

NATURAL RESOURCES COMMISSION
Meeting Minutes
April 10, 2020

Pursuant to the notice filed with the Town Clerk, a virtual public meeting of the Natural Resources Commission in accordance with the Commonwealth of Massachusetts Executive Order of March 12, 2020 Suspending Certain Provisions of the Open Meeting Law was held virtually on Friday, April 10, 2020 at 2:00 p.m. The following Commissioners were present: Greg Higgins, Chair, Lynn Huggins, Ed Nardi, Nick Pappas, and Judy Zaunbrecher. Natural Resources Director Delia Kaye, Assistant Natural Resources Director Colleen Puzas, and Natural Resources Administrative Assistant Karen Bockoven were also present.

Chair Higgins opened the meeting at 2:00 p.m. He stated that the NRC meeting was being recorded and requested that anyone from the public recording the meeting so inform the Commission.

New Business: Discussion of Town Conservation Land Use

Chair Higgins said additional measures may be needed due to increased usage of Town conservation lands and associated parking associated with the pandemic. At some point it may be necessary to streamline any actions and potentially allow Natural Resources Director Delia Kaye or Planning & Land Management Director Marcia Rasmussen or a designee to make decisions on the NRC's behalf. Chair Higgins asked for any comments from the Commission.

Commissioner Zaunbrecher stated that she has been walking the trails at Powder Mill Woods, Old Rifle Range and White Pond. She rides her bike to these trails. She has seen people using the trails, practicing social distancing and being considerate. So far she has been the only person wearing a mask. She has been encouraging other people to wear masks when outside and to maintain the recommended six-foot distance. She is concerned about social distancing practices on the BFRT even though that is not under the NRC's purview. Commissioner Huggins agreed and stated that she has seen a variety of behaviors. She noted that people are slowly getting the message and spreading out. She has also seen congregations of people, usually around parking areas.

Commissioner Pappas said he received a study about Dutch people regarding people walking, biking, and other forms of motion. The study found that the separation distances should probably be more than six feet. Chair Higgins said that he believes that the study was indicating that when people are walking, etc. in the same direction that they should be 15-30 yards apart. Commissioner Zaunbrecher would like to get an assessment of the study from Public Health Director Susan Rask, Public Health Director.

Commissioner Nardi said he was surprised to see the lack of putting dogs on leashes at Hapgood Wright Town Forest.

Chair Higgins stated that parking is another issue. Some people are parking outside of designated areas. More enforcement and signage is needed.

Chair Higgins suggested that the NRC give authority to Director Kaye with the Town to synchronize what the Town's land usage will be so everyone is on the same page. The NRC agreed.

Town Manager Stephen Crane explained that there are federal, state, and local states of emergency. The additional authorities are not really articulated under the Civil Defense Act. He said that it is the Town's preference to have the Natural Resources Commission be part of the dialogue. He said the guidance in terms of the studies and what is right or wrong is evolving. One thing that has not changed is that staying at home is still the safest and best way to prevent community spread of the virus. Walking on your own street is different from driving somewhere to take a walk. Mr. Crane said that Paris has banned outdoor exercise because people were not abiding by the social distancing guidelines. He explained that the Town's decision-making has one goal and that is to stop the community spread so people can stay safe and healthy and return to their normal daily activities. Therefore, the Town's decision-making will be geared towards addressing the few who are not doing what is recommended. Mr. Crane said that the Town closed playgrounds and playing courts a few weeks ago. Even with the closings people were still going to the playgrounds, tennis courts, and basketball courts. The Town had to block and physically close those areas, and still people are attempting to enter.

Chair Higgins asked about enforcement if everything is shut down. Mr. Crane replied that parking areas may need to be closed to limit the number of people. The Town is trying to model what Governor Baker did which was to close parking lots at beaches but not the beaches themselves. That had mixed results but it is a mid-range approach. Mr. Crane said that the goal of the Town is to get people to comply but not to punish.

Chair Higgins asked if the NRC gives authority to Director Kaye to work with Mr. Crane and Police Chief O'Connor would that be acceptable. Mr. Crane replied yes. He stated that the Select Board gets feedback from the public that they are not doing enough but they also get feedback that they are doing too much. If a small number of people don't obey the rules they may need to have some restrictions.

Commissioner Huggins moved that in the event the Town Manager, Police Chief, and Public Health Director deem the closure of parking lots at conservation lands to be necessary to protect public health and safety, that Natural Resources Director Delia Kaye, may act on behalf of the Concord Natural Resources Commission to closing parking areas on conservation lands. Commissioner Zaunbrecher seconded. **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED** by Roll Call Vote: Chair Higgins, Aye, Huggins, Aye, Nardi, Aye, Pappas, Aye, Zaunbrecher, Aye.

Mr. Crane explained that this issue is not open-ended but there will have to be some flexibility as to the duration. State emergencies may be lifted but perhaps not the social distancing requirement. He suggested that Emergency Management Director Tom Judge be added to the group evaluating closure of parking lots.

Commissioner Huggins moved to amend her motion to include the Emergency Management Director. Commissioner Zaunbrecher seconded. **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED** by Roll Call Vote: Chair Higgins, Aye, Huggins, Aye, Nardi, Aye, Pappas, Aye, Zaunbrecher, Aye.

Chair Higgins inquired about signage at conservation trails. Director Kaye responded that the first round of signage will be replaced with language specific to asking for compliance in order to keep trails open. She asked the NRC to provide her with any comments on the draft signage. Mr. Crane said that the content of messaging is good, however, the Town will have a standard message. Chair

Higgins agreed consistency was important. He said if dogs are going to be allowed people must have dogs on leashes on all Town lands at this time not just on the properties where leashing is now required.

Joan Ferguson, Chair of the Concord Land Conservation Trust (CLCT), asked if Director Kaye's draft of the signage was going to be posted. If the Town requires that dogs be on leashes on Town lands, then people may go to CLCT lands so their dogs can run without leashes. Also, if the Town decides to close conservation lands they will have to follow suit. Will the Town be willing to provide police assistance? How would the new rule go into effect in areas like Chamberlin Park? Chair Higgins explained that the language will have to be coordinated.

Police Chief Joseph O'Connor said he has the authority to post temporary no parking signs for up to 30 days. Communication is what works to get voluntary compliance. One issue with regard to dogs being unleashed is that if someone is bitten by a dog not only does that take up resources for the Police Department but also for medical facilities which are very busy right now. People should remember if they are going to walk in the woods because they are feeling stressed their dogs are also feeling that way, another reason for keeping dogs leashed. People should use common sense and practice social distancing.

Mr. Crane explained that when The Trustees of Reservations decided to re-open their sites they put out guidance that the Town has borrowed heavily from. Director Kaye will provide information to partners so there is continuity. Mr. Crane said they will circulate that information. If possible, Director Kaye will give advance notice when they are posting. Mr. Crane said he has received emails from people stating that they have not seen any problems. However, they have received reports of problems. Even if that is the vast minority of situations those are the situations that need to be addressed. He would not bring the subject up if they did not feel it was a legitimate problem. Chair Higgins said that he has noticed significant parking issues at several locations.

Commissioner Huggins moved to adjourn. Commissioner Zaunbrecher seconded. **UNANIMOUSLY VOTED** by Roll Call Vote: Chair Higgins, Aye, Huggins, Aye, Nardi, Aye, Pappas, Aye, Zaunbrecher, Aye.

This meeting adjourned at 2:40 pm.

Respectfully submitted,

Karen Bockoven
Administrative Assistant