

Cranberry Bog Working Group

Meeting Minutes

March 15, 2021 via Zoom

Members Present: Luke Ascollilo, Ken Belitz, Melinda Lindquist, Alex Parra, Susan Provenzano, Helen Young.

Conservation Administrator: Sylvia Willard

Public: Iva Mooney, Wanda Avril, Mark Duffy, Warren Lyman, MaryAnn DiPinto

Meeting commenced at 7:13 pm with Young reading the Commonwealth open meeting laws designated during the pandemic and then took roll call.

Initial action was to revisit the vote from January 25th minutes because the specifics of the vote was not recorded. Lindquist moved the motion to approve adding \$3500.00 to the invasive species fund to combat Phragmites at the Bog, and Young seconded. The motion was approved unanimously as follows: Ascollilo: aye; Belitz: aye; Lindquist: aye; Parra: aye; Provenzano: aye; and Young: aye. Then the group reviewed the minutes of February 22nd meeting with only one correction of the spelling of MaryAnn DiPinto's name. The change was made and the minutes approved unanimously.

Next Parra introduced MaryAnn DiPinto and mentioned that he and DiPinto had visited the bog the previous week. DiPinto began by asking the group what their goals were for the future of the bog. Lindquist started with stating that the bog was popular because of the openness and the ponds. The public enjoyed the vistas, wildflowers, and vegetative wildlife. DiPinto mentioned that someone had done a bird survey which revealed 25 species. Belitz asked Young to summarize the survey. Young stated that most everyone enjoyed the open vistas. Some liked dogs others did not. Everyone wished that the bog continued to grow cranberries, but at least keep the open vistas, good trails, and natural vegetation. Water rights were also a concern of the public. Recreation Commission had expressed interest in flooding an area for skating in the winter. Willard mentioned that the public has skated on the ponds, but there are safety concerns. Provenzano stated that for horseback riding the trails needed to be kept open and the trail surfaces level with as few rocks or stones as possible. Willard would like Wood Duck boxes, but that require extra volunteer work. Lindquist cited that bog is used by many non-residents especially during Covid. Willard mentioned that there may have been sightings of spotted salamanders and the bog has had a Blandings Turtle sighting. The group would like to maintain the flumes. Lyman said that having the trail surfaces level and as smooth as possible would allow handicapped individuals access to the open space.

DiPinto then mentioned that she had contacted Alex Hackman who also knows the bog. She talked with him about ecological restoration and low and high cost options. She understands that the town wants a low-cost restoration that strives to keep the bog as it is now. Hackman

mentioned that flooding areas would keep the trees down and that volunteers could go in to cut other growth. To achieve this Cons Com would have to file for ecological restoration permit. The permit would specifically mention the activities that would be allowed to maintain the bog. Such things as being to be able to put in flash boards and remove invasive species. Cons Com must meet a set of pre-conditions and then the permit would allow Cons Com to maintain the bog areas long term. The Order of Conditions must be renewed every 3 to 5 years. At that time Cons Com could ask for changes or adjustments. Lindquist asked about beavers. DiPinto mentioned that some towns are trapping them and others are putting in beaver deceivers. Goal would be to keep costs down but maintain what we have. Beltz asked what were some of the key preconditions. DiPinto brought up specific regulations such as rare species, dam removal has specific conditions, dredging requirements, sequence of restoration and maintenance, flooding impacts for onsite flooding, and invasive plants management. Willard asked what the threshold was for Army Corp of Engineers involvement. DiPinto replied that fill or altering an acre plus of land or dredging a large area. The ecological restoration project would serve as the 401 certificate for water quality. Beltz mentioned that all sounds doable as long as we meet the preconditions. DiPinto would meet again with the group to go over the proposal before submitting it. Lyman agrees that a restoration is popular. The vistas are most important. Alex Hackman mentioned to Lyman that we could block a few ditches which would raise the water level and make the wetland meadow, which was the original bog before cranberry growing. Lyman also commented that removal of material may be problematic due to the pesticides used in the past. Duffy commented that while all of this was doable it is harder on a bog as large as this one. Parra asked Duffy to sketch a map of the excess wet areas. DiPinto suggested a controlled burn during a dry area. Willard said burn season is usually springtime which is too wet to burn on the bog. Beltz asked if any others of the public wanted to comment. Mooney asked about lowering of the water levels and its effect upstream in Chelmsford. She asked to please check the overall ecosystem and water level effects before making changes.

Beltz recognized that the community will need to be made aware of the plans. DiPinto would produce a summary and list the options. The public could then weigh in on the draft and how it fits into the plans. DiPinto mentioned she could have the proposal done by the first of April. She mentioned that then it looked like mid-April for the plan. DiPinto will put everything in writing and then it can be put out to the public. Her contacts would be Parra and Willard. Parra felt have a meeting a week to ten days after that to give the group time to read it. At that meeting DiPinto would be there to answer any questions and review the plan. At that point the plan could be brought to the public with some slides. DiPinto asked Lyman and Duffy for information about flumes and dikes. Willard mentioned that water is released from Hart Pond to control and so the water on the bog is very managed. The public meeting was scheduled on April 26th. Mooney queried about viewing the presentation as she does not have internet access. Lindquist assured her that the presentation will be made available to the public prior to the meeting.

Belitz asked for motion to adjourn which was made by Lindquist and seconded by Parra and unanimously approved at 8:11 pm

Next meeting April 12, 2021 at 7 pm via Zoom

Minutes approved at the April 12, 2021 meeting and submitted by Susan Provenzano