

Rye Conservation Commission
Wednesday, October 14, 2020
1:00 p.m. – via ZOOM

Members Present for the first part of the meeting: *Chair Suzanne McFarland, Vice-Chair Sally King, Heather Reed, Karen Oliver, Danna Truslow, and Jaci Grote (arrived 1:15)*

Alternates Danna Truslow and Karen Oliver were seated for the meeting.

I. CALL TO ORDER

Chair McFarland called the meeting to order at 1:10 p.m.

II. Review of Natural Resource Inventory Proposals

The Commission reviewed and discussed the three proposals that were received for the Natural Resource Inventory (NRI). It was agreed there was a large price range between the three proposals and it looked like they all covered the same basic work plan and outline given by the Commission.

Member Truslow commented that her sense is there is some added value with a couple of the firms who have more involvement with more complex projects. However, she is not sure that really would help because the Commission knows what they want and there is no need for other services at this point. She was surprised at the range in pricing. She suggested they take time to look at them on a one to one level.

Member Reed pointed out the biggest cost difference seemed to be in the mapping price. The proposal that has the lowest bid had a couple of things that stood out in favor; (1) being the cost and (2) they have already worked in Rye with the Parsons Creek Watershed and gave Kim Reed as a reference. She felt their overall structure is easy to follow and the timeline seems reasonable.

Referring to Member Reed's comment, Chair McFarland concurred.

Member Reed noted that one thing that stood out with the proposal that had the highest bid is that they had a ton of pictures, which were really nice. They also made the suggestion to use InDesign, as opposed to Microsoft Word. She explained that InDesign is an Adobe product and is an industry standard. The program is a little more robust than Microsoft Word, so more can be done with adding pictures and moving content around. The quality of the output is probably a little bit better than Microsoft Word.

Vice-Chair King asked if this is going to be funded through CIP.

Chair McFarland replied that it does not have to be. It depends on the cost. If the least expensive proposal is chosen, it does not have to be in CIP. She noted there is a \$30,000 difference between the least expensive and the top.

Member Grote explained that if a budget item is beyond anything that the Commission has spent before on something, its usually considered a CIP. It is also considered a warrant article. It could be in the budget if the budget was kept flat with this in a category, but it would significantly wipe out the budget, which would have to be explained to the town.

Vice-Chair King stated this is a State mandated unfunded item that was not required before. It has not been a typical expense. It would also affect the timeline.

Chair McFarland commented that the lowest proposal is just under the threshold for a CIP number. She continued that it was recommended to look at the strengths and weaknesses of each proposal first and try not to totally decide it just on cost, unless cost and the proposal is such that everyone is comfortable and it delivers everything that was asked for so it is felt there is no need to go any further.

Member Grote asked if all the proposals meet the criteria of the RFP. She asked which one most closely resembles what the Commission asked for.

Member Truslow explained that she looked at all the proposals. She looked at the costs first and then scanned each proposal to make sure they had all the components asked for. All proposals seem to have them. The least expensive proposal does not reiterate all the things the Commission asked for. That is kind of assumed in their proposal. As long as, there is an assurance from the bidder that is chosen that they are going to follow what the Commission asked for, she thinks they would be safe to go with the most reasonable cost proposal.

Referring to the lowest bid, Chair McFarland stated that she spoke with one of the references, Kim Reed. She gave them top marks. She said they were terrific, on time, proficient, very professional and have a team approach in their work. Kim has worked with the firm since 2009. Chair McFarland pointed out that one of the biggest cost differences was just in the “five person meetings”. The least and the middle were very close, but the highest one was eight times higher. She believes that it was said that the Commission was good with five online meetings, so there should be no travel. This was one thing that surprised her. They also budgeted a tour of the area for their staff. This made her like the least expensive proposal because a tour is not needed.

Referring to the middle proposal, Member Truslow noted they went into a lot of detail about the GIS Mapping that would be conducted. They were also very specific about what would and would not be included. However, she thought there were a lot of extras when she looked at the budget numbers that didn't seem necessary.

Member Reed agreed.

Member Truslow continued that the mapping costs were very high, assuming that a lot of the GIS layers that would be used are all available data layers. They would not be creating new layers or doing anything original in terms of mapping.

