

THE CONSERVATION COMMISSION of the TOWN OF HALIFAX
P.O. BOX 127, WEST HALIFAX, VT 05358
Conservation Commission **DRAFT Meeting Minutes**
Thursday, October 28, 2021, at 6:30 PM

Meeting at 246 Branch Road in West Halifax and on Zoom (Location: <https://us02web.zoom.us/j/7814490827> or call +19292056099,,7814490827#).

Attendees: Stephan Chait (Chair; SC), Jess Cooney (Member; JC), Dov Towler (Member; DT), Lesley Pollitt (Treasurer; LP), Laurel Copeland (Clerk; LC), Mary Horne (MH), Earl Holtz (EH), Sue Kelly (SK), Stewart McDermet (SM).

CALL TO ORDER at 6:32 pm

CHANGES AND/OR ADDITIONS TO AGENDA – None.

APPROVAL OF PREVIOUS MEETING MINUTES

Regular Meeting Minutes of September 23, 2021 – Approved with 4 ayes and 1 abstention.

NEW BUSINESS

Wildlife and Cats. Presentation by Sue Kelly and Stewart McDermet. **SK** described her career in veterinarian science, most recently wildlife veterinarian care. **SM** has been involved with the humane society 30 years and preservation from childhood worm saving in rain. **SK** and **SM** recently teamed up with others to form **Cats And The Stats—CATS**—a group advocating keeping cats indoors for their well-being and that of their prey animals. Cats originated in Africa and Europe. In the US, the prolific reproductive capability of cats leads to millions of domestic and feral cats. Feral cats and strays experience a wide variety of diseases, accidents, parasites, and predators among other issues. About half of cats under 5 years of age who die were hit by cars. Outdoor cats have a life expectancy of 2-5 years. In addition, in the US cats kill 12.3 billion mammals, reptiles, and invertebrates every year plus 2.4 billion birds every year. In the UK each pet cat kills 40 animals per year including 10 birds. Cats are common rabies vectors, more so than dogs. Cats have been a major cause of extinction of 63 species globally. Therefore, we recommend 3 ways you can help: 1) keep cats indoors, 2) advocate for cats to be included in animal ordinances, and 3) neuter feral cats to reduce feral colony sizes. To keep cats indoors, give them toys and perches, find a litter that your cat likes, and keep the litter box clean. We realize keeping cats indoors is a cultural shift, and we ask for your help. You can train some cats to go out on a leash. You can make a cat patio—a catio—so the cat can get outside safely. **SK** and **SM** can help you design and put together your catio. For cats that you allow outdoors, please get a **BirdsBeSafe** collar to protect birds (87% reduction in bird captures; does not help other prey). Regarding ordinances, in US towns, dogs must be controlled, but in general cats are not. An exception is Aurora CO which includes cats in the animal ordinance. There are other towns. It is time for Vermont to catch up. A third solution is the Trap-Neuter-Release (TNR) program to reduce the number of feral cats out there. TNR is controversial because the colony is not entirely eliminated, so wildlife is still impacted, but less so. It would be best to have all cats living indoors. In the interim, reducing the number of outdoor cats will help. In summary, there are 3 things you can do. (1) encourage

everyone to keep their cats indoors; (2) Join campaigns for local ordinances to prevent free-roaming cats. (3) Support TNR to eliminate the feral cat problem. We want to help. Contact us at CatsAndTheStats@gmail.com.

Discussion. **LP:** Do you have a proposal for Halifax? **SK:** Not yet perhaps but we want to start to achieve the cultural shift by talking about the problem. **SM:** This is information. We would like to present these facts to people and encourage them to take action.

AR: My neighbors have a “cat factory” and I have bird feeders. How can I control the cats, to keep them out of my yard? **SK:** You can trap feral cats and get them neutered.

BB: Perhaps let neighbor know about the TNR program.

LH: Any Vermont towns have cat ordinances? **SK:** not that we’ve found.

LC: TNR program was low-cost in San Antonio. **SK:** No cost to the trapper in Windham County. **SM:** We have flyers you could distribute. **AR:** Or we could mail them out like the Beaver Education flyer. **BB:** Could also post in PO, Town Office, on FPF and so on. What is the cost for spaying? **SK:** Depends on the situation. It can be no-cost for feral cats being re-released, but if the person intends to keep the cat, it would be hoped they would pay for their veterinarian services. We also have volunteers that socialize feral kittens at the Humane Society. **SM:** We have flyers made by the American Bird Conservancy we can provide to you. These could help initiate conversations about this topic.

