

CHARLESTOWN CONSERVATION COMMISSION
December 8, 2015, 2015
Charlestown Town Hall
4540 S. County Trail, Charlestown, RI 02813

- I. **CALL TO ORDER:** The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by L. Arnold, Chair.
- II. **ROLL CALL:** Present: L. Arnold, G. Klinger, C. Connery, H. Hultgren, K. Simoneau and R. Thieke.
Excused: F. Safford.
- III. **INTRODUCTION OF GUESTS AND PUBLIC COMMENTS:** Catherine Hewitt from The Westerly Sun attended the meeting.
- IV. **APPROVAL OF MINUTES:** Motion to approve the minutes of November 6, 2015 by H. Hultgren. 2nd: K. Simoneau. Aye: L. Arnold, G. Klinger, H. Hultgren, K. Simoneau and R. Thieke. Nay: None. Abstain: C. Connery.
- V. **OLD BUSINESS:**
 - A. **Report on Charlestown Moraine Preserve**
 - a. Town Council Report - L. Arnold reported that at the last Town Council meeting she gave a report of what has been done at the Preserve and what is left to be done. Completed is the management plan, laying out a trail in the eastern section and clearing most of it and siting a parking lot. Public Works Dept. will put in the lot after they get necessary clearances. We already have a sign to be placed at the lot entrance as well as a kiosk and large and small trail map.
 - b. Parking Lot – L. Arnold reported that the letter sent by the Public Works Dept. to John Brown of the Narragansett Tribe has been refused and the matter will now be pursued by the Town Administrator.
 - c. Trail – C. Connery reported that most of the trail is done but that the connections to the parking lot await its installation.
 - B. **Report on Richard Trails Preserve**
 - a. Maintenance – C. Connery reported that he and a friend cleared any obstructions from the first and second trails but that the third, or Loop Trail, has a number of large fallen or leaning trees. R. Thieke will inspect which parts of the trail are affected and place cautionary or closed signs where appropriate.
 - C. **Report on Schoolhouse Pond Preserve**
 - a. Geocaching – R. Thieke reported that Jim Cole had installed two caches on the Preserve and that one of them had been visited within 2 hours of the site being published.
 - b. Work Day – will set a date at our January 9, 2016 meeting.
 - D. **Potable Water Workshop Group**
 - a. H. Hultgren reported that he attended the December 3rd meeting and noted that the following were discussed: level of nitrate levels in four community wells and an unknown number of private wells south of Route 1. Also that the Committee has a subgroup working on a brochure but that the draft is too long and alternatives as to how to present the information to the public are being discussed. An article about the meeting posted in The Westerly Sun is attached to the minutes.
 - E. **Annual Site Walk of 16 Town Owned Properties**
 - a. Agreed to do this work on January 9, 2016 starting at 9:00 AM and to assemble at the tennis courts in Ninigret Park

VI. NEW BUSINESS:

- A. **Minutes from October 27, 2015 Meeting:** Motion to approve the minutes of October 27, 2015 by H. Hultgren. 2nd: G. Klinger. Aye: G. Klinger, C. Connery, H. Hultgren, K. Simoneau and R. Thieke. Nay: None. Abstain: L. Arnold.
- B. **Eco Tourism Destination Discussion with Frank Glista**
 - a. Agreed to meet with Frank, representing the Economic Development Commission, at our January 26, 2016 meeting to discuss their ideas on how to expand the tourist season.
- C. **RI Association of Conservation Commission Dues**
 - a. Motion by H. Hultgren to spend \$100 to renew our membership. 2nd: G. Klinger. Aye: L. Arnold, C. Connery, H. Hultgren, G. Klinger, K. Simoneau and R. Thieke. Nay: None.

VII. MEMBER COMMENTS/ANNOUNCEMENTS: None

VIII. ADJOURNMENT:

Motion by H. Hultgren to adjourn. 2nd: K. Simoneau. Aye: L. Arnold, C. Connery, H. Hultgren, G. Klinger, K. Simoneau and R. Thieke. Nay: None

Meeting adjourned at 7:52 PM.

Respectfully Submitted,

Richard N Thieke
Secretary

Next Commission Meeting on January 26, 2016 at Town Hall at 7:00 PM

Group seeking to get the word out on Charlestown's water problems



2 Comments

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By CATHERINE HEWITT Sun Staff Writer

CHARLESTOWN — The town's Potable Water Working Group has begun discussing the first draft of a public information brochure intended to raise public awareness of Charlestown's drinking-water problems.

The Town Council voted to establish the group in December 2014 and asked that it study the next steps needed to preserve clean drinking water.

Rising levels of nitrates found in the groundwater south of Route 1 have raised concerns about the safety of the town's drinking water. Groundwater is the sole source of drinking water in the town, and elevated nitrate levels can indicate water that contains other contaminants such as pesticides, viruses, or bacteria, all of which can cause health problems.

Town Councilor Virginia Lee, a member of the working group, said at the group's meeting Dec. 3 that nitrate levels had become a serious health and safety issue for the town.

"With the well water sampling that's being done by groups and by the town, concentrations of nitrates and nitrogen are really getting high in the groundwater, and as we all know that's our only source of drinking water — high enough that the department of health is concerned that we're already at 'alert' levels and we have to look for alternative supplies and/or seriously tackle this problem," she said.

The group's brochure will focus on educating residents about the main causes of nitrate growth in groundwater, which are faulty septic systems and lawn fertilizers. Residents living in high-density areas south of Route 1 near Quonochontaug Pond, East Beach and Ninigret Pond, where the highest levels of nitrates have been detected, will receive the brochure first.

While group members agreed on the educational and outreach concepts of the brochure, many thought residents would not read the 23-page draft.

"In reviewing it in its current form, it's obviously too long and repetitious and needs some people to edit it," said group member Peter Ogle. "I don't know how we'll ever get people to read it — that's the problem — how we deliver it to the public."

Lorraine B. Joubert, who directs the URI Nonpoint Education for Municipal Officers program, suggested making a long-term plan for public outreach.

"We all know it has to be shorter but I'm also thinking of ways we could encourage people to read it and get the word out. If we had a plan, then we could implement that plan as we go," she said. "One way to approach the brochure would be to emphasize the problem, how serious it is, and outline the basic steps the town wants people to take and then provide information throughout the year to support those elements."

Hal Hultgren, a master gardener, thought the brochure should begin with the town's 2009 resolution that called for "voluntary nonuse of harmful pesticides, herbicides and fertilizers on lawns and gardens."

Town Council President Thomas Gentz, who chaired the meeting, asked how many people remembered the resolution — three people raised their hands.

Ogle said he recalled that the resolution was a collaboration between wastewater management officials and the conservation commission, and that it had been based more on nitrate growth in the salt ponds than the groundwater. It did not have an impact on Charlestown residents, he said.

"Driving around my neighborhood, which is in the Quonny area, it's pretty obvious that people haven't heard about it, taken it to heart, understand it, care," he said. "In trying to take the next step, how do we get higher visibility?"

Gentz said, "That's why we're here as a group because this has reached a point where it's worse than 2009 and we need to step up to the plate and work on it. Hopefully our mark will remain more visible after this group is done, if we do our job correctly."

The group voted unanimously to change the brochure from a "scientific paper" to an easy-to-read summary combined with more graphics, with a more detailed version online.

