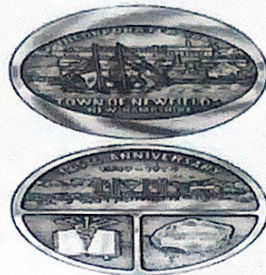


Town of Newfields
65 Main Street
Newfields NH 03856



www.newfieldsnh.gov
603-772-5070-phone
603-772-9004-fax

May 3, 2024

Members of the Newfields Selectboard,

Members of the Newfields Conservation Commission were called to the Selectboard meeting on 4/23/2024 to discuss an accusation of bias and of an offensive comment allegedly made about a member of the public. Toward the end of the meeting, further assertions were made by former Selectboard member Michael Kessler and current Selectboard members. These assertions directly questioned the commission's ethics, professionalism, and integrity. Furthermore, these alleged violations were used as supporting evidence to hold open the reappointment of Conservation Commission Co-Chair Jeff Couture. The examples from Conservation Commission minutes cited by Selectboard member Hoby Harmon as proof of unethical advocacy all occurred prior to a warrant article being drafted or submitted to the town.

The commission firmly believes we were acting within our purview when advocating for town conservation of the Rugg property. We have consulted our bylaws, RSA 36-A, the Handbook for New Hampshire's Municipal Conservation Commissions, and with attorneys at the NH Municipal Association. These consultations confirmed our position that the commission acted ethically and within our role. The following points from our research and from a phone consultation with an attorney at the NH Municipal Association outline the advocacy role that conservation commissions are permitted to take:

- When working on a conservation project, conservation commissions may promote the project and take steps to educate, persuade, and convince the public and town boards of the value of a project.
- Promoting the project and steps to educate, persuade, and convince the public and town boards can take the form of informational meetings, signs, one-on-one discussions with the public, public hearings, presentations, site-walks, pamphlets, maps, websites, articles, and other measures the conservation commission deems necessary for its work.
- Conservation commissions can work to craft a warrant article to support a conservation project. Not only can they contribute to the language of the article, they are permitted to actively participate in soliciting signatures for a petition to have a warrant article placed on the ballot.
- After a warrant article has been approved, a conservation commission may continue to provide the public with information about the project.

Given these guidelines we believe that Conservation Commission was acting within its defined role, for the good of the Town, and we ask that the Selectboard correct statements made to the contrary. If the selectboard requires further clarification we request that the Town Attorney be consulted. We would like these steps to be made publicly and on the record at the 5/7/2024 Selectboard meeting.

Sincerely,
Newfields Conservation Commission

Chris Griffith- Chair

Forrest Hayden

Dave Mason- Treasurer

Josh Lent

Laurie Hill- Secretary

Alison Watts