

Conservation Commission Natural Resources Inventory Subcommittee Minutes December 6, 2023

In attendance; Katrin Kasper, Dawn Genes, Anne Tappan, Dennis Regan, Laurel Cox, Caren Rossi, Erick Sawtelle, Mark Nelson, Mary Woodward and Lisa Murphy.

Meeting called to order at 10:05AM by Lisa Murphy from SRPC

L. Murphy provided a handout with sample survey questions for a community survey. C. Rossi inquired as to how the survey would be distributed? L. Murphy inquired about town communications, A. Robertson advised that the town has a web site, social media pages, and a subscription based electronic newsletter that goes out weekly. The group discussed using the transfer station, the library and local businesses as distribution points. E. Sawtelle provided perspective from some earlier surveys conducted in town. C. Rossi mentioned a potential town winter carnival, E. Sawtelle suggested the Backyard Farming Initiative events happening January thru April. C. Rossi advised that there are 1800-2000 households in Lee.

L. Murphy suggested having a “roll out” event in January or February to launch the survey effort. A. Robertson advised that L. Murphy had discussed having a “world café” meeting in January at the November meeting. A. Robertson said there were a lot of events coming up in January and February and he would need a firm date soon in order to schedule a room. L. Murphy discussed “stations” that might be useful at the meeting, A. Tappan recommended having an affordable housing station and a refreshment station. D. Regan noted that by simply observing attendance at the stations you could gauge community interest in a topic.

Discussion turned to the survey questions. D. Genes stated that the survey questions seemed to be about presenting strategies and not gathering community concerns. E. Sawtelle discussed the master plan and the conservation protection target of 25%. E. Sawtelle feels you should directly ask “What’s more important, affordable housing or conservation?” on the survey. D. Genes noted that some NRIs include demographic information. Conversation drifted to housing and property taxes.

K. Kasper explained why she personally supported creating a Natural Resources Inventory and emphasized its importance in planning for fire safety. E. Sawtelle asked what the intended use of the NRI would be. K. Kasper responded that it was to identify natural resources that the community would like to protect, D. Genes said it was about the “what and why”; what to protect, and why.

A Robertson reminded the group that the initial discussion topic was to pick a date for a community event, he noted that there had been no mention of a date. After some deliberation the group decided to schedule an event on Saturday Jan. 27th at 10AM in the lower meeting room of the PSC with Feb. 10th as a snow date.

L. Murphy suggested the group to focus on the sample survey questions, she wants questions that generate Lee specific input.

M. Woodward asked what stage of the NRI process the group was actually at?

L. Murphy said goals of the group should be mapping, priority setting and data collection.

D. Genes turned discussion back to the survey questions. D. Genes suggested that the first questions “check the box” questions, this will make the survey more appealing as it will appear easy to complete.

Regarding Questions #1 & 2: A Tappan wants to see more precise questions, don’t include conservation and recreation in the same question. K. Kasper agrees with A Tappan, states that it’s important to have specific topics. There is general discussion about how people define conservation, recreation, and outdoor activities. A. Tappan states that it’s unfortunate that a percentage benchmark worked its way into Lee’s conservation conversation, the 25% comment initially referred to New York City’s greenspace planning and was not necessarily relevant in Lee. M. Woodward and K. Kasper both brought up the importance of identifying invasive species, forestry concerns and protecting pollinators. A. Tappan recommends using the word “protection” instead of “preservation” in the questions.

Regarding Question 3: L. Cox says buildings should be included as historic places. M. Woodward questions including buildings, much conversation about including (or not) buildings ensues. There is discussion about possibly adding buildings to question 6.

Question #4: D. Genes states that this is essentially a “What’s your favorite spot in town?” question. There is some discussion of how open ended questions should be. K. Kasper favors open ended questions.

Question #5: E. Sawtelle suggests using conservation instead of protection in the wording. D. Genes suggests making the question more leading, provide examples.

Question #6: E. Sawtelle recommends replacing open space and agriculture with the term working landscape. E. Sawtelle reconsiders and recommends using “actively managed agriculture and forestry spaces”. A. Tappan reminds that the topic is inventorying, not a discussion of activities. M. Woodward suggests using biodiversity and also recommends having a “Not sure” column in the answer check box. D. Genes recommends including aquifers and drinking water as a category, also wildlife management should be re-titled wildlife habitat.

Question #7: D. Genes recommends removing working forests and the parks lines. M. Nelson recommends defining “recreational activities” more precisely pointing out that hikers aren’t necessarily snowmobilers and that people have strong feelings about hunting. M. Nelson also recommends using a word other than preserving in the category lines. E. Sawtelle suggests using the term outdoor recreation, and dividing between passive and active recreational activities. A. Tappan suggests using a numerical ranking answer strategy.

Question #8: E. Sawtelle suggests “long term” before some of the categories. M. Woodward suggests adding an “other” category row so responders can add categories of their own.

Question #9: Little discussion.

Question #10 & #11: D. Genes suggests listing town owned lands with trails as a check option. D. Genes also suggests moving question #4 down to a position near questions 10 and 11. D. Regan would like to add water access to question #10, maybe list canoeing and kayaking as activities? A. Robertson suggested using “paddle sports” or “paddling” to include SUPs. D. Regan also suggests adding hunting as a category.

L. Murphy will incorporate the suggested edits into a more final document and bring back to the group.

L. Murphy wants to discuss map layers, she starts with flood zone. D. Genes asks which version flood map should be used? E. Sawtelle asks what order of streams and rivers will be included. D. Genes says all streams first order and up should be included. A. Tappan recommends including vernal pools and wetlands. D. Regan suggests prioritizing importance of a resource with roadway and trail information. E. Sawtelle questions what a “Conservation Focus Area” (from the handout) is? L. Murphy replies that she’s not sure of the exact definition. M. Nelson would like to see glacial features and anomalies identified. A. Tappan recommended an aquifer layer. D. Genes wondered if a build out layer could be included.

L. Murphy layers that she had on her list, stratified aquifers, slopes, glacial features and erratics.

D. Genes questioned what the “historic/cultural resources” layer was? Is this a data layer?

M. Nelson recommended including sand pits both active and abandoned, D. Genes thought this could be accomplished with a soil type layer.

A Tappan and D. Genes both feel the map categories need better definition, for example agricultural soils vs. prime agricultural soils and divide town land by type of town land, there’s a lot of difference between town land used as a forest and town land used for a transfer station. D. Genes also noted that the SRPC generated maps of Lee have a number of errors that need to be corrected.

L. Murphy wanted to discuss activities for the world café event.

A. Tappan asked who would facilitate at each table. L. Murphy said it would be SRPC staff and volunteers.

C Rossi recommended using the world café event to kick off the survey.

D. Genes asked exactly what the format and activities would be. Is this a live version of the survey? A. Tappan followed up asking if this was sort of an open house. L. Murphy responded that it's more of a formal workshop and she would recommend having a speaker as well. E. Sawtelle suggested having some speak about what an NRI is, why we're doing one, and how it will be used. D. Genes recommended having a speaker from UNH CE and also using existential questions at the stations.

E. Sawtelle thinks having corn chowder the meeting is a good idea, he'll bring the chowder.

L. Cox thought a speaker on climate change might draw attendees. D. Genes suggested adding a little drama to draw people, maybe with a title like "How Healthy do you think Lee really is?" E. Sawtelle suggested keying on

M. Woodward feels air quality has been left out of the discussion and should be included.

It was decided to hold the next meeting on Wednesday January 3rd at 9:30AM.

L. Murphy adjourned the meeting at approximately 11:15.

Minutes recorded by Town Administrator A. Robertson