

CONSERVATION BOARD
30 January 2024
Hybrid

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4
5 **Present:** Gian Dodici (chair), Steve Bissen, Anne Clark, *Jeanne Grace, Kate McKee
6 (alternate), *Andrew Miller, *Nancy Munkenbeck (arrived 7:18 p.m.), Craig
7 Schutt
8 **Absent:** Bob Beck, Tim Woods
9 **Liaisons:** *Spring Buck (Town Board)
10 **Staff:** Loren Sparling (Deputy Town Clerk)

11
12 “*” denotes attendance via Zoom
13

14 The meeting was called to order at 7:03 p.m.
15

16 **Review and Approval of Minutes from 28 November 2023**
17

18 On motion made by A Clark, seconded by G Dodici, the minutes of November 28, 2023,
19 were unanimously approved as written.
20

21 **Report: EMC**
22

23 S Bissen reported that the EMC had their organizational meeting to decide what they
24 will be doing in 2024. The ideas that were discussed were pretty vague, so they will continue to
25 work on this in February. One thing that will happen, though, is finalizing the update of the
26 Unique Natural Areas (UNAs) for the County. Once this is completed, each town will be
27 provided with a new list of prospective UNAs located within their limits. A lot of the boundaries
28 have changed; they have been refined because when they initially did this, they just marked up
29 a bad aerial map. The boundaries are more precise now.
30

31 **Report: Agriculture Advisory Committee**
32

33 C Schutt reported that the Ag Committee did not meet.
34

35 **Report: Rail Trail Task Force**
36

37 B Beck was not present to report.
38

39 **Report: Town Board**
40

41 S Buck reported that the DRYC (Dryden Recreation and Youth Commission) is being
42 tasked with gathering community input for potential uses of the Town-owned land behind
43 Town Hall and the DPW building. It is her hope that the Conservation Board will engage on
44 that and provide recommendations to them.
45

46 S Buck also reported that multiple companies have responded to the RFP that went out
47 to update the Town Zoning Code. This will provide us with a much better opportunity for
48 choice, and another good opportunity for the Conservation Board to provide input and advice.
49

50 Rick Young went through a list of funding needs for road maintenance in 2024. S Buck
51 will work to understand what activities will be undertaken so that she may report these to the
52 Conservation Board so as to seek their input well ahead of the spring when these activities
53 would commence.
54

1 Lastly, S Buck confirmed that the streambank stabilization efforts will continue this
2 year on Knollwood Drive.

3
4 **New Business: Discuss Direction for 2024**

5
6 G Dodici began by gauging interest among Board members in the chair or vice-chair
7 positions. He stated that although he does not mind being chair of the Board, he does not want
8 to deprive someone else from holding the position should they want to do so.

9
10 G Dodici expressed his unease at how people become members of the Board, through
11 selection/appointment more than through the membership process (submitting an application,
12 holding an alternate position, and waiting for a vacancy to open up). C Schutt recalled how
13 membership applications were first reviewed by Conservation Board members, who then made
14 recommendations to the Town Board; nowadays, members are simply selected by the Town
15 Board. G Dodici acknowledged that there also hasn't been a new Board member in quite some
16 time, as nobody resigns.

17
18 From his years on the Board, G Dodici stated that the chair position has never been
19 decided by Board members; he himself was asked to be chair by the previous chair. There are
20 no nominations or discussions. He would welcome some fresh insight and drive if anyone was
21 so inclined.

22
23 G Dodici has been frustrated over the past few years at the lack of any meaningful
24 product from the Conservation Board. We would occasionally submit a resolution to the Town
25 Board that may or may not be listened to. It doesn't seem like we are doing anything except
26 having interesting discussions among ourselves. He is unsure how they can generate a tangible
27 product, though they are close with regenerative agriculture. Ditching is similar; we have tried
28 to communicate with DPW to collaborate on getting things done, but, as of yet, we haven't
29 made any headway.

30
31 S Bissen echoed G Dodici's comments, stating that he has more or less been on the
32 Board for 20 years. We have come up with a lot of things; these are submitted to the Town
33 Board or the DPW, but nothing happens. He feels at times that the Board has no power. We
34 might be advisory, but no one is taking our advice.

