

Public Hearing

Meeting Called to Order: at 6:04 p.m.

Members Present: Chairman Earl Bagley, Members Russ Wilder, David Lawrence, and Nancy Mitchell.

Additional Consulting Guests: Tom Howe and Jack Savage from Forest Society and Don Berry from Lakes Region Conversation Trust.

Members Absent: Vice Chairman Gene Young, Treasurer Roger Burgess and Selectmen Representative Robert Daniel.

Description of Intent of Meeting: Public Input for the expenditure of monies according to the RSA distributed (Article 23). Intent to protect land on Mt. Major. Money proposing to contribute to the fund is \$230,000. Total current fund \$372,000. This project will not deplete the Conservation. FYI in 2008, the town voted to authorize the initial \$20,000 plus 50% of any land use taxes collected during the current year to begin the Conservation Fund. Purpose was to give priority to those portions of the Belknap Range. The Commission is a member of Belknap Range Conservation Coalition. Focus on the open space and use.

Currently the trails go through private land to reach the summit of Mt. Major. This project is to obtain key parcels and protect these parcels. Alton being included in this project will give Alton forever rights to and through these parcels; continuing recreational use such as hiking, hunting, and snowmobile trails.

The Commission has studied this project extensively and voted to expend \$230,000. Before spending any funds they are required to hold a public hearing for public input.

Tom Howe – Sr. Director of land conservation for the forest society. Land management. Three tracts proposed purchase.

1. Fundamentally getting permanent protection of the lands.
2. Guaranteed right of pedestrian access.
3. Continuing of the public uses for these lands, hunting, snowmobiling, and hiking.

Don Berry – Pres of Lakes Region Conversation Trust. Cover from Maine border to New Found Lake. Pleased to be part of this project.

Public Input:

Barbara Howard – resident.

Three properties. Who pays the taxes? Forest Society pays taxes. Acres? 630 acres. Concern of land-locked land and the seller reaping top dollar.

D. Lawrence – first a professional appraisal to be completed to determine costs. Conservation Commission has waited to build up funds to do a project such as this. Not depleting fund.

B. Howard. Purchase and Sales agreement already set? R. Wilder – not set in stone and two appraisals have been done and one to be complete. Forest Society cannot purchase without an appraisal. Using George Lamprey.

B. Howard – forestry operating – profits go where?

R. Wilder – our interest is only public access, not sharing of logging operations.

Jane Cormier – representative for Belknap District

Noted her opinion of Forest Society and noted the Forest Society really is an organization to help impact legislation and on their website as well. Feels it is a very political organization. Would like to see a scaled down organization and not such a huge organization. What is the bottom line on how it affects the town?

E. Bagley stated the Forest Society will pay taxes.

J. Cormier asked for the total cost of project.

R. Wilder - 1.8 mil. Purchasing through land owners.

D. Lawrence – noted the Forest Society is a scaled down version. Owners are interested in selling and not interested in contributing to Conservation Commission.

R. Wilder – noted this mountain is as valuable as the lake.

Jim (Alton and Meredith resident). Thank for this project. Question how the properties were selected.

R. Wilder answered the focused on un-fragmented lands (woods and open spaces). Focused in on ones with value, trails, woodlands, water quality, and recreation. Ridgeline and supporting slopes were chosen as well as trail junctions, and snowmobile trails.

E. Bagley added that some of the other parcels were not available at all after approaching the land owners.

Don Claybrook, resident – asked with there is a possibility the hunting, fishing, etc. can change?

J Cormier – states the letter says as long as FS owns the property they can make changes and referred to another project that conditions changed after the fact.

Jack Savage – Forest Society lives in Middleton. Noted the Forest Society owns 172 properties – 2 places restrict hunting due to safety. Allow hunting to state law everywhere. For example they would restrict hunting near the parking lot on Mt. Major.

Nelson Kennedy, resident – timeline?

R. Wilder stated closing late this fall, campaign fundraising this summer (donations, grants, etc.)

David Countway, resident – legacy – has worked on a four year effort to reserve a pond. Lakes Region Conservation Trust helped to bring the project. This is worth the effort and good representation of land being respected. Glad to see this effort to protect the land in the Belknaps. Speaking as a realtor. Knows what draws economy.

Aaron Lichtenburg, resident – value of the community and town are clear. Certainly support these organizations and see this go forward.

Virginia Bergeron, resident – President of Mt. Major Snowmobile Club. Maintains trails. Groom many trails even MM. All trails are done because the members of the club . Money comes from dues, grants, and hard volunteer work. Would like to see guaranteed access. Want to work with FS. Club would like to see trails a little more secure than they are now with private owners. Agrees with project

Allen Sherwood, resident – spoke to the article 2008 town meeting. Hiked every trail in the range and have an appreciation of the value of the land. Land around MM is vulnerable. In favor of this project. Would like to see the easement would codify that the existing trails would be forever open and also the FS would entertain some new trails. Would like to see support from all the communities, hunting, fishing, snowmobile, and hiking.

Mike Amicanbily, summer resident – lives in Derry
Owns property at the end of Reed Road. Concern for the overflow - plans for access to Hurtel property and Reed Road and access.

E. Bagley – noted they are years away from any projects, not on the plans currently.

Jack Savage. These properties are going to be held forever by the Society. Long term goal to look at a possible an additional trailhead.

M. Amicanbily - still concerned for the future of his property.

J. Savage – does not know what the future plan would be for that property. Started to protect Mt. Monadnock early 1900s and continue to work on protecting that area.

Bob Bergeron, resident – trail master for MMSC. Try to get some language into the document that would at least show the intent to keep the existing snowmobile trail system. Club is in favor of this project whether or not the wording would be included. Noted it went badly at Castle in the Cloud. Sore spot to this day. Trails are important and will always be up to a certain standard.

Raymond Howard, resident – property into recreational current use. Concern with subsidizing - when land is timbered will the town get the timber tax?

R. Wilder – noted yes.

R. Howard can this money go back into the Conservation fund?

R. Wilder – It does not.

R. Howard suggests a donation box. At MM. Thanked for the project.

Steve Rollings, resident – owns property on MM – logged in the past – not interested in selling it. Wants to know what will change for his logging.

T. Howe – nothing will change the rights or access to the property.

J. Savage – timber harvesting is important to the Society. Have worked with other property owners in the state and are willing to work up a Method of Use document. Suggest talking with Sr. Director of Forestry.

T. Howe – this is routinely done with abutters and are very willing to work with them.

Roger Sample, resident – curious in 2008 the towns people vote for the town to purchase land or the forest society to purchase the land.

R. Wilder – noted it was for the priority of the land. Pretty flexible.

R. Sample - concern that there are other properties in between the other properties looked at. Concern the FS is a government organization.

J. Savage – not a government organization.

R. Sample – still concerned that this is not going to turn out like it was presented and promised.

J. Savage – asked to look to their record for multiple uses.

J. Cormier – feels all the people should go to the FS website. Feels their wording on the website is misleading to what they seem to be presenting. Referred to New Hampshire Everlasting.

J. Savage – stated the wording is with regard to protecting the land. Goal is a vision they are encouraging other to consider to protecting their town.

E. Bagley. – Thanked everyone for being present and voicing their opinion. Adjourn at 7:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,
Carolyn Schaeffner, Recording secretary