

**MINUTES  
CONSERVATION COMMISSION**

**1 JUNKINS AVENUE  
PORTSMOUTH, NEW HAMPSHIRE  
EILEEN DONDERO FOLEY COUNCIL CHAMBERS**

**3:30 p.m.**

**May 13, 2015**

**MEMBERS PRESENT:** Chairman Steve Miller; Vice Chairman MaryAnn Blanchard; Members, Alison Tanner, Alternates Kimberly Meuse, Matthew Cardin

**MEMBERS ABSENT:** Elissa Hill Stone, Barbara McMillan, Peter Vandermark

**ALSO PRESENT:** Peter Britz, Environmental Planner/Sustainability Coordinator

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**I. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

A. April 8, 2015

This item was tabled until the next Conservation Commission meeting.

**II. CONDITIONAL USE PERMIT APPLICATIONS**

A. 445 Ocean Road, Unit 8  
Ocean Village Homeowners Association, owner  
Glen Parker, applicant  
Assessor Map 294, Lot 21-0008

John McDougal (builder) and Glen Parker (owner) were present to speak to the application. The application is for the expansion of a deck in back of the house extending from an existing 8'X26' deck. The addition will be 3'X16' and it will extend three additional feet along the entire length (16') of the deck. The applicant included a map of the wetland buffer zone layout in the packet given to the Commission. The map depicts the proximity of the expansion (which will be on lawn) to the wetland.

Mr. Britz stated that the wetland line is from the City wide inventory and is somewhat overstated. The wetland lies behind the stone wall on the property and is further away from the house than it appears on the drawings. He stated that the lawn is not manicured or fertilized.

Ms. Tanner stated that the Commission prefers when lawns are not fertilized.

Vice Chairman Blanchard inquired about excavation.

Mr. McDougal stated that there would only be excavation to the point necessary to support the expansion of the deck.

Vice Chairman Blanchard inquired about runoff from the roof on the enclosed deck.

Mr. McDougal stated that rain gutters are not planned but said that he would be happy to install a drip edge on the ground.

Hearing no other questions, Chairman Miller asked for a motion. Ms. Tanner made a motion to recommend approval of the application to the Planning Board as presented with the following stipulation:

1. That a stone apron drip edge is installed.

The motion was seconded by Mr. Cardin. Hearing no discussion, Chairman Miller called for the vote.

The motion to recommend approval of the application to the Planning Board as presented with the stipulation passed by a unanimous (5-0) vote.

### **III. OTHER BUSINESS**

#### **A. Seacoast Science Center Presentation –**

Ashley Stokes, Events and Marine Mammal Rescue Coordinator, and Sarah Toupin, Rescue Assistant, Program Registrar and Outreach Coordinator were present to talk about the Marine Mammal Rescue Program at the Seacoast Science Center. Ms. Stokes and Ms. Toupin handed out materials including a magnet with the number for the rescue hotline (to report a seal or other marine mammal on the beach 603-997-9448). The Seacoast Science Center now runs the Marine Mammal Rescue program for the state of New Hampshire. The University of New England Biddeford gave up the New Hampshire territory and that is how Seacoast Science Center came to coordinate this response. They stated that the team is comprised of 5 staff members; one full time staff member and 3 part-time assistants, as well as one management team member. There is also a consulting veterinarian, Dr. Beekman, that works with the program and he has a long history in marine mammal work. He was a veterinarian at New England Aquarium, as well as for the Marine Mammal Rescue program at the University of New England Biddeford. He also has his own feline practice in Maine. There are 32 field responders throughout the seacoast region that maintain a 24/7 hotline and are deployed when needed. Marine mammals they respond to include: Seals, dolphins, porpoise, whales. Much of what they do is focused on marine education. A common misconception is that seals do not belong on the beach. Seals are semi-aquatic, spending 40% of their time on land, unlike dolphins, porpoise and whales, which should not be seen on the beach (if they are alive). However, at times seals become sick, abandoned or injured and are found on the beach. If the animal is deceased, the responders collect data on the animals and it is entered into a national database with the National Marine Fisheries, for which NOAA has oversight. If the animal is healthy, they monitor the situation. They may put up signs stating that a seal is resting in the area. However, the situation can turn around quickly. On day one, an animal may look good and appear healthy, and the next it is in decline, so they are checked daily. Respiratory and parasite infections are not uncommon and can progress very quickly. Discharge from eyes and/or the nose are signs of illness. Open-mouth breathing is also a sign of distress/illness. They do see entanglements (particularly with Gray Seals) with fishing ropes, net/gear, but fortunately, it is not all that common in the seacoast region. When a (freshly) deceased animal is found, necropsies at the New England Aquarium are conducted to