35
36 K McKee asked if the Board exists solely to advise the Town Board, or if community
37 outreach was an option. G Dodici responded that the Board is anything we would like it to be.
38 Previous Boards have been active in the development of Dryden's Natural Resources and Open
39 Space Plans, as well as Tompkins County's UNA inventory. K McKee explained that her interest
40 in Board membership stems from her desire to subtly educate the community about
41 conservation-related issues (e.g., Dryden Village's "No Mow May"). S Buck suggested the redo of
42 the Town website as another opportunity for educational outreach.

43
44 G Dodici returned to the Board's role as advisor, expressing that it would be helpful if
45 the Board were asked for their advice. We often give our opinion to the Town Board, but it is
46 extremely rare that the Town Board asks us for our opinion. He hopes that the Town Board
47 recognizes that, as an advisory board, there is expertise on the Conservation Board and will
48 ask them for their input. S Buck responded by officially asking the Board for their input,
49 especially over the next year, when the Zoning Code is reviewed and the Town lands behind
50 Town Hall/DPW are developed.

51
52 ***Zoning Code Rewrite***

53
54 G Dodici feels that the Conservation Board's input needs to be more specific. Regarding
55 the Zoning rewrite, he personally is not in a position to broadly give input. But if it came to

1 specific conservation/environmental issues (e.g., impact to wetlands, stream buffers,
2 deforestation), the Board can be asked specifically about those items. They can offer opinions
3 on lot sizes and housing density but would not have the expertise to back it up.
4

5 S Buck understood, saying that she had hoped to engage the Board early in the process
6 of the Zoning rewrite rather than towards the end, knowing that it was going to be big; she
7 wanted to be proactive (because it would be easier to incorporate any feedback) rather than
8 reactive.
9

10 A Clark inquired whether the Conservation Board could ask the Planning Board that
11 the Zoning rewrite be undertaken in a conservation-responsible manner, and so push
12 themselves into the process a little bit. To this, S Bissen wondered whether the Conservation
13 Board needed a liaison to the Planning Board, so that they would be involved. A Clark thought
14 this a good idea, saying that the Board needs firsthand knowledge so as to be helpful around
15 the table. C Schutt hoped that all boards would be represented in this process.
16

17 A Clark resumed by saying that the Board could simply make this suggestion upfront.
18 We could send a letter to the Planning Board elucidating areas of the Code where the
19 Conservation Board could provide insight and ask for a seat at the table when those areas are
20 reviewed. Right now, we are just expecting a place at the table.
21

22 ***Use of Town-Owned Land behind Town Hall/DPW***

23

24 G Dodici was curious to know the process by which the DRYC (Dryden Recreation and
25 Youth Commission) would engage the Conservation Board's thoughts about the use of the
26 Town-owned land behind Town Hall/DPW. Would S Buck be facilitating this, or should the
27 Board itself reach out to the DRYC? He further questioned why the Town is even interested in
28 developing this land rather than saving it as open space.
29

30 S Buck relayed that there had been a significant amount of feedback in regard to the
31 Town having outdoor space for outdoor activities. There has been a real shortage of available
32 space for outdoor recreation, especially for kids. The school system cannot fully support all the
33 different kinds of club activities, and we end up with people in the community going to other
34 counties for access to such recreation opportunities.
35

36 G Dodici understood the need for recreation space but had heard a rumor about
37 potential housing on that same land, which troubled him.
38

39 S Buck still believes a task force should be assembled to gather community input,
40 consider what is and is not feasible, and get more expertise on suggestions. She encouraged
41 the Board to reach out to the DRYC to state its willingness to engage in the land's use. It would
42 also be another opportunity for community education on wetlands, given how much of it there
43 is out there. If anything is done with the land, S Buck would like to see that the Board takes
44 advantage of the educational opportunity.
45

