CONSERVATION & TRAILS COMMITTEE
Essex Town Offices, 81 Main St., Essex Junction, Vermont 05452

Minutes of Friday, January 3, 2020

In attendance
Conservation & Trails Committee (CTC): Cristine Hammer, Chair; Alan Botula; Elisabeth Coleman
Tree Advisory Committee (TAC): Nick Meyer, Chair; Warren Spinner
Town Staff present: Darren Schibler, Town Planner; Chuck Vile, Tree Warden

AGENDA ITEM #1: Public Comments

Hammer called the meeting to order at 9:00 AM. There were no comments from the public.

AGENDA ITEM #2: Agenda Changes and Approval

Schibler had hoped that the CTC would be able to sign a letter of support for a grant application by the Winooski Natural Resources Conservation District, but due to lack of quorum, he would work with Hammer to make the letter specifically from her and not the entire CTC.

Schibler also noted that the CTC should discuss whether to hold its regular January meeting or postpone until February due to Botula’s and St. James’ planned absences.

Botula wished to discuss scheduling for the subcommittee working on updates to the landscaping requirements.

Due to lack of quorum, no official changes to the agenda were made.

AGENDA ITEM #3: Joint Meeting with Essex Junction Tree Advisory Committee Regarding Emerald Ash Borer Management Grant

Hammer asked all in attendance to introduce themselves and describe their role. Schibler noted that updated documents, including a draft grant application and budget spreadsheets, had been uploaded to Google Drive.

The Committees discussed the rural ash inventory and the removal strategy for Brigham Hill Road and Lane. The consensus was to hire contractors and focus on larger trees in poorer condition to maximize the value of the grant and minimize potential future cost to the Town. Committee members volunteered to flag or paint trees in advance of the work.

The Committees reviewed cost estimates for all grant work and discussed the advantages and disadvantages to replanting with bare root stock versus balled-and-burlapped stock. The Committees agreed that bare root is preferable and more cost-effective when there is sufficient support from municipal crews to prepare sites and water trees, and the TAC plans to utilize bare root once its stock at Branch Out Burlington’s nursery matures. However, for work under this grant, balled-and-burlapped stock should be used to ensure success and make the planting process simpler.
Schibler reviewed the Town’s ash replacement plan, noting that all of the 2020 work could be included under the grant with funds left for Village work. The Town’s plan includes $9,900 for the removal of 10 trees, pruning of 1 tree, and replanting of 8 trees (one on private property). The Village’s plan includes $5,000 for the removal of 5 trees and planting of 8, some of which would be interspersed with existing ash trees prior to removal to better ensure canopy continuity. The Village also has funds in the operating budget to plant approximately 30 new trees not related to emerald ash borer (EAB) that could be included in the planting portion of the grant.

The Committees discussed cost estimates for planting materials and contractor labor, as well as the value of volunteer and municipal work crew labor. The Committee also proposed purchasing a watering trailer or tank to avoid having to use the street sweepers for longer runs.

Spinner reminded the Committees that under Vermont statute, a public hearing must be held by the legislative body before removal of trees from a public right-of-way. The Village held a meeting for its planned ash removals recently, but will need to hold meetings annually for future work.

**AGENDA ITEM #4: Minutes: October 8, 2019; November 12, 2019; December 10, 2019**

Due to a lack of quorum, approval of previous meeting minutes was postponed to the February 2020 meeting.

**AGENDA ITEM #5: Communications**

There was discussion of upcoming forestry education events organized by Ethan Tapper, Chittenden County Forester.

The CTC decided to cancel the regular January 14, 2020 meeting, since there was no urgent business to discuss and it falls on the same night as the joint Selectboard and Trustees meeting to review the EAB grant application.

Botula, Hammer, and Schibler discussed meeting to review the landscaping requirements, noting that it would be beneficial to collaborate with Meyer and Spinner from the Tree Advisory Committee, as well as Robin Pierce, Village Community Development Director. An initial meeting was scheduled for January 16, 2020 at 10:30am.

The meeting adjourned at 10:55 AM.