determine possible cause of death. A good portion of what they find though is healthy animals. If the seal is alert and responsive (and in the “banana pose” where the head and hind flippers are slightly off the ground), they are most likely healthy and just resting on the beach. Young seals are sometimes approached by dogs or disturbed by humans. Recently a visitor to the beach petted a seal and their dog was tracking the seal. As a result, the seal was abandoned by the mother. It is best for humans not to approach these animals. They may be carrying disease and they have strong claws and teeth that can injure. In addition, it is illegal to handle these animals as they are a federally protected species. If the animal is sick or abandoned, they triage the situation. If it is not healthy and not deceased, the animal is taken for rehab at one of two facilities: the National Marine Life Center in Buzzards Bay or the Mystic Aquarium in Mystic, CT. The organizations response area includes 238 miles of coastline from New Castle to Seabrook and N. Massachusetts. It also includes the Great Bay Estuary as well as 3 of the Isles of Shoals. Ms. Stokes showed a chart on the slide presentation of the number of cases they encounter/month; 2014 had 73 cases, for example. Two hot spots for beach stranding’s in 2014 were Hampton and Rye. There was an Unusual Mortality Event (UME) in 2011 in which many animals were showing up on the beach deceased or near death. It was found to be a strain of the Avian Flu (transferable to humans) H3N8. Ms. Stokes reported that a Harbor Seal was found in South Mill Pond last year. The seal failed in her attempts to navigate out of the pond. After rescue, she later died in rehab. Gray Seals and Harbor Seals (year round residents in the coastal area of New Hampshire) are the most common of Marine Mammals found on the beach. Winter residents are Harp Seals and Hooded Seals. There were quite a few Harp Seals this winter due to the cold, and icy conditions, which they prefer. The seals came down from the Canadian Provinces. They are still seeing Harp Seals in Connecticut as they continue to migrate northward. Most of what is seen this time of year (and through October) is Harbor Seals. They are born at this time of year. Harbor seals are described as having a dog snout that is short. Their nostrils form a “V” shape. Gray Seals have a longer snout, like a horse, and their nostrils form a “W”. Harbor Seals are more docile than Gray Seals, which can be aggressive. In response to the question people ask a lot, which is what can they do to help, the group responds that people can volunteer, call the hotline (24/7) if they find an animal, and, donations are always needed as the program is a nonprofit. They do ask that people not approach or touch the animal, put it back in the water, or put water on it.

Ms. Tanner asked if seals are banded or tagged.

Ms. Stokes stated that they are not banded as a rule, but if they going to rehab, they do get tags that are pink with “Seacoast Science Center” and the phone number on it. If the animal is going to be relocated, for reasons such as disturbance from heavy crowding in Hampton Beach in summer, they will also tag the animal.

Ms. Tanner stated that Great White Sharks are increasing on Cape Cod due to a higher count of seals. She inquired if this means we will be seeing more seals in this area from them trying to escape the sharks.

Ms. Stokes stated that the water in New Hampshire is quite a bit cooler than it is at Cape Cod so the sharks tend to stay away from this area. There are also more Gray Seals on the Cape. They are larger and will make for a better meal for sharks. There are Gray Seals near the Isles of Shoals, but they tend to stay out there. Researchers have stated that only two Great White Sharks are considered residents on the Cape and as a rule, they tend not to let other sharks inhabit the same area.

Commission members thanked Ms. Stokes and Ms. Toupin for their presentation on the Marine Mammal Rescue Program at the Seacoast Science Center.

B. Invasive Clean-Up

Mr. Britz asked for a date for the Commission to conduct an invasive plant clean-up event. Little Harbor Road has been a point of discussion as the site for this activity due to the Bittersweet. Mr. Britz will contact the Boy Scouts and the Ecology class at the school for help with the project. There will be training on site as to how to go about removal of invasives. He will try to coordinate for the week of the 15<sup>th</sup> and 24<sup>th</sup> (which will be before the plants seed and can spread). Mr. Britz will send an email to Commission members when he has a final date. He asked that Commission members send him names of individuals and groups that may be able to help with the clean-up.

C. Sagamore Creek Commission

Ms. Meuse inquired if there was an update for the Sagamore Creek Commission. Ms. Tanner stated that there was a meeting last Thursday. There was an article in the Portsmouth Herald (that mentioned Vice Chairman Blanchard). There were 20 people that spoke at the meeting, 7 of which wanted recreation fields at the site. The remainder of the people wanted the area left as is. The Chair of the Sagamore Creek Commission held firm that this was not a good space for fields and disc golf (due to the understory and vernal pools) in spite of strong opinions otherwise. Ms. Tanner felt the property should be left alone. There is no date yet for the next meeting. Vice Chairman Blanchard mentioned the gate and felt that something should be done with it such as removal, or signage installed to make the site more welcoming. Ms. Tanner talked about adding signage. Vice Chairman Blanchard stated that Pierce Island has done a great job with signage (there is a plan, a map and signage and things are well marked at the site). An added bonus is that signage helps to keep people on the paths.

#### **IV. ADJOURNMENT**

At 4:31 pm, it was moved, seconded, and passed unanimously to adjourn the meeting.

Respectfully Submitted,

Toni McLellan  
Conservation Commission Recording Secretary

These minutes were approved at the Conservation Commission meeting on June 10, 2015.