Member Grote asked if the documents have to be updated periodically.

Chair McFarland confirmed. She noted this is a working document when maps and scientific data are updated.

Member Grote asked if the person who would be chosen would be someone that they would stay with because they would be the ones to update it. Would the Commission be responsible for updating?

Member Truslow stated that almost all the proposals say that they will provide the GIS data to the Commission. That data can always be reused with someone else doing the work.

Chair McFarland asked how often the NRI would have to be updated.

Member Truslow stated that unless there is a significant shift in knowledge and need, it would probably not have to be that often.

Chair McFarland commented there is a huge push throughout the State. Towns that do not have an NRI are trying to get one. This is actually a very hot topic right now.

Member Truslow noted that the other advantage that Rye has is the benefit of Nature Conservancy Mapping and a lot of the other resources in the coastal region that have already been generated and would not have to be redone by the chosen firm.

Chair McFarland commented that she is under the absolute assumption that somebody could do this from home and this is all just a compilation of data. In the three proposals, besides the one that said “staff tour”, there was nothing that stood out as being anything but pulling things.

Member Reed replied the only thing would be the optional field work.

Member Truslow commented that she did not see any in-person work mentioned in any of the documents, except for the staff tour.

There was more detailed review of the line items in the proposals by the Commission.

Member Truslow noted that if they want to follow up with any of respondents with some additional questions, at that point they can ask about the costs for things that may need to be done in addition to what’s available publicly.

Chair McFarland asked how the Commission should proceed.

Member Truslow suggested following a process by listing the proposals and what is included, against three or four of the Commission's criteria to use as reasoning for the selection. This would be good due diligence for the Commission to have on record, in case anyone asks. She volunteered to come up with a spreadsheet to use for this process, which can be done within a week.

Chair McFarland noted that the three firms who submitted proposals are well qualified, talented and up on technology. She was very happy with how well written the proposals were.

It was agreed that Chair McFarland would wait on checking the references until they come up with criteria to use as a guide for questions. The Commission discussed ideas for questions to ask.

III. Other Business

- Member Oliver noted that she was at the Rye Airfield recently and there is a huge pile of construction debris that has been dumped at the entrance. She contacted Police Chief Walsh who said they were aware of the debris, but did not see anything identifying in the trash.

Vice-Chair King stated that she will call the Public Works Director to have it cleaned up. DPW has been good about making sure the area stays clear, as there has been dumping in this area in the past.

- Member Reed pointed out that the Rye Junior High will be holding a cross country run at the Airfield later this afternoon.

Vice-Chair King commented that a schedule of where they are going to be might be useful.

Motion by Karen Oliver to suspend the meeting until 2:30 p.m. Seconded by Heather Reed.

Roll Call: Suzanne McFarland – Yes; Heather Reed – Yes; Danna Truslow – Yes;

Karen Oliver – Yes; Sally King – Yes

Motion passed

At 2:34 p.m., Suzanne McFarland made a motion to unsuspend the meeting and continue with other business. Seconded by Susan Shepcaro.

Roll Call: Suzanne McFarland – Yes; Sally King – Yes; Susan Shepcaro – Yes;

Mike Garvan – Yes; Karen Oliver – Yes; Jaci Grote – Yes

Members Present for the remainder of the meeting: *Suzanne McFarland, Sally King, Mike Garvan, Karen Oliver, Jaci Grote and Susan Shepcaro*

Budget Discussion:

The Commission reviewed the current year's budget and year-to-date totals. Chair McFarland summarized the remaining funds in the three accounts under the Conservation Commission Budget, which are in addition to the Commission's annual budget. Chair McFarland noted that the annual budget used to be \$90,000 for years; however, it was cut for this year by \$6,000. The budget shows \$82,500. There seems to be a discrepancy in the numbers.

It was agreed that those numbers will need to be verified with the Town's Treasurer.