46 A Clark asked about the type of space being sought for recreation. S Buck has heard
47 about a variety of uses: ballfields, soccer fields, even a raised walkway. But currently, it is just
48 talk. A Clark suggested that the Board think about things that maintain some natural
49 functioning in areas used by people, e.g., pollinator gardens, linking backyards as habitat,
50 linking wetlands, and say that what we would like to do is to partner with the recreation and
51 zoning efforts both to ensure that the naturalistic habitat is maintained and showcase that
52 human use is not completely unfriendly to its natural function. K McKee put forth that this fits
53 well with the Recreation Department not wanting to develop programs solely for children, but
54 to engage the broader community. The health of the environment and the health of the
55 community go hand-in-hand. S Buck added that beautiful and functional does not always

1 mean perfectly groomed. Bring in the butterflies, the milkweed pods, and the witch plants, and
2 leave the seed standing through the winter.

3
4 **Ditches**

5
6 S Bissen proposed that no-mow areas around Dryden Lake be expanded. C Schutt
7 related that on the north side of Dryden Lake, along Lake Rd, there are a couple of nest boxes
8 on posts; though part of the park, DEC stated that these must be left alone until late summer
9 to allow the birds to nest, and then the area can be mowed. For the last few years, DPW
10 mowing has occurred in May. S Buck will inquire about this with Rick Young when she next
11 sees him.

12
13 A Clark reminded the Board that ditches are perfect for leaving and planting milkweed.
14 Milkweed is not going to get so high that it will prevent you from seeing deer. If the ditch is not
15 too deep, deer will not hide in it.

16
17 To S Buck, A Miller related his observation over the past two years that a lot of great
18 ideas stem from the Board; these invariably run up against the DPW, who does not want to
19 follow any guidelines produced by anybody, whether that's county, state, or town. We have no
20 power (I don't know if we ever will), and that makes for a relatively frustrating situation for
21 many people on this Board when there are ways to improve things that never actually happen.

22
23 G Dodici acknowledged a difference of intents between the Board and the DPW. It does
24 not seem to him that the intent is really there on the part of the DPW to try to do what's right
25 for the resource. It is more than just the road; it is the environment around the road. S Buck
26 does not believe that there is any bad intent but wants to figure out how she can help support
27 alignment between both entities. A Clark feels that the Board gets verbal best intentions all the
28 time, yet actions contrary to these words. She doesn't know if these contrary actions stem from
29 the machine operator or the lack of any policy (e.g., "Fix that ditch so that it looks nice"), but
30 there needs to be something written that can be referenced (e.g., "Dig the ditch no deeper than
31 x").

32
33 S Bissen surmised that their mindset may be that if the guidelines denote that a ditch
34 be dug only to a certain depth, and yet if the ditch is not dug deeper, the roads will then flood
35 and the Town will receive complaints from residents about the flooding. Is their thinking that
36 we're asking too much, and they can't do their job because we're giving them guidelines or
37 suggestions that they cannot follow. To S Buck, he inquired if Rick had spoken to her of such
38 complaints from his staff.

39
40 S Buck related that R Young had taken her on a tour of the Town and highlighted the
41 issues associated with certain areas that he is trying to address, as well as the different
42 strategies being employed to reduce the amount of material used. He showed her some of the
43 areas where DPW is having a lot of problems with ditches due to the amount of water runoff
44 after significant rain events, in addition to areas where they are really proud of the work they
45 did. Given the work DPW has planned for 2024, she wondered if the Board would want to
46 provide advice to him on how to handle certain areas.

47
48 A Clark counterposed this by stating that R Young has never offered to take the
49 Conservation Board on a site tour nor to explain what he is trying to do in problematic areas.
50 What the Conservation Board experiences are the aftereffects of DPW activities. A Clark for one
51 would be interested in a tour to see the logic behind the action. S Bissen added that the Board
52 could even come up with areas that they think he should look at with them, so that he could
53 see firsthand the Board's concerns and hear their side and perspective. A Clark continued that
54 it is hard to proceed forward without a full two-way conversation, and reiterated that she would

1 welcome going out and seeing exactly what R Young’s philosophies are and what he considers
2 his written guidelines.
3

