



Minutes - Special Meeting of the Conservation Commission
4:30 PM, January 29, 2024, Town Hall and via Microsoft Teams

Commissioners attending: Lisa Wahle, Sandy Prisloe, Kate Hair, Lisa Hayward, Ted Taigen
Guest Speaker: Hank Gruner, Herpetologist and Conservation Commissioner from Andover. Guests:
Randy Bernotas (IWWA officer), Bill Meyers, Jenny Kitsen, Marieanne Heft (Chester Land Trust)

1. Hank Gruner joined remotely and presented Andover's approach to conducting a Natural Resource Inventory (NRI). They have been working on this for ~2 years. The presentation was largely an illustration an explanation of the map layers the Commission was using. Key elements of their approach included:
 - a. Looking at the previous Andover NRI, which had identified 3 main conservation corridors largely based on mapped NDDDB areas, wetlands, slope and existing open space.
 - b. Developing a set of questions to guide the NRI revision, e.g., what important natural resources exist? How well are they protected by existing open space and regulations? How can we best use the NRI to protect key resources?
 - c. Examining and utilizing a set of GIS layers that would identify areas with important land forms, habitats, biodiversity and key species, and build connectivity between important areas. Some of the GIS layers used included;
 - Core forest
 - Cold water streams
 - NDDDB areas
 - Surficial materials (sand/gravel areas)
 - Farm soils, wetland soils
 - Important pollinator areas
 - Vernal pools – this layer was created with assistance from UConn. Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commission asked landowners by a letter for permission to confirm potential vernal pools on their properties.
 - d. Information on these maps help prioritize parcels for protection and enable the Conservation Commission to make meaningful comments on applications to regulatory land use agencies.
 - e. Maps and recommendations will be a chapter in the town's next POCD.
 - f. A Chester NRI should also consider ledge outcrops and tidal wetlands
 - g. Hank felt was important for the NRI to be done locally so that there was local ownership, and it was more likely to be used. Also, the Andover Commission is using the free version of ArcGIS, so maps can be shared easily.
2. Update on Chester open space mapping: the attribute table is mostly filled in for open space parcels but there are questions about whether some parcels should be considered as open space and if they have legal protection.

3. Adjournment 6 PM.

Respectfully submitted by Lisa Wahle