

Holyoke Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes 06/09/2022 (Remote via Zoom)

Conservation Commission Members Present: Jeffrey Horan (Vice Chairperson), Michael Dodge, Mary Moriarty, Rosemary Arnold, John Perdrizet, Chelsea Gazillo

Conservation Commission Members Absent: Bernice Bowler (Chairperson)

Staff Present: Yoni Glogower (Holyoke Conservation and Sustainability Director)

Members of the public present: Elia Del Molino (Greenagers), Sarah LaRose (Holyoke Gas & Electric), Aliko Fornier (Connecticut River Conservancy), Attorney Michael Unknown

1. Item No. 1 - Call to Order

Vice Chairperson Horan called the public meeting to order at 6:19 p.m. and reminded everyone that due to meeting remotely, all votes must be called out.

2. Item No. 2 - Public Hearing – Notice of Intent WE 186-0294 (Continued from 5/12/2022 meeting)

Applicant: Delorean Power

Representative: BL Companies

Location: 361 Whitney Avenue

Description: Construction of a battery energy storage system within the buffer zone of bordering vegetated wetlands.

Vice Chairperson Horan announced that another request for continuance was received via letter from the Applicant. Commissioner Dodge indicated that he was not present for the 5/12/2022 and that he would listen to the recorded that Director Yoni sent.

3. Roll Call Vote - Approve Continuance until 6/23/2022

Commissioner Dodge made a motion to continue until 6/23/2022 and Commissioner Perdrizet seconded. Commissioners then voted unanimously to approve the continuance

4. Item No. 3 - Request for Determination of Applicability – Filed 5/26/2022

Applicant: Greenagers

Representative: Elia Del Molino, Conservation Director

Location: Rock Valley Road

Description: For trail improvements, re-routes and foot bridge crossings within the buffer zone of bank and bordering vegetated wetlands.

Elia Del Molino introduced himself as the Conservation Director at Greenagers. He then shared a map and explained the project that they are trying to do in Gloutak Woods this summer. The trail crew would be youth-based, hired out of Holyoke High School with the crew leader hired from Holyoke

Community College. They would be going in for 24 days to do a variety of things to improve the trail system and the health of the forest. On the map being shared, Mr. Del Molino directed attention to the following: A bridge crossing with an 18-foot span, labeled as "Bridge A"; "Bridge B," a 24-foot span bridge located in the southern side of the property; intermittent stream that runs through the property; the buffer zone, which is where the bridges are; a trail that is to be closed and invasive species removed along it, which is anticipated to result in approximately 1,800 square feet of restoration.

Mr. Del Molino then shared a photo of the location of "Bridge A" and described the parts of the bridge that would come in contact with the ground. He indicated that the plan would prevent foot traffic from going down the banks, which would restore the banks as long as ATV use is also prevented. A second view of "Bridge A" crossing was shown and explained.

Mr. Del Molino shared and described a photo of the second crossing location, known as "Bridge B". He then expressed that they feel that the closure of the trail would restore far more square footage than the sills would impact, and overall, it is a win for both the environment in Gloutak Woods and the community at large. He indicated that a site visit was done on Monday with some members of the commission and they discussed the project.

Vice Chairperson Horan asked Mr. Del Molino to share the map again that was shown previously and confirmed that Commissioners Perdrizet and Moriarty and Director Glogower went on the site visit.

Commissioner Perdrizet stated that it is a beautiful piece of property that he hopes most of Holyoke gets to experience. He felt that the whole trail system seemed to be in fairly good order, with one area that's going to require some switchbacks. Mr. Del Molino pointed out where the switchbacks and re-routes are located. Commissioner Perdrizet expressed that overall, he thought the plan was great, but mentioned a steep area near the end of the trail that would remain steep in the beginning and fixed in the future.

Commissioner Moriarty stated that she thought it looked really great and they've got a good plan that will require a lot of work. With regard to the impact, she agreed with Mr. Del Molino in that the amount of remediation that this would do is far greater than the amount of impact. She mentioned that hopefully down the road there will not be as much ATV or foot traffic damage to the bank.

Director Glogower stated that they had a good time on the site visit and that they've done a good job identifying the areas of most need and determining where the sensitive wetland resource areas are, with hopes to minimize impacts.

Vice Chairperson Horan stated that in seeing the steep areas, relocating those will certainly be an improvement, and mentioned a new trail construction that with the exception of a small portion, is outside the buffer.

Director Glogower pointed out another area where the trail will be closed near the northern end of the Magenta trail, to which Vice Chairperson Horan asked for an explanation as to how the trails will be cut off and de-commissioned. Mr. Del Molino explained that material found onsite would be used, such as a boulder, braches or blown down tress that would prevent ATV access. White pine saplings may also be planted to deter people from accessing those areas. He then stated the trail closures will likely be

the most difficult part of the project and that communication with the ATV community about the property and the sensitive nature of it will play a factor in the success of the closures.

