

Natick Conservation Commission
May 3, 2023

The Meeting was Remote and was called to order at 7:00 by Chairman, Matthew Gardner. Members present: Chris Stillman, Jeff Richards, Doug Shepard. Members absent: Mike Downey, David Howe, George Bain

Request for Determination of Applicability – 90 Evergreen Road

Mr. Gardner read the public meeting notice. The request is to repair existing dock and access stairs. Matt asked for clarification on how the dock will be attached to the bank. Claribel Ramirez clarified that the existing dock is detached from the bank and all that is proposed is repair to the decking. No work is proposed to the footings of the detached, removable dock. The stairs will be repaired in a similar manner and railings are proposed to be added.

Doug asked whether DCR had approved the work. Claire assisted Claribel in getting in touch with DCR and since there is no permanent dock proposed just repair to what is existing, DCR has no concerns or requirements for the work.

Matt Gardner asked for a motion to close, Chris Stillman moved, Doug Shepard seconded, all in favor 4-0.

Matt Gardner asked for a roll call vote:

Doug Shepard, yes
Chris Stillman, yes
Jeff Richards, yes
Matt Gardner, yes

Mr. Gardner asked for a motion to issue a Negative 2 determination, Jeffrey Richards moved, Chris Stillman seconded, all in favor 4-0.

Matt Gardner asked for a roll call vote:

Doug Shepard, yes
Chris Stillman, yes
Jeff Richards, yes
Matt Gardner, yes

Request for Determination – 31 Ranger Road

Mr. Gardner read public meeting notice. The request is for an after the fact approval for the removal of a prior existing screen porch, new addition to a single-family home, a new 16’x18’ porch with associated stairs, and drainage work.

Staff noted work occurring on the property within 200’ of Beaverdam Brook while visiting another property in the neighborhood. Staff issued a violation notice and the contractor was very responsive in his filing.

Steven Comolli, contractor, provided an overview of the work completed and what still needs to be finished. He apologized for not filing for the appropriate permits.

Addition to the single-family home included a foundation, and the new deck is supported on helical piers. The area under the new deck has ¾” stone cover.

The contractor is hoping to finish up the drainage work, area drain for the driveway with outlet, with the approval from the Commission.

Claire noted that some sort of outlet structure to prevent erosion should be included in design, and the contractor will be installing a drywell to take in the water. Matt asked if the area is appropriate for a drywell. Steven confirmed that he feels the drywell will function very well, as it is a minor amount of water being managed and the drywell will still be several feet above the elevation of the stream. Claire confirmed that soil testing on other lots in the neighborhood suggested that the a drywell would function properly.

Matt Gardner asked for a motion to close, Doug Shepard moved, Jeffrey Richards seconded, all in favor 4-0.

Matt Gardner asked for a roll call vote:

Doug Shepard, yes

Chris Stillman, yes

Jeff Richards, yes

Matt Gardner, yes

Claire suggested that erosion controls be conditioned while the drainage work is completed, along with requiring an as-built showing completed work.

Mr. Gardner asked for a motion to issue a Negative 2 and 3 determination with the above conditions, Jeffrey Richards moved, Doug Shepard seconded, all in favor 5-0.

Matt Gardner asked for a roll call vote:

Doug Shepard, yes

Chris Stillman, yes

Jeff Richards, yes

Matt Gardner, yes

Request for Determination (continuation) – 8 Crest Road

Mr. Gardner asked for a motion to continue to May 18th, Doug Shepard moved, Chris Stillman seconded, all in favor 4-0.

Mr. Gardner asked for a roll call vote:

Doug Shepard, yes

Jeffrey Richards, yes

Chris Stillman, yes

Matt Gardner, yes

Notice of Intent – DEP File #233-892 – Town Forest Beavers

Mr. Gardner read public hearing notice. The proposal is to develop a management plan for the beaver activity at Hunnewell Town Forest to allow more flexibility in the timing of dam breaches.

Claire reviewed the project area, the history of beaver activity, and project scope as drafted. This will serve as the special conditions document for the Order of Conditions. The narrative was also provided to the interested abutters in advance of the meeting.

Claire reviewed the requirements to be met to require dam breaching, along with some options for how breaching could occur. This includes the use of volunteer residents to provide support DPW's full breaches. The volunteers would only be approved to assist in breaches at Location 1.

The narrative details volunteer requirements and training, as well as different methods of breaching.

Matt asked what are the differences for when volunteers can breach versus DPW? Claire stated that we can clarify that further, but water level monitors could assist in that. There is also the model of the application form for work under the Generic Trails OOC, and something similar could be developed for this.

