

Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes January 19, 2011

Submitted by stoddard on Fri, 01/21/2011 - 3:11pm.

Stoddard Conservation Commission Meeting Minutes

Date: January 19, 2011 (first meeting since June 24, 2010, due to scheduling problems and lack of agenda items)

Time: 7:30 p.m.

Place: Town Hall

Members Present: Scott Semmens, Paul Crosby, Geoff Jones

Agenda:

1. Reviewed Huard Property Dredge & Fill application prepared by Oak Hill Environmental Services.
 - a. Very thorough application.....little over kill;

duplication of maps that could be consolidated

b. Approved and sent to town clerk

2. Discussed AT&T proposal for a tower on Melville Hill

a. Brought CC members up to date on developments and CC Chair's involvement (attached is a list of concerns presented to ZBA and AT & T counsel)

3. Scott updated members on his efforts to establish a website:

a. Developing a Google website that will link to NHACC website for Stoddard. Goggle website offers more flexibility in terms of what kinds of things that can be posted (slidewhows, post images, maps, news events)

b. Developing an ESRI website that will enable other members to

work collaboratively on GIS maps, as we go forward on a NRI and conservation plan for the town

- 4. NOTE: CC meetings have been moved to 3rd Wednesday of the month**

Next Meeting: Wednesday February 16, 2011

Meeting adjourned: 9:15 pm

Respectfully Submitted

Geoffrey Jones (chair.....Paul Crosby has consented to try “stab” at being the secretary).

**Summary of Stoddard Conservation Commission
Concerns Regarding Melville Hill Cell Tower
Proposal**

(Presentation to ZBA on Wednesday, January 5, 2011)

Background:

1. Stoddard is the second largest town, geographically, in Cheshire County and was the last to become

incorporated in 1774 (in large part due to its remoteness and rugged terrain).

2. It is a topographically challenged town. Half the hills and half the rocks of Cheshire County are located in this town (according to local lore).
3. For 30+ years, the residents of Stoddard and the conservation community has protected 66% of the land base in town. Over 6,000 acres have a Wilderness/ Forever Wild designation...all on private lands...very unique!!! No other town, south of the White Mountains has as much of a percentage of their town protected as Stoddard.
4. Because of the high percentage of protected lands, there are a limited number of opportunities to place cell towers.....placement will require strategic and resourceful locations to provide meaningful and maximum coverage for essential services and the majority of residents.
5. Because of the broken terrain and large size of the town, several smaller "town centers" exist in the following places: Granite Lake, South Stoddard, Mill Village, Upper Village, Marina, Hidden Lake Development. Over the years, year round residents have moved into areas along the lakes, including Highland Lake, Island Pond, and Center Pond. The population of 1,200+/- year round residents and 5,000+ seasonal residents are spread out over a large, hilly area.
6. Stoddard is UNIQUE....and cell tower providers should recognize this.
7. Large unfragmented blocks of forest and wetlands (no public roads or housing) consisting of 15,000 to 30,000+ acre blocks make up much of the undeveloped

landscape of Stoddard and surrounding towns of Sullivan, Nelson, Hancock, Antrim, Washington, Windsor, and Marlow.

8. Big game species like bear, bobcat, moose, deer, coyotes, and fisher depend upon these undeveloped (and in Stoddard, permanently protected) wooded areas to meet the daily and annual habitat requirements.
9. Numerous species of tropical migrant song birds require undisturbed interior forests for mating and nesting. They are particularly sensitive to development that fragments these areas.
10. One of the biggest threats to unfragmented wooded blocks are any kind of roads.....especially ones that support developed activities like seemingly benign uses like cell towers or wind turbines.
11. The Melville hill site is surrounded by permanently protected lands of the Dakin Hill area.
12. The tower site is less than a mile from the popular Sunapee/Monadnock hiking trail.....a through trail that connects Mt. Monadnock with Mt Sunapee dating back to the 1920-30's. Connecting trails make it possible for through hikers to hike from southern Connecticut to the White Mtns. of New Hampshire.
13. Communities and landowners that host this unique and wonderful trail system need to be mindful of protecting the conservation and recreation values of this resource when siting development projects that could have negative impacts.

