

GLOCESTER LAND TRUST
REGULAR MEETING
December 10, 2019

The regular meeting of the Gloucester Land Trust took place on December 10, 2019 at the Gloucester Town Hall. Chair Stephen Mitchell called the meeting to order at 7:00 p.m.

Members in attendance: Stephen Mitchell, Steven St. Pierre, Gene Cavaliere, James Giarrusso, Roy Najecki, David Piccirillo, Janine Pitocco and Legal Counsel John J. Bevilacqua, Sr.

Members Absent:

Minutes: Judi Rix

Guests: Town Councilors Walter Steere and Jay Forgue and Gloucester resident Bruce Payton.

Pledge of Allegiance

Open Forum Agenda Items Only: No one present wished to speak.

Approval of minutes of previous meetings (discussions and /or action):

- a. Chairman Mitchell wanted to ensure the amount reflected in the minutes for Approval of Bills item “F” was correct and should be \$575.00, a different amount was on the draft. Roy Najecki made a motion to accept the amended minutes of the November 14, 2019 meeting; it was seconded by Steven St. Pierre and passed unanimously.

GLT Treasurer’s Report (discussions and /or action): Treasurer Roy Najecki provided an updated report with the 2019-2020 proposed budget for each line, all the expenses for November were also incorporated. A transfer of \$38,121 was made from the Unrestricted funds/Citizens Account to the Hawkins Dam line in the budget. Gene Cavaliere made a motion to accept the report as presented; it was seconded by Janine Pitocco and passed unanimously. Member Najecki had asked Diane Brennan what options the Land Trust has for the remaining funds in the checking account since it is earning little/no interest. Ms. Brennan indicated it could be put into a CD, and that would earn approximately \$400 a year; something for the Board to consider.

Approval of Bills (discussions and /or action):

- a. Janine Pitocco made a motion to pay Judi Rix a total of \$175.00 for November 14, 2019 Minutes; it was seconded by David Piccirillo and passed unanimously.
- b. Roy Najecki made a motion to pay John J. Bevilacqua, Sr. a total of \$1,000.00 for Legal Services for December 10, 2019 meeting; it was seconded by Janine Pitocco and passed unanimously.
- c. Roy Najecki made a motion to pay Pare Corporation a total of \$10,719.14 for Services from July 27 to August 30, 2019; it was seconded by Janine Pitocco and passed unanimously.
- d. Roy Najecki made a motion to pay Pare Corporation a total of \$6,560.82 for Services from September 27 to October 25, 2019; it was seconded by Janine Pitocco and passed unanimously.

Chairman Mitchell spoke to the Finance Office and gave them permission on 11/20/19 to reimburse the Gloucester DPW for repairs made to the tractor. He wanted those expenses officially approved by the Board and recorded in the minutes. They were: \$183.34 to Johnson & Johnson, \$349.08 to 146 Supply

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Center and \$81.78 to Auto Plus. Roy Najecki made a motion to approve the expenses to repair the GLT tractor; it was seconded by David Piccirillo and passed unanimously.

Old Business (discussion and/or action):

a. Update on Volunteer Projects, Member Najecki continued working on the property maintenance project on Steere Hill and got quite a bit done. Due to the snow arriving early, all volunteer projects have been put on hold and Member Najecki will wait until March to reach out to them again for help.

b. Hopkins Woodlands Encroachment: Legal Counsel John J. Bevilacqua sent a final letter to the landowner, giving him until the next GLT meeting on December 10th to respond to Attorney Bevilacqua before the Board takes action to remove the items still on GLT property. The landowner did not respond to that letter, so the Board will now arrange for the shed and zipline equipment to be removed; they are willing to file a legal claim to recoup the costs associated with this. The removal of the sprinkler system will have to wait until the spring since the ground is covered with snow now. There is an old logging road that provides access to the site.

c. Open Space Grant Account Update: Chairman Mitchell spoke with Diane Brennan of the Town's Finance Office to get an update on the funds. Over \$38,000 has been transferred into the Hawkins Dam line account to help defray the cost of the engineers up to this date. There is still over \$29,000 left in the Citizens account for future use.

d. Trail Inspection Report Updates: Vice-Chairman Steven St. Pierre created a report to summarize what has been done and what still needs to be done on the GLT trails. Chairman Mitchell thought the report was very informative and a comprehensive look at the existing trail conditions. He is very pleased with the current trail conditions and thanked Vice-Chairman St. Pierre and Member Najecki for all of their hard work to get them in such great shape.

e. Approval of 2019-2020 GLT Budget: Treasurer Roy Najecki made all of the requested changes to the proposed budget and presented an updated spreadsheet to the Board for approval. Steven St. Pierre made a motion to adopt the 2019-2020 GLT Budget; it was seconded by David Piccirillo and passed unanimously.

f. Process of volunteer applicant review: This item is on the agenda at the request of the GLT liaison for the Town Council Walter Steere. Chairman Stephen Mitchell believes that voting on volunteer applications is a personal decision and there is no written policy in place; this is the same as the Town Council. Only votes abstaining are looked at because the Member must have a valid reason for abstaining and state for the record why. Vice-Chairman Steven St. Pierre is not a fan of the current way of approving volunteers; he would like to see each volunteer come before the Board for a brief face-to-face conversation before being voted upon. A person who abstains from a vote may go back and change their vote before the end of the meeting; all discussions regarding volunteer applications are done in a public forum where anyone present can hear what is being said.