4 G Dodici imparted that he, over the course of the last several years, has actually
5 credited DPW with doing a better job on their ditch management; there are numerous cases
6 where they’ve maybe not done best practices, but better practices than before, so they are
7 working in the right direction. But then you drive around Lower Creek Rd, and there’s no
8 consideration given to any kind of best management practice; they dig deep to get below the
9 lowest elevation of the culvert that’s in there, and then it just ponds water because it is flat.
10 There’s no slope anywhere. But the Board has given credit where credit is due.
11

12 Ditches have been a constant source of frustration with the Board. As such, A Clark
13 proposed that the Board decide on an exact set of actions, even if it is just writing something or
14 inviting someone to speak, so that they could get some clarity on whether it is worthwhile to
15 keep discussing this. It seems like one of the first things we should do is try to get a tour of
16 past, present, and future ditches with R Young and get an explanation for how he sees these
17 problems. She would like to understand his logic, to know what things he cannot do, what
18 things he thinks that he must or should do, and what holds him back. If he says that he would
19 rather do something a certain way but is not going to because of X, that would be helpful to
20 understand.
21

22 N Munkenbeck added that it might be useful to have someone from the Cornell Roads
23 program be on this tour as well, as they would have long-time expertise on roads and could
24 provide suggestions.
25

26 S Buck will meet with R Young in the next few weeks to talk about the list of roads that
27 will be worked on over the coming year. She will talk to him about sharing this with the
28 Conservation Board and the potentiality of doing a tour. She will update the Board at the next
29 meeting, at which time a next step can be devised. She hopes to identify some actionable
30 specific locations to begin building some forward momentum, and after sharing these with the
31 Board, it might be easier to divide them up into problem areas, areas that would benefit from
32 DEC-expertise, areas that would benefit from Cornell Roads expertise, etc.
33

34 A Clark mentioned that the Board once tried to identify locations where ameliorative
35 water-blocking techniques could be employed, but that was not met with enthusiasm. G Dodici
36 added that the Board also had a list of ditches that DPW was going to work on last year (via the
37 289 agreement), but that did not go anywhere. A Clark continued that if she were to ask for a
38 tour, she would like to see a current location that exemplifies what DPW would like done and
39 then a location that is forward-looking (i.e., this is what I am going to do with this ditch). She
40 added that she simply has no idea what happens when somebody goes out and looks at a
41 ditch. Who makes the decisions? What do they say to the guys operating the big machinery?
42 How do they decide on what ditches need to be done? We just want to understand DPW’s
43 perspective on ditches. It would be wonderful to see prospectively what is going to be done and
44 how they are going to do it.
45

46 ***Pollinators***

47

48 A Clark kept the discussion going by stating that pollinators and associated (natural)
49 communities seem like the other big thing that the Board can get in on. G Dodici related that
50 Jennifer Michelle is interested in helping the Town. As a consultant there would be a fee for her
51 service. There seems to be interest in the Town to possibly incorporate pollinator-friendly
52 language into our municipal law. He asked if he could put J Michelle directly in touch with S
53 Buck, as the Town Board would be able to hire her, if they want to proceed forward with this.
54

1 A Miller recounted that Dryden resident Scott McArt is a professor in Cornell's College
2 of Agriculture and Life Sciences, and that the bulk of his work is in pollinator health. His grad
3 students would be a local resource as well. G Dodici reminded the Board that the goal was to
4 get pollinator-friendly language codified, and he did not know if the folks at Cornell were
5 working from the legal end of things, getting municipalities to insert such language into their
6 laws. A Miller thought that it would be more reasonable to reach out to local resources before
7 hiring someone. We might be able to get something done at no cost rather than at cost.

8
9 A Clark reported that the Climate Smart Task Force has talked a lot with J Michelle.
10 From their December minutes, she read that "J Michelle will reach out to Alice Green and the
11 Town for potential collaboration on reviewing their zoning laws. She said there are currently no
12 state funding initiatives to take these action steps, but there are potential points for pollinator-
13 friendly landscaping and the Climate Smart Communities program." One of the things that the
14 Climate Smart Task Force is trying to do is to check more boxes, so that more sources of
15 potential funding become available.