Looking at Alternative Sites

An analysis of sightlines (which can be equated with cell phone reception) from Melville Hill to 12-14 sites in Stoddard (waypoints on a map) was conducted using Terrain Navigator and ArcMap GIS software. Waypoint sites included homes of Harry Powers and Pat Putnam (west end of 123), town hall, points in Hidden Lake, Mill Village/Fire Station, several points on Highland Lake, including the Marina, the landing on Island Pond, east side of Island pond, South Stoddard, Fred Ward's house, and several points east and west along Rte. 9.

Sightlines were made to the same waypoints from two alternative sites: Shedd Hill site hosts a commercial TV antenna facility and Pitcher Mtn. tower hosts several communications antenna. Both alternative sites have established access and power. The Melville tower site would have to develop access off Aten Road. It would be over one mile in length, rise several hundred feet in height, and cost in excess of \$10 to \$15/foot,

which is an approximate cost for developing logging truck access to such a location. Cost of rising diesel fuel and importing aggregate would increase this cost, placing access costs at over \$100,000. The cost of adding power is not known.

Profiles of the sightlines from all three hilltops were made to look for obstacles and compared. From this exercise, it was determined that essential services (town hall, fire station) would not be served by a tower from Melville Hill, while Shedd Hill and/or Pitcher Mtn. would provide cell coverage. More of the populated areas in town (Mill Village, upper village, South Stoddard, Island Pond residents, and several residents on either side of the south end and some north end sites) would be adequately served from the alternative sites, but not from Melville Hill.

Hidden Lake residents would probably not receive adequate cell coverage from any of the three sights. However, a relay tower on

Proctor Hill would.

Several sight lines were reviewed looking east and west at several locations along the route 9 corridor. Sightlines had mixed results; coverage would be spotty.

Alternative sites along the PSNH Powerline ROW were also assessed. Unlike the photos submitted by AT&T that showed co-location sites in hollows, several areas along the ROW were on knolls, elevated land areas, or locations on side hills, all with vehicle access were identified.

Recommendations from the Conservation Commission

Seek Less Intrusive Alternatives by hiring an independent consultant to:

1. Examine the accuracy of the AT&T target areas (once they have been identified and properly located on maps are useful scales);
2. Explore Alternative sites (we suggest looking at established sites with access and power, such as Pitcher Mtn. and Shedd Hill. Towers in other towns should be

looked at);

3. Explore Co-location sites and/or smaller towers located along the PSNH Powerline ROW, that parallels Rte 9 east/west through the southern part of Stoddard. Sites should look for places that offer topographical advantage (knolls, side hills, not hollows) that have existing access and/or short distances to existing roads. Several areas exist, they need to be assessed for cost-effective viability.
4. The Stoddard CC is not against cell towers or cell phone technology. We all use it and embrace it. We want towers to be located on the least environmentally damaging practical alternative sites that provide the best possible coverage. People who work in the woods (like two CC members) rely upon good cell coverage for emergency situations.

The one salient point the Stoddard CC wants to make on the Melville Hill site is this: building a permanent road of the size and length to service the AT&T tower would seriously undermine the conservation and natural resource values of the area by fragmenting (creating development, noise, and a presence) in an undeveloped wooded area that is surrounded by protected land and in close proximity to the Monadnock/Sunapee

Greenway hiking trail. The Stoddard CC would like to see a tower(s) placed on areas that would provide the same or better coverage that have existing infrastructure (roads and power).

When you look at all the development that is taking place or being proposed along the Rte. 9 corridor, we feel that the landscape we collectively live on (in the Stoddard area and surroundings) is like a melting block of ice.....it keeps getting smaller.....and it won't start to "grow" for an incredibly long period of time. Common sense and a coordinated regional effort are required to site these facilities in order to minimize impact to conservation values.

Like they say, in the field of conservation "Victories are temporary; defeat is permanent". The effort to protect our protecting open space requires constant and eternal vigilance.....therein lies the challenge.

Submitted by

Geoffrey T. Jones

Chairman, Stoddard Conservation

Commission

Licensed Professional Forester, *Loveland*

Forestry