

Shaftsbury Planning Commission
Minutes
May 26, 2015

- 1) The meeting was called to order at 7 pm. Present were Abigail Beck, Chris Williams, Bill Pennebaker, and David Spurr. ZA Shelly Stiles was also present.
- 2) May 12 minutes: Pennebaker moved to approve; Spurr seconded. Misspellings and typos were noted and corrected. Mr. Spurr moved to approve as corrected; Ms. Beck seconded. The minutes were adopted 4-0.

3) County Forester Mr. Mason Mason

Mr. Mason gave an overview of his responsibilities: works about 80% with private sector UVA enrollees. Helps Towns with various questions and with managing Town forests (right now at Dorset, Winhall, Landgrove). Not enforcement, but technical assistance. VDEC is responsible for logging operation enforcement on private and state lands.

Mr. Mason has seen about 2 heavy cut operations in Bennington County, defined as a cut totaling > 40A (in one or more stands) on a single parcel and harvesting to below the C line (a description of low canopy cover).

Terms were discussed and defined. "Clear cut" refers to a silviculturally appropriate means of achieving regeneration, depending on the site. "Timber mining," "viewshed clearing," "land clearing" are not silvicultural terms and do not refer therefore to forestry. Put another way, harvesting a product without any concern for the future is not forestry. Mr. Mason thought the Town could regulate these activities well outside the purview of 24 VSA, 117, 4413, "Limitations on Municipal Bylaws" because they aren't silvicultural practices.

Mr. Mason described the intent of the AMPS, to protect water quality by preventing discharges to streams. (The AMPs are being revised.) The new Voluntary Harvest Guidelines aren't regulatory, but UVA enrollees will be asked to sign on to them.

Biomass plants were brought up. Mr. Mason believes that the economics of harvest and transport mitigate against any large scale clearing for energy plants. Nonetheless, there is concern that whole tree harvests for such purposes could result over time in a reduction in soil fertility. At the same time, healthy low grade markets make sustainable forestry possible.

Mr. Mason isn't familiar with any municipalities that have taken on the Chapter 117, section 4413, d(3) issue.

When asked what he would advise a rural PC to consider, Mr. Mason suggested invasive species. UVA requires only that the consulting forester or landowner report their presence; they don't have to treat. (There will be push back because treatment is very expensive.) NRCS can help landowners treat invasives. Mr. Mason thinks major dispersal agents power line R-O-Ws, dirty mowing equipment, dirty logging equipment (and of course birds).

The PC might write a letter to the Commissioner asking that a requirement to clean equipment between job sites be adopted, and that a policy recommending/requiring? Invasives control be adopted. Mr. Mason also supports promoting "sustainable low grade markets," e.g. firewood, paper pulp.

Town Forest: Mr. Mason would be glad to help, later in the fall. The management plan doesn't have to be all about timber but can include other values – recreation, habitat, water quality, e.g. There is still a law on the books permitting SBs to authorize access for some activities on Town lands over privately held lands. That law doesn't permit long-term public access via those routes.

As an aside, Mr. Mason mentioned that Bill Leak and other researchers at Hubbard Brook have begun to suggest larger rather than smaller patch cuts. The regen ring on the inside is shade intolerant; the ring next out is slightly more shade tolerant; the ring on the outer edge is shade tolerant. Speaking of rings: a ring of old-growth sugar maple/yellow birch/red maple is present just below the Equinox summit.

The PC will ask the Commissioner for clarification re the silviculture/not silviculture issue.

- 4) Sign ordinance: Mr. Williams will bring some draft language to the next meeting stating that, in the Town, internally illuminated lights are prohibited. The PC will take the group-approved language to the SB for thoughts. Could go on the ballot 2016.
- 5) The meeting was adjourned at 9 p.m. The next meeting of the Planning Commission will be held June 9, 2015.