Councilor Steere was there to represent the Town Council since several Councilors had questions and concerns regarding a recent volunteer application that was denied. He does not agree that the processes should be the same, since it is very different when considering a person to be appointed to a Board or Commission and a person who wishes to volunteer to do labor/ work – like cutting brush on a trail. Councilor Steere asked the Board to please consider policy, procedure and perception when considering someone's application. If it is too difficult to be a part of, then nobody will want to be a volunteer.

Chairman Mitchell thanked Councilor Steere for his input and appreciates the Town Council's concerns. The Board tries to make thoughtful and informed decisions that will better the community and continues to evaluate all their procedures to identify ways to improve where they can. He believes the

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Land Trust has a good working Board that operates as a team, and they vote by consensus which may take a bit longer. The vote in question that the Town Councilors were concerned about was not a denial by a majority vote, it was a tie at 2-2 with an abstention so the motion failed. That person's application is still on file and can be looked at again; it is not a dead issue. Bruce Payton then asked to address the Board. Mr. Payton said he was sorry if he offended anyone on the Board with his comments in the past, but he has also been offended by some of the comments made by past GLT Board members. He doesn't understand why his application was denied since he has an excellent background with relevant expertise and only wanted to help. Chairman Mitchell again stated that his application was not a dead issue and stated that it will be placed on a future agenda for reconsideration.

New Business (discussions and/or action):

a. Welcome New Trustee: Chairman Stephen Mitchell would like to welcome Mr. James Giarrusso to the Board as the newly appointed trustee to finish out late trustee Russell K. Gross's term. Mr. Giarrusso is a licensed arborist, has extensive knowledge of heavy equipment, has worked on the Pascoag Reservoir project and enjoys working with a team; the Board is excited to have him as a Member/Trustee and believes he will be a great addition.

b. Glocester Land Trust Resolution in support of GTC for Hawkins Pond Dam: Legal Counsel John J. Bevilacqua does not think a resolution from the Glocester Land Trust to support the resolution the Glocester Town Council is necessary; it should be understood that the GLT and the Town Council are on the same page. Attorney Bevilacqua will draft letters to the Speaker of the House, President of the Senate and the Governor request support on efforts to gain funding for this project. Representatives Chippendale and Della Cruz have already been attempting to get help with funding and have been told that the project needs to be on RI DEM's project priority list to be eligible for help with funding. The dam has been classified as a high hazard dam, so it should be on the list, but Chairman Mitchell will follow up with DEM to ensure it is.

Attorney Bevilacqua thinks the board should be looking into hiring a person who can help write grant applications and assist in getting funding from sources other than taxpayers. He was given a name of an outstanding grant writer by a few different people, and he reached out to her. As soon as he mentioned what the project was, she immediately named three possible grants that could be applied for. If the Board can get a significant amount of money from other sources, that will be less needed from anyone else. Chairman Mitchell will reach out to her and invite her to the January meeting to have a conversation with the Board. Councilor Steere thinks pursuing as many options as possible to obtain funding is the best route to take. Bruce Payton suggested looking into contacting the organization *Ducks Unlimited* for help with funding since there is a large duck population on the pond.

c. Elbow Rock Road Issue: Member Roy Najecki took photos of a current flooding issue and poor road maintenance, not to mention there are also ATV and dumping issues that are a problem. The road is a town road that runs through the Sprague Farm property; the GLT owns the property on both sides of the road for approximately 1.2 miles. Since it is a town road, the GLT can not prohibit people from using it. James Giarrusso suggested setting up cameras to catch the people who are dumping there. The town would need to abandon the road to allow for the board to control who uses it, once a road is abandoned the property owners on each side are given half the road and then their land policies apply to the newly acquired portion. Certain protocol needs to be followed for that to happen, and usually there are town citizens in opposition to the road being abandoned so it is not easy.

d. Action on Volunteer Application requests:

