

**Draft
MEMORANDUM**

TO: Cape Elizabeth Town Council
FROM: Conservation Commission
DATE: February 9, 2011
SUBJECT: FY2012 Budget - Greenbelt Maintenance Request

Introduction

The Conservation Commission would like to lend its support to a proposal for a seasonal general laborer position to be added to the Public Works Department that would dedicate 1/2 of that position's time to maintenance of the Greenbelt Trail system.

Background

The first Greenbelt Plan was adopted by the Town in 1977 and promoted the preservation of sensitive environmental areas, and trails that should extend from the northern to the southern part of town. The 1988 Greenbelt Plan more specifically identified the goal of a pedestrian trail system that extends from Fort Williams to Crescent Beach. In 1988, the Town of Cape Elizabeth provided public access to 239 acres of open space. In 2010, this number had grown to 857 acres (not including pedestrian easements). Town of Cape Elizabeth open space holdings have increased from 2.6% of the town to 9.2% of the town.

With this increase in open space, a trail system has been developed and expanded in these open space parcels. The 2001 Greenbelt Plan Vision states:

To establish a town-wide network of greenbelt trails by connecting the Town Center to important open spaces currently owned or to be acquired and all neighborhoods through a hub-and-spoke system. A greenbelt trail shall be located within a comfortable walking distance to all neighborhoods ...

The Conservation Commission, supplemented by the Public Works Department, outside contractors, and volunteers, has been maintaining and improving the trails on an ad-hoc basis. With over 15.6 linear miles of trails, however, the Commission has struggled to keep up with maintenance needs and public expectations.

Alternatives

The Conservation Commission has sponsored several annual Cape Trail Days that solicited volunteers to clear trails, build bridges and boardwalks and spread wood chips. In addition, the Commission has held several trail work events to improve trails, including clearing the Two Lights Trail (November, 2002) and construction of the Great Pond Boat Racks (February - April 2010). Commission members have individually worked on trails, including stabilizing the Alewife Cove Bridge and installing beaver dam flow-throughs.

Commission members felt they could increase volunteer maintenance if equipment was made available as needed. They requested that \$12,000 be used to purchase an ATV and trailer, and miscellaneous hand held equipment to be stored in a shed at the Public Works Department. Equipment would be accessible to Commission members as needed on weekends when Public Works was closed. This request was not funded.

The Commission then pursued a more formal partnership with the Public Works Department to schedule annual maintenance. The Public Works Department has been very cooperative in adding trail maintenance to their existing duties, as time permits. Unfortunately, basic vegetation management of trails is needed at the same time that Public Works is busy with Spring cleaning and mowing, resulting in overgrown trails. Last year, the Public Works Department tested a new approach of cutting back vegetation on trails in March, with the hope that trails would not be overgrown when they returned to them in mid-summer. This approach has only moderate success.

The Commission also pursued a pilot project of soliciting bids from private contractors to mow a trail for the growing season. The low bidder was selected, but never returned phone calls.

Recommended Annual Maintenance

The Conservation Commission has prepared an annual maintenance plan that would provide basic vegetation management on the town greenbelt trail system. This would not address capital improvements that the Commission would continue to work on with volunteer labor and contracted services within their existing \$8,000 annual budget. The annual greenbelt trails budget is primarily spent on purchasing lumber and other materials to improve trail surfaces. The Commission requests that this annual funding continue.

In lieu of seeking funding to hire a private contractor to perform all the work that the Public Works Department cannot commit to within existing time constraints,

the Conservation Commission has discussed a proposal by the Town Manager to devote 50% of the time of a seasonal laborer to greenbelt trail maintenance.

The Conservation Commission has prepared an annual maintenance plan (see attached) that identifies the work needed on the greenbelt trails. The Commission anticipates that 1/2 of a seasonal laborer's time will greatly improve greenbelt maintenance. The new position would be located in and supervised by the Public Works Department. The Conservation Commission is requesting that they be provided a report at the end of the season noting where hours were expended. This information will help them refine the annual maintenance plan.

Conclusion

The Conservation Commission remains committed to good stewardship of the greenbelt trails. We will continue to work to improve and expand the trail system. Maintenance has been both a constant goal and a challenge. This new proposal to supplement volunteer efforts with seasonal labor is an exciting opportunity to address ongoing, chronic maintenance challenges to the greenbelt trail system and provide a predictable level of passage on town trails.