Vice Chairperson Horan then welcomed questions from commissioners. Commissioner Perdrizet asked how wide the bridges are going to be, and Mr. Del Molino shared an image containing what the bridge will look like. He explained and pointed out the foundation of the structure. He stated that he believes it is a 38 span bridge with a basic railing system on one side, and width wise, he believes it is about 3 and a half feet wide. The sills on "Bridge A" will be 5 feet wide, 2 feet high and 18 feet long on the northern side and 5 feet wide, 2 feet high and 24 feet long on the southern side.

Vice Chairperson Horan asked if the stream is a blue-line stream, which Mr. Del Molino was unfamiliar with. Vice Chairperson Horan explained and Mr. Del Molino stated that the wetland hydraulic connections layer was used to illustrate the stream on the map, but he believes that it is not a USGS stream. Director Glogower confirmed. Vice Chairperson Horan expressed concerns of the bridge being washed out due to drainage issues, but mentioned it's not a major issue if it does get washed out. Mr. Del Molino then mentioned that the bridge will be pinned in with rebar at a 45 degree angle to essentially stake the bridge into the ground, which they've found a lot of success in doing. He stated that they've been lucky with their bridges not washing out.

Commissioner Moriarty if they were waiting for something from NHESP, to which Mr. Del Molino responded that a checklist was submitted and is currently being reviewed. Director Glogower indicated that NHESP is required to provide a response within 30 days, but there may be further conditions to prevent damage to rare and endangered species. He further stated that a determination must be issued within the 21 days.

Mr. Del Molino mentioned that they have worked with NHESP on another project where there was an endangered species and they had a herpetologist educate the crew about the species and visit them occasionally.

Director Glogower indicated that the appropriate determination, if moved forward, would be a Negative #3 taking place in the buffer zone, but unlikely will not alter an area subject to protection under the Act.

#### 5. Roll Call Vote – Approve Request for Determination of Applicability

Commissioner Dodge made a motion for Negative #3 for work in the buffer with no alteration to regulated areas. Commissioner Moriarty seconded the motion. Commissioners then voted unanimously to approve.

#### 6. Item No. 4 - Public Hearing - Notice of Intent WE 186-0295

Applicant: Holyoke Gas & Electric

Representative: Sarah LaRose

Description: Control of nuisance aquatic vegetation in Log Pond Cove, including riverfront and land under waterways and water bodies.

Ms. LaRose explained that they are submitting an application for treatment of a water chestnut infestation at Log Pond Cove, which is about a 17-acre cove. She explained that Holyoke Gas & Electric has partnered with Connecticut River Conservancy and the US Fish and Wildlife Conte Refuge in an effort to treat the 20 plus year infestation. They are proposing a treatment with Clearcast, an herbicide that they have used in the recent past, to control the water chestnut, which would be sprayed on top of the chestnut after it has matured but not yet dropped seeds. They are looking for a 5-year Notice of Intent with annual updates to the Commission and have also submitted to Natural Heritage, whom they have not yet received a final determination from.

Commissioner Moriarty asked Ms. LaRose if she has any way of knowing what progress has occurred. Ms. LaRose responded by explaining that they've done a good job preventing the infestation from spreading to other areas of the Connecticut River, and that with partnership with the Conte Refuge, they've seen a noticeable decline in water chestnut in the Finger Cove area, the area that was first targeted. While she hopes to get to the point where everything can be contained by hand-pulling, it's not there yet. Ms. Fornier added that water chestnut seeds have a viability of 12 years, so a lot of the water chestnut seen today is from plants that surfaced years ago, so progress is hard to measure. She also stated that a reduction in plant density has been noticed though aerial shots taken of the entire cove throughout the year.

At Vice Chairperson Horan's request, Ms. Fornier explained the Connecticut River Conservancy's role in the project. She gave a brief description of what the Conservancy is how it ultimately took over overseeing the water chestnut management efforts in the Connecticut River Watershed, and most the efforts are focused in Massachusetts and Connecticut. She stated that the infestation at Log Pond Cove is the biggest in the watershed, so they stated working to return it to it's non-infested status in 2017.

Vice Chairperson Horan announced that he works for US Fish and Wildlife Service and volunteered to recuse himself if a member of the Commission thought it to be inappropriate. Ms. Fornier added that US Fish and Wildlife and Holyoke Gas & Electric have helped fund and manage this project over the last several years.

Commissioner Moriarty questioned if there is a way to measure progress and if it is being done, to which Ms. Fornier responded that they have tools to do so, but it's been hard to measure how much water chestnut is pulled as not everyone measures it the same way. They have been able to measure success in areas where the units of measure have been consistent and they are working on a conversion chart to form progress charts.

Commissioner Moriarty questioned if there are any updates more recent than 1997 on Clearcast. Ms. Fornier placed the Clearcast product description in the chat for access by everyone and explained that it has been really effective in freezing water chestnut plants before seeds are produced.

