



The Waterbury Conservation Commission held a Special Meeting on *May 29, 2024, from 7:00 pm to 8:00 pm.*

*Present: Amy Marshall-Carney, Marcy Blauvelt, Malachi Brennan, Marty Johansen, Josh Lincoln Public: Gannon Osborn, Gunnar Nurme*

**A quorum was established. The meeting was called to order at 7:11pm.**

#### **Agenda Review & Modifications**

- Agenda accepted as published

#### **Public Comments**

- Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation (FPR) representatives, Gunnar & Gannon entertained a series of WCC follow-up questions relating to:
  - The Gilpin family land stewardship interests - protection of land and increasing public access
  - The State of Vermont's capacity, capability and financial resources needed to purchase and maintain the property in perpetuity.
  - FPR representatives acknowledged prior requests to expand the mountain biking trail system within the Perry Hill block were denied as the area has been designated as a significant bear and deer wintering/habitat.
  - WCC members raised potential economic and environmental encumbrances imposed on townspeople and the municipal departments at large if this property were to be used to expand the mountain biking trail system.

#### **Waterbury Land Initiative (WLI) & Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation (FPR) Request for Support- Gilpin Project**

- (Blauvelt) Motion for WCC to enter into deliberative session. (Lincoln) Second, the motion. Motion carried unanimously.

##### **Commission discussed the agenda item in deliberative session**

- (Brennan) Motion for Amy to draft, on behalf of the WCC, a response letter to WLI and FPR summarizing the WCC's decision. In short, project discussions have been underway for several years however no project details or workproducts exist, therefore the WCC is unable to provide input within the brief timeline requested.

#### **Action Items**

- Amy to draft WLI & FPR response letter and send to Malachi for final review
- Amy to conduct final review of response letter and send to stakeholders

#### **Adjournment**

- The meeting adjourned at approximately 8:42 pm



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**Date Sent: June 2nd 2024**

**To:** Gannon Osborn, Gunnar Nurme, and Danielle Fitzko, Vermont Department of Forests, Parks & Recreation; Steve Hagenbuch, Vice-Chair - Waterbury Land Initiative

**cc:** Town of Waterbury Select Board; Town of Waterbury Planning Commission; Department of Fish & Wildlife - Commissioner, Chris Herrick; Agency of Natural Resources - Secretary, Julie Moore

**Re: Proposed Gilpin Family Land Conservation Project**

At the Waterbury Conservation Commission's May 21, 2024 meeting we welcomed Steve Hagenbuch from the Waterbury Land Initiative and two representatives from the Vermont Department of Forest, Parks & Recreation (FPR), Gunnar Nurme and Gannon Osborne for an initial review of a proposed conservation project in the Town of Waterbury, located off Black Bear Hollow, for which they have requested the Commission's support.

At the meeting, and in a May 14, 2024 letter attached here as Appendix A, FPR representatives described the proposed project, which involves the acquisition by FPR of two parcels totalling about 83 acres from members of the Gilpin family, in addition to a right-of-way on existing state land. These parcels abut the Perry Hill block of the C.C. Putnam State Forest and would be managed as part of that existing block.

The Perry Hill block and surrounding area are within the lower extent of the Worcester Range, which provides an irreplaceable linkage with a regional wildlife corridor and provides a valuable unfragmented forest block within that corridor. As noted in FPR's May 14 letter, the Worcester Range and the land involved in this proposal rank highly among numerous priority metrics for habitat, connectivity, and natural diversity. As such, the Commission has a keen interest in this area and deeply supports conservation work that advances these values.

As explained to the Commission, FPR's proposed process for acquisitions such as these is to perform a full assessment of the ecological functionality, determine the management class, and begin the long-range management planning process *after* the land is acquired. The introductory letter describes several *potential* management goals for these parcels. These include expanding recreational access for dispersed recreation and as part of the nearby mountain bike trail network at Perry Hill, and also managing the parcel as part of the forest block for wildlife

connectivity. As detailed planning has not begun, the proposal lacks any resource assessment or planning details or objectives that the Commission can evaluate.

As with all successful projects one of the most critical outputs of the initiation phase is a comprehensive proposal.<sup>1234</sup> Both the introductory letter and our collective discussions on May 21st and May 29th<sup>5</sup> confirmed a comprehensive proposal is not attainable at this time.

The Commission – through the lens and context of Core Principles of Conservation, e.g. Conserving Vermont’s Natural Heritage, environmental conservation, and Act 59(H.126) – is acting in its role as a public interest representative of Waterbury and broadly as state citizens. We recognize that the proposed project may advance those values or act as a buffer to the core forest block of the Worcester Range, or it may bring other community benefits and impacts, some of which are beyond the purview of this Commission (i.e. economic value), however, in the absence of defined management classifications, goals, or project details, we have no foundational content to make a decision, and are unable to offer our unconditional support for the proposal at this time.

The Commission appreciates the efforts that have gone into this proposal and strongly supports continued work to conserve the Worcester Range and surrounding areas – should that ultimately be advanced by this proposal. We further appreciate the time of the FPR representatives. While we are unable to provide input on the proposal as formulated within the brief timeline requested, we would welcome further discussion of this effort, including as it pertains to the proposed project, once a concrete vision for the work and an analysis of the properties ecological functionality, landscape features, species conservation, historical and cultural importance, natural community and habitat features is available.

Sincerely,

Waterbury Conservation Commission  
Amy Marshall-Carney - Chair

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<sup>1</sup>Project Management Institute - Project Management Body of Knowledge- Initiation Phase Article: The first step can be the most important

<sup>2</sup> Conserving Vermont’s Natural Heritage - A Guide to Community-Based Planning for the Conservation of Vermont’s Fish, Wildlife and Biological Diversity

<sup>3</sup> No.59. An act relating to community resilience and biodiversity protection

<sup>4</sup> A Landowner’s Guide - Wildlife Habitat Management for Lands in Vermont

<sup>5</sup> The Commission held a special meeting to discuss the proposal in more detail on May 29th.