16
17 N Munkenbeck suggested that the insurance companies also be engaged, as
18 underwriters have put forth that insurance policies be cancelled because no-mow areas around
19 houses represent a fire hazard. Before you start putting pollinator-friendly language into
20 something, make sure you are not running into insurance issues.

21 **Public Outreach**

22
23
24 K McKee stated that she would be willing to write something up as the Conservation
25 Board's contribution to the Town's monthly newsletter, should anyone have a suggestion as to
26 what she should write about, especially given that springtime is fast approaching. Knowing of K
27 McKee's interest in educational outreach, S Bissen said that the EMC usually hosts a public
28 outreach meeting once a year; the last one was about flooding and ways to prevent it. Maybe
29 the Conservation Board could also host a public meeting on some theme or topic.

30
31 A Clark added that such outreach could help in the promotion of pollinator gardens
32 among the community. Have you considered this? If so, be sure that you support us as we try
33 to get pollinator-friendly gardens passed through your local zoning office. Such outreach could
34 also dispel misconceptions (e.g., letting your grass get long does not help pollinators). Putting
35 in a pollinator garden is not simple. Joining up with other groups (e.g., Climate Smart
36 Communities Task Force) during Dryden Dairy Days, for instance, might be good.

37
38 A Clark ventured that the Board could write something to the Town Board, saying that
39 the zoning update is an opportunity for some really nice actions that will put Dryden ahead of
40 other municipalities in thinking about everything from pollinators to natural areas that can be
41 utilized as recreational walkways, etc. G Dodici asked if she could begin drafting such a letter
42 as a shared document among Board members.

43 **Monitoring Conservation Easements**

44
45
46 C Schutt wondered what has happened to the conservation easements that the Board is
47 supposed to be monitoring. G Dodici had wondered the same a few weeks ago and contacted
48 Ray Burger about this. The only easements that the Board was tasked with monitoring were
49 two on Ellis Hollow Rd, which they did monitor. There is no formal requirement that these
50 continue to be monitored, yet should the Board feel these easements need to be resurveyed, it
51 is on them to do it, as there had been issues with a water retention pond that was not built
52 well. It would not hurt to return to those two properties in the spring.

53
54 Returning to the topic of pollinator-friendly language, A Clark located a website that
55 lists municipalities and the regulations they have passed that control the plantings that people

1 can put in, demanding that they be completely native or completely non-invasive
2 (<https://www.pollinator-pathway.org/ordinances>).
3

4 **Task Summary**
5

6 In summarizing the tasks that they set for themselves, A Clark relayed that she would
7 begin a letter to the Town Board that she will share with members. G Dodici asked Board
8 members to let him know if anyone wanted to serve as the Board's liaison to the Planning
9 Board. A Clark will also reach out to A Green to ask how the Conservation Board and the
10 Climate Smart Communities Task Force could mutually support each other. G Dodici will also
11 reach out to the DRYC in regard to participation in the zoning update.
12

13 S Buck also summarized the proposed tasks in a subsequent email to Board members
14 as such:
15

- 16 1. Spring will discuss with Rick Young about the mowing schedule near the
17 nesting birds area.
- 18 2. Spring will meet with Rick Young to discuss the potential uses of each
19 location and bring the information back to the town.
- 20 3. Spring will share a list of key focus points for action during the next meeting.
- 21 4. Spring will discuss with Rick about a potential tour and sharing a list of
22 upcoming road projects with the board.
- 23 5. Spring will also follow up with Nancy about potentially involving someone
24 from the Cornell Roads program in the tour.
- 25 6. Spring will reach out to Jennifer Michelle about potentially collaborating on
26 pollinator-friendly language in municipal laws.
- 27 7. Write a letter to the town board about pollinator-friendly initiatives and the
28 opportunity with the zoning rewrite.
- 29 8. Reach out to the planning board for a liaison.
- 30 9. Consider contacting Alice for information on heat source heating and water
31 heater installations.
32

33 There being no further business, on motion made by S Bissen and seconded by G
34 Dodici, the meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.
35

36 Respectfully submitted,
37

38 Loren Sparling
39 Deputy Town Clerk
40