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- d.1. Thomas Chamberlain (11/05/2019): Roy Najecki made a motion to approve and accept the application submitted by Thomas Chamberlain to become a GLT volunteer; seconded by Janine Pitocco and it passed unanimously.
- d.2. Sophie Higgins (11/04/2019): Roy Najecki made a motion to approve and accept the application submitted by Sophie Higgins to become a GLT volunteer; seconded by James Giarrusso and it passed unanimously.
- e. Appointment of Equipment and Maintenance Project Managers: Chairman Stephen Mitchell would like to nominate Steven St. Pierre and James Giarrusso as the Equipment and Maintenance Project Managers. Janine Pitocco made a motion to appoint Steven St. Pierre and James Giarrusso as the GLT Equipment and Maintenance Project Managers; seconded by Roy Najecki and it passed unanimously.
- f. Universal quick release forks for GLT tractor: Roy Najecki made a motion to explore this purchase for the current tractor and move forward with purchasing for a cost of up to \$1,000; seconded by James Giarrusso and unanimously approved.
- g. Birdhouses on Sprague Farm, Hawkins Pond, and Steere Hill Conservation Area: Roy Najecki stated that the board has several birdhouses already and he would like to get them out on the properties. Member Najecki will also reach out to the original local vendor to inquire about purchasing more.
- h. Repair to GLT tractor during winter months: James Giarrusso looked at the current GLT tractor and says that it is in very good shape; for a small amount of money it can be brought back to excellent working condition so there is no need to purchase a new tractor. Chairman Mitchell would like to start a maintenance log and safety checklist for the tractor; this is something for the board to consider at the January meeting.
- i. Town or State Highway Employee(s) Volunteer Approval Process: Member Roy Najecki believes that everyone should go through the same process. Attorney Bevilacqua agreed with that and said that the volunteer approval process should be kept standardized; once the board approves their application, they would be all set. Member Giarrusso thinks some of the employees will not want to fill out the application. Chairman Mitchell stated that the Board has to answer to the RI Interlocal Trust, and cannot allow for anyone not approved by the Board to do work on the properties.
- j. Purchase new Polaris UTV/Side by Side Four-wheel drive Utility Vehicle: Several listings were provided to the board for review and all agreed having 4 -wheel drive would be very helpful. The costs were up to \$16,999 for any type of vehicle; a purchase of that size would require an RF p with details of what the board was looking for. The only way to avoid creating an RFP is to purchase through the state bid list. The Board will check the bid list to see if there are any comparable items, and if not then they will start the RFP process after a follow up discussion at the January meeting.
- k. Meeting with Ponaganset HS Principal and FFA Advisor: James Giarrusso and Chairman Mitchell will be meeting with these two people next week and are hoping to possibly partner with the Future Farmers of America to create some habitats on GLT properties.
- l. Bridge design and possible construction at Phillips Farm and Steere Hill Conservation Area: Steven St. Pierre and James Giarrusso walked the properties to see where pedestrian bridges are needed; they identified at least five locations. Member Giarrusso drafted a bridge design for pedestrian traffic only. The bridge design will need to meet code and the board needs to find out where to get the appropriate code to design by. Attorney Bevilacqua also wanted to remind the Members that they will have to get the draft stamped and approved by an engineer since the public will be using it. They will finish the draft plans, have a local engineer look at it and bring it back before the Board.
- m. Caution signs near stone bridges on Sprague Farm Property: There are approximately five bridges that have gaps between the stones and need to notify the public to use caution. The holes are in historic bridges, so the Board can not alter them in any way. They do have a responsibility to apply as many safety

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measures as possible to make people aware of the issue. Member Najecki will go back and take pictures to present to the Board.

n. Insignificant Wetlands Alteration permit (\$300?) from DEM: This request is tied to the plans to build bridges in some locations at Steere Hill. The Board will need stamped bridge plans to submit along with the application. Roy Najecki made a motion to proceed with submitting the application to D.E.M. so the bridges can be constructed at Steere Hill; it was seconded by Steven St. Pierre and passed unanimously.

Correspondence

a. URI Winter Trail Bobcat Survey – Amy Mayer (11/22/19): Chairman Mitchell received notification from Ms. Mayer that she is proceeding with her survey and appreciates the Land Trust allowing her to use the property; she will report back on her findings.

Trail Inspection and Volunteer Hour(s) Reports: Steven St. Pierre indicated Steere Hill inspections were complete. Roy Najecki spent 46 hours in November working on mowing and trail maintenance at Steere Hill; the main trail looks better than it has in a long time.

Monthly GLT Activities/Reports: Roy Najecki had a good turn out at his day after Thanksgiving walk with at least 20 people attending.

Open Forum: Vice-Chairman Steven St. Pierre wanted to clarify something for the record. There were some public comments made that the Ridge Trail at Steere Hill, abutting the Gross's property was closed because the Gross family complained that it was ruining their hunting. That was not true, and this Board decided to close the trail for safety purposes. There were trespassers going onto the Gross's property, people claiming they had bullets whizzing by their head, there were multiple times people were walking past the trespass signs and going onto the Gross's property. That is the true reason the trail was closed; it had nothing to do with ruining someone's hunting.

Executive Session: There was no executive session held at the meeting this evening.

There being no further business before the Land Trust, Steven St. Pierre made a motion to adjourn at 9:17p.m.; it was seconded by Janine Pitocco and passed unanimously.

Minutes Approved: January 14, 2020 meeting.