Referring to the 2020 expenditures, Chair McFarland noted that approximately \$63,000 has been spent to date with about \$19,000 remaining. However, at last month's meeting, the Commission approved expenditures of \$18,045.00 which leaves only \$906. She also noted that \$18,500 did not get encumbered in 2019 for the 81 West Road closing. Therefore, the \$8,239 that the Commission voted to pay to Doucette Survey and Rockingham County Conservation District which should have been under encumbered funds, is not covered. She further explained that \$31,400 was encumbered for Jim Verra and most of that has been spent. There is one piece that has to be done in November and the Commission has the funds to cover that last piece under the encumbered funds. It was explained that encumbered funds are funds that are held in addition to the general fund. Chair McFarland commented that they are probably going to have to use funds from elsewhere, as there are bills that are coming in for work that has already been done. There is funding elsewhere; however, they have never had to use it before this point.

The Commission reviewed the details of the current year's expenditures. After recalculating the year to date expenditures, it was agreed that \$59,499 was spent to date, which includes the recent approval to pay \$18,045. The remaining budget for 2020 is \$23,100. Expenditures remaining for the year include expenses for the Goss Barn, \$5,125 to RCCD for Phase I (Town Forest) and \$4,475 for Phase II to RCCD.

There was some discussion in regards to the funds needed for closing the West Road property and how the shortage will be covered. It was noted that the acquisition fund will cover part of the costs with funds possibly coming from the main account.

Referring to the work needed on the Goss Barn, Chair McFarland stated that in 2014 the project was basically done, but there was no money left for painting. The account with \$170,000 was zeroed out. It is now to the point where the east and west ends seriously need to be painted. Being in the barn in the last couple of months, it was noted that the north and south vertical barn board is letting water in, as it is weathered barn board and not really siding. She continued that she has received three proposals for the work. One is putting shakes on the north and south side for \$25,906. She noted that this is with today's pricing, which has had a 30% to 40% increase over the past year. They are hoping materials will go back down in the spring; however, there is no guarantee the costs will not go back up. The second option is to clapboard the sides for \$25,374. A pine clapboard could be used for \$21,990. The catch is that the clapboards would need to be painted. The shakes would not have to be painted. She noted that she also got quotes

for painting the east and west side and the doors. One quote is between \$18,000 to \$20,000. Another quote will be coming in within the week.

Chair McFarland gave a summary of work that has already been done on the barn. She stated that work has stopped on re-nailing and dealing with any of the clapboards because what they are nailing it to is “punky”. The clapboard exterior could probably be painted and would possibly hold up for another four years. However, the proper thing to do would be to take off the clapboards on the east/west side, put plywood up and re-clapboard the whole east/west side. She does not yet have a cost for that work. In her opinion, this is a property maintenance issue that needs to be kept up with through the years.

Vice-Chair King stated she does not see this as a property maintenance issue. First, the Commission does not have a maintenance fund that would touch keeping that barn up or the budget to do it. Also, she does not think it would be an appropriate use of the all the funding that came together for the Goss Farm that is used for other improvements. There are great uses for those funds and the Commission has been using it all along to put trees in, blueberry bushes and a trench. There is a lot of farm maintenance and agricultural soils preservation coming up, which is the purpose of this property. She thinks the shakes and those kinds of things are improvements, not maintenance perse. To her, those are CIP items. She thinks that is the only way the barn improvements can be sustained successfully.

Chair McFarland explained that she is not suggesting that they wipeout the \$40,000 Goss Farm Budget. She is suggesting that moving forward for next year’s budget, the property maintenance budget should reflect one of these projects. To her, it is maintaining the property.

It was agreed that this is a topic that would have to be discussed and decided on by the full Commission, as in how to handle the expenses for maintenance/improvements to the barn.

The Commission discussed possible projects for 2021 and worked on numbers for each budget line item. There was also discussion in regards to adding a line item to the budget to cover educational programming. The Commission agreed it would be beneficial to include this in the budget. After an in-depth discussion regarding the 2021 Budget, it was agreed that Chair McFarland would re-tweak the numbers for 2021 and email her work back out to the Commission for approval. Budgets for all town departments, boards and commission will be presented to the select board in November.

Adjournment

Motion by Suzanne McFarland to adjourn at 3:58 p.m. Seconded by Sally King.

Roll Call: Suzanne McFarland – Yes; Sally King – Yes; Karen Oliver – Yes;

Susan Shepcaro – Yes; Mike Garvan – Yes

Motion passed

Respectfully Submitted, Dyana F. Ledger