Vice Chairperson Horan questioned if it is necessary to use herbicides in this case and stated that he thinks that Clearcast is a safe herbicide for aquatic situations, although it is still a herbicide and nonselective. Ms. Fornier responded that Clearcast is classified as non-toxic to wildlife, but it is damaging to other plants, not just water chestnut. They do hope that eventually herbicide and the mechanical mower will no longer be needed, but the cove is too big and the infestation too large to rely solely on hand pulling.

Director Glogower reminded everyone that when the DEP file number was issued, there were a number of comments associated with it, so it would be in the Commissions interest to review those. At Vice Chairperson Horan's request, Director Glogower shared and briefly went over the comments he was referring to. Commissioner Dodge questioned if this was done the last time the project was discussed, to which Commissioner Moriarty indicated that it was probably put into the orders, which they would want to see and if that is the case, they'd want to ask someone to provide that information, although it seems like a difficult task. Ms. LaRose stated that she does not recall anything like that, but while looking at the cove, the other aquatic vegetation that had overtaken the bottom of the cove was another invasive plant. Director Glogower finished going over the comments that need addressed. Vice Chairperson Horan asked if the submittal was complete in Director Glogower's view, to which he responded that none of the activities of actually occurring in the riverfront, besides putting out the canoes. Ms. Fornier stated that they launch from Red Cliffe Canoe Club or the public launch, both of which are on South Hadley side. Director Glogower mentioned that as far as land under waterways and water bodies, it is probably worth some discussion. He then explained to Ms. Fornier that it is one of the wetland resource areas that's defined in the Wetlands Regulations, as she stated that she was unfamiliar with the language. He believes that the comment from DEP is looking for a discussion about how the activities will or will not pertain to each of the performance standards, although this project has been permitted in the past. Ms. Fornier reiterated that according to the EPA, Clearcast is not toxic to birds, fish, algae and aquatic invertebrates, and that water chestnut is more damaging than the act of pulling the roots from the ground.

Vice Chairperson Horan stated that this project has been permitted in the past and that the decision they come to in the past is that it needed done in order to not spread water chestnut throughout the entire Connecticut River Watershed, but that they need to ensure they've done their due diligence. He then inquired about a committee that used to manage this type of work and asked Ms. LaRose if such committee still asks, which she confirmed it does to an extent. Annual meetings are held and at the decision of the committee, it was determined that they would cut down on regular oversight of invasives on the Connecticut River. The committee focused on annual surveys of invasives and found that each year invasives were increasing, so they agreed to a meeting and survey every five years and to use the additional funds for treatment at Log Pond Cove. The next survey is to be in either 2023 or 2024. Ms. Fornier announced a new partnership with Massachusetts Department of Conservation & Recreation, which adds additional support for a multi-year management plan for Log Pond Cove that would include metrics to measure success over time. Their contact is Jim Straub at the Lakes and Ponds Program. Ms. Fornier also noted that there is suspected cyanobacteria blooms throughout the summer at Log Pond Cove.

Director Glogower indicated that until Natural Heritage provides it's determination, legally, they can't issue an Order of Conditions. Vice Chairperson Horan stated that they need to inform Ms. LaRose and Ms. Fornier what information is needed so that they can approve this at the June 23<sup>rd</sup> meeting. Director Glogower stated that he will discuss with Ms. LaRose and Ms. Fornier during the week.

Commissioner Moriarty requested updated information on the pesticide, and stated that the information they have is from 1997 and everything that she has read states that they are not sure how much it affects birds and wildlife that eat the vegetation. Vice Chairperson Horan then asked if it'd be possible to have the contracted pesticide applicator present for the next discussion, to which Ms.

Fornier agreed to contact and see if they are available. Commissioner Perdrizet indicated that he would have questions for the technical specialist. Ms. LaRose added that a boom is put at the mouth of the cove to prevent anything from moving out of the cove.

Commissioner Moriarty questioned if a site visit would be necessary, although Commissioners Perdrizet and Gazillo are the only ones who have not visited the site, to which Director Glogower responded that it is common practice for a Notice of Intent, but if the Commission feels like it's not necessary, it could probably be foregone in this case. Commissioner Arnold expressed interest in a site visit and Vice Chairperson Horan asked Director Glogower to schedule a site visit if convenient.

7. Roll Call Vote - Approve Continuance until 6/23/22

Commissioner Dodge motioned to continue. Commissioner Arnold seconded the motion. Commissioners then voted unanimously to approve the continuance.

8. Discussion - Upcoming Items for 6/23/22 Meeting

Director Glogower announced that there were no new filings, but the Green Infrastructure Workshop #3 would be Saturday on Race Street from 10:00 a.m. to 12:00 p.m.

9. Adjourn

Commissioner Arnold motioned to adjourn. Commissioner Perdrizet seconded the motion. The Commission adjourned the meeting.