Matt wants this to be a tactic to drive the beavers out of this area. Could DPW go out to do a full breach and then volunteers assist with removing smaller rebuilds after the full breach to prevent the beavers from being able to fully rebuild?

Jeff asked if we could use any other types of deterrent to scare beavers out of the area, such as fake coyotes? Claire stated that full grown male beavers can actually be larger than a fully grown male coyote and generally they are going to be able to hold their own against coyotes.

The Commission asked if we had any idea of population size in this area? Claire said she did not have evidence of where the lodges were located, but guessed it was along the northern edge of the larger wetland.

Matt is open to flexibility in how the volunteers are involved, but be sure to include language that allows changes based on implementation feedback. Claire drafted some language that appeared to meet the Commission's request.

Matt is glad to hear that DPW has been cooperative. He feels that we should not limit ourselves to warm weather months, so expand it out to all year.

Claire is happy to announce that beaver solutions will be out soon to evaluate the Oak St culvert dam to see if a flow leveler device can be installed there.

Simone Poliandri is very happy to see the Commission making steps to move this issue forward. He wonders if photo/video documentation could be included in the requirements of breaching. In addition, if DPW is out at location 1, can't they just address location 2 as well? Claire noted where

the language about photos is already included and that there is more coordination required for location 2 due to the roadway access.

Simone asked for clarification on the water level monitors.

Matt is sick of the beavers and just wants to see as many regular breaches as possible.

Martha Paynter asked for clarification on the breaching schedule for the culvert dam? Claire clarified that this dam will also be breached regularly and added in language to allow bi-weekly or as needed, in case they don't need to be done that regularly.

Martha noted that when the water is released during location 1 breaches may be blocked by the dam at location 2. She is concerned about issues with water flow. The initial breach will be for both dams, but there is not likely going to be any major impact if location 2 is breached after location 1.

Martha is still concerned about the low water levels in Big Jennings Pond. Claire stated that the levels identified based on science and that the monitor will be located at the culvert to have the best idea of water flow impacts from the upstream dams. Matt also stated that the low water levels last summer were likely caused by the drought versus the dams.

Chris asked if we can zero out the monitor at a known elevation? Claire would be using the DPW roadway elevation, along with drone data to determine water levels. Chris just wants to be sure it is set to a known elevation rather than a relative elevation.

Mr. Gardner asked for a motion to close, Doug Shepard moved, Chris Stillman seconded, all in favor 4-0.

Mr. Gardner asked for a roll call vote:

Doug Shepard, yes

Chris Stillman, yes

Jeff Richards, yes

Matt Gardner, yes

Mr. Gardner asked for a motion to issue an Order of Conditions with the discussed special conditions, Chris Stillman moved, Jeffrey Richards seconded, all in favor 4-0.

Mr. Gardner asked for a roll call vote:

Doug Shepard, yes

Chris Stillman, yes

Jeff Richards, yes

Matt Gardner, yes

Notice of Intent – DEP File #233-XXX – U.S. Army Soldier Systems Center Boat Ramp Project has not received a DEP File number, so the applicant has requested a continuation.

Matt asked for a motion to continue to 5/18, Chris Stillman moved, Jeff Richards seconded, 4-0.

Major Stormwater Permit – 21 Park Avenue

Project is still working with Town staff to revise the application, so the applicant has requested a continuation.

Matt asked for a motion to continue to 5/18, Douglas Shepard moved, Chris Stillman seconded, 4-0.

General Business Discussion

Community Organic Farm Board – Conservation Commission Representative

Since neither David nor Mike are in attendance, this discussion will be continued to 5/18.

Letter of Support for MVP Grant

The Town is submitting an MVP grant application for design and permitting support for the park areas around the South Natick Dam. This funding would allow the park design work to occur in conjunction with the hoped for Dam and Seawall Grant funding the design, engineering, and permitting of the South Natick Dam.

Matt asked for a motion to submit a letter of support on behalf of the Commission, Chris Stillman moved, Jeff Richards seconded, 4:0:0.

Intern

Claire let the Commission know that a summer intern, UMass Amherst student, starting mid-May.

Charles River Flood Model

Just had the public engagement meeting and we expect concept designs for Natick High School by end of month. Staff are being trained to inspect culverts and Claire is now a certified lead observer for NAACC.

SuAsCo Walks

We will be walking with the consultant team areas identified as part of the grant on Monday May 8th. Let Claire know if you'd like to join.

Tiny Forest Grant

Project is rolling!

Hazard Mitigation Plan Update

Town has executed contract and will be soliciting vendors.

Claire Time Off

Claire will be off for 2 weeks 5/25-6/5.

Meeting adjourned at 8:30.