approach to economic growth is to attract visitors to Pondicherry Wildlife Refuge by working with the Department of the Interior to develop this land to enhance Whitefield's attractiveness to recreational users and to offer a unique experience in the state of New Hampshire. Our future plans include surveying the community and working with the students at WMRHS and

the Society for the Protection of New Hampshire Forests. Our future hopes are to have better communication and collaboration with all stakeholders in town and to be transparent with the community.

Respectfully,

A handwritten signature in dark ink, appearing to read "Frank Lombardi". The signature is fluid and cursive, with the first name "Frank" and last name "Lombardi" clearly distinguishable.

Whitefield Conservation Commission Chairperson
Chairman Frank Lombardi

Thoughts for Whitefield Conservation Committee
Frank Mai Whitefield, NH

Some information I thought I would share for your efforts in creating a "Town Forest".

While I am familiar with the Shorelands Protection Act, at the time of the town meeting when I brought it up, no map was introduced to review. I have seen the maps in the past, but I didn't memorize them, so I did not know for sure how close the subject area was in reference to Cherry Pond, which is a 103 acre pond, plus there are a couple of smaller ponds and streams, which are all part of The Pondicherry National Wildlife Refuge.

I made my suggestion at the town meeting so that those involved, who might not be aware of it, would check. Peter Corey, the selectman who was just re-elected after his first 3 year term, proved to me that he was not up to speed on things either. After spending 3 years in a job, I expected him to be more knowledgeable. For example, he told the public that WEDCO owned the land, which is ridiculous and absolutely not true. When I was on the Whitefield Economic Development Corporation, we acted as an agent for the town when we sold land in the industrial park to David Presby. The Town of Whitefield was the seller who owned the land, and they rightfully received the proceeds of that sale, not WEDCO.

The thing is that NH Fish & Game owns the Pondicherry National Wildlife Refuge, which is part of the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge and at one point they wanted to purchase the land in this discussion, for what I was told was a decent price, and add it to the Silvio O. Conte National Fish and Wildlife Refuge. The select board at the time declined their offer, which in my opinion was a big mistake. From the town's standpoint, which may not meet with the Conservation Committee's agenda, it would be wise for the town to revisit that conversation and sell it to them.

I suspect the town is most likely not interested to sell, so part of your negotiating position should be that no one will ever have interest in that land for industrial use and I will explain why. I was on the Whitefield Economic Development Corporation for about 20 - 25 years. We had State people from DRED (NH Department of Resources and Economic Development) accompany Canadian business people, and other potentially interested parties who were considering doing something in NH, to meet with us. Once they looked at that land and discovered it's negatives, they passed on it. It could not come close to matching the Littleton Industrial Park, which has good land, town water, town sewer, the Littleton Water and Light Department that offers the lowest cost for electricity, and is in close proximity to I-93. We could not come close to competing with them and to this day, no one else in this area can either.

Thoughts for Whitefield Conservation Committee
Frank Mai Whitefield, NH

The town of Lancaster started an Industrial Park that is now owned by AB Excavating Inc. They realized use of the land as an Industrial Park was never going to happen, and made an intelligent decision. They sold it.

Now, those who may have had an interest in locating in the North Country, were initially motivated by lower costs for land and construction. However, if they produced a product that had to be transported to market in lower part of NH or Massachusetts, they quickly found their transportation cost to be unacceptable. and their numbers simply didn't work. Ultimately, they would also have to pass on the Littleton Industrial Park, and look much further South. South being as close as possible to the border with Massachusetts.

Now whether or not the town would sell the subject land, NH Fish & Game had, and most likely still has, an interest in that land. For that reason, I suggest the Conservation Committee contact them and ask what, if any, issues they might have, and/or their position on the Shorelands Protection Act, because even if the land is technically far enough from Cherry Pond, which I believe it is, there is always a possibility that politics comes into play when the state wants something and unforeseen roadblocks can be put into play.

If selling the land to NH Fish & Game is not an acceptable option to the select board, and NH Fish & Game tells you it has no issues with your plans, then there is no realistic reason to be against the Conservation Committee's proposal of creating a Town Forest, short of town voters not agreeing. Any other reason to have survey work performed would be a foolish decision and tax payer money wasted.