Disaster Planning for Animals. Presentation by Lesley Pollitt. **LP:** I volunteer at the TNR clinic, and it’s an amazing program. VDART stand for Vermont Disaster Animal Response Team. There are regional VDART organizations. We in Windham County are in Win-DART. DART arose after Katrina [2005] because some persons refused to leave their pets and therefore were not rescued; some of these people perished. Therefore in 2006 the federal government passed the PETS Act (Pets Evacuation and Transportation) to empower FEMA to rescue and shelter household pets and service animals. Now pets must be included in disaster management plans to qualify for FEMA funds. Farm animals are not included in the PETS Act. VDART is a state program that covers all animals, pets and farm animals; it was established in 2007. Incident Command System is followed, a coherent, hierarchical plan for managing disaster response that is used by all states. The Department of Agriculture initiates mobilization of VDART in an emergency. VDART is a volunteer organization. VDART trains its volunteers to set up emergency shelters for a mix of animal types including sick and healthy animals, to help stressed animal owners, and to take care of the rescued animals at the shelter. As an example, in Barre the VDART shelter is set up next to the Red Cross so the pet owners can easily locate their pets. In Windham County, Win-DART is working out a memorandum of understanding (MOU) with the [Brattleboro Union] High School. VDART also helps towns plan, working with the Emergency Manager. VDART also educates people at town fairs on what to do with their animals in a disaster. Halifax may need a fund especially as there are many farms near flood plains that might need help with their large animals in a flood. **SC:** is part of the planning to do an inventory of how many large animals there are in Halifax? The logistics of moving them during a crisis is complex. **LP:** Not a lot of attention is given to horses and cows. VDART would likely support such an inventory. VDART would also help farmers think ahead about this issue. **SC:** Many farms are in a flood zone. **LP:** As an example of VDART suggestions of what to do in a flood or fire, one idea is to write your phone number in permanent marker on the side of your horse and let it loose. **BB:** A couple years ago the Town looked into whether the Community Hall could serve as a shelter, and I looked

into how animals would be handled; carriers were recommended. When a small area is affected, the Red Cross tends to put people up in motels rather than opening a shelter. Are you looking at having a physical location for animals? Would people then be unable to bring cats and dogs in carriers to the people shelter? **SK**: It is difficult to have a crowded facility with dogs and cats there, too. **LP**: Do we have an Emergency Manager? **SC/JC**: Yes, Paul Blaise. **LP**: Perhaps the next step is to raise this question with the Select Board. **SC**: The town only has dog licenses; all dogs should be registered. We could get in touch with Paul Blaise. **BB**: Leslie's point about the Select Board is important. If getting FEMA aid is contingent on having a plan for animals, the Select Board should know that. Emergency management plans for animals could be put on the agenda.

Meeting Schedule for November and December. The 4th Thursday in November is Thanksgiving, so there will be no meeting that night. In December the 4th Thursday is the 23rd. The Conservation Commission agreed to skip November and meet December 23, 2021.

OLD BUSINESS

Beaver Education. **SC**: Margo and Windham Regional organized 2 days of **beaver education events** in mid-October. On Oct. 16, **SC** and **LC** and about 10-12 others visited 2 beaver dams with flow controls in Marlboro. Skip Lisle talked about his Beaver Deceivers and how beavers operate. They are territorial, they seek a gentle gradient with a small stream flowing through it, and they respond to the sound of a leaking dam by repairing it. Skip always includes a way for EMS to access the water easily for fire control. On Oct. 17th about 30 people went to a farm in Guilford where the owner has a problem with the beavers in his pond.

At the last Select Board meeting, the new Road Crew Boss identified **three beaver – roadway conflicts (Deer Park Road, Hatch School Road, Pennel Hill Road)**. **LC** commented on communicating with the Select Board this week regarding using flow control devices for the conflict points. Margo Ghia felt the flood resiliency funds would not necessarily be awarded for that purpose. **SC** favors trying for it. **AR** talked to Mike (Road Boss) the other day about beaver flow devices. **LP** commented that there is a Beaver Deceiver on Amidon Road, a rather old one. **AR** noted that water is rising on the Jacksonville Stage Road between Stowe Mtn and Vaughan Roads; has that been discussed with the **Select Board**? **JC** has talked with the Select Board about this issue at times. **LC** has just corresponded with the Select Board about the flooding on Hatch School Road this week when the road crew broke out the dam a few times, and the Select Board shared the information with the Road Crew. **Flood Resiliency**: there are 2 sources of money, **ARPA** and **FRCF**. If there are more suggestions about needed flood resiliency measures in Halifax, let us know and let the Select Board know. **LP** asked about the Pennel Hill Beaver Deceiver, and **SC** said Skip Lisle will assess it. **LH** noted there are other vendors, e.g., Mike Callahan, www.beaversolutions.com

OTHER BUSINESS – None.

HEARING OF VISITORS – Nothing further.

ADJOURNMENT at 7:44 pm. Next meeting will be Dec. 23, 2021 at 6:30 pm.