



Mason Conservation Commission Minutes

March 8 2023, 7:00 PM to 9:00

Attendance:

- **Chuck Andersen – present**
- **Barbara DeVore – present**
- **Liz Fletcher – absent**
- **Bob Larochelle – present**
- **Lundy Lewis – present**
- **Ann Moser – present**
- **Chris Pratka – absent**

Alternates:

- Charlie Lanni – absent
- Michelle Horowitz- absent
- Rosanna Nadeau – absent

Minutes: Barbara moved we accept the February 8 minutes as amended. Bob seconded. Passed unanimously.

Visitors: Marie Baker, Dorothy Minior, Kurt Spacht, Bob Dilberger, and Charlie Moser to discuss parking in the hayfield on Greenville Road and other items.

Bills to pay: Barbara moved we pay NHACC \$250 for annual dues, to come from the CC Town Budget Fund. Bob seconded. Passed unanimously.

Finance: Barbara moved we track together the money in our conservation budget general fund and the Forestry Committee for the RR Trail. Ann seconded. Passed unanimously.

Letters Received: From Department of Environmental Services Re: Outstanding Item(s) Request for Enforcement File, Subject Property Churchill Rd, Mason NH

Action Items Review: Postponed until next meeting.

CC email: None

Discussions:

We discussed a request from Eversource. Barbara moved that we give Eversource permission to cut a designated tree leaning on wires on Pratt Pond Road, contingent upon Ann and Bob looking at it. Bob seconded. Passed unanimously.

Ann showed her design for parking in the hayfield on Greenville Road. The design is to be discussed further. It is a living document. For the short term we all agreed to experiment with one extended inconspicuous parking space that would accommodate one vehicle perpendicular to the road, as recorded in the January minutes. Letters of opinion by (i) Bob Dilberger and (ii) Marie Baker and Dorothy Minior are included below. Our apologies to Bob Dilberger for not including his letter in the November 2022 minutes.

Kurt Spacht and the commission discussed (i) coordination of roadside cleanup and (ii) a trail work plan at Bronson Potter Homestead April 15 or May 13.

We discussed Garth's interim trail map to make available at voting.

We discussed drug take back day April 22 10 AM – 2 PM

Bob Dilberger

Nov. 9, 2022

I'm here to ask that the Conservation Commission (CC) please reconsider the decision to close the Greenville Rd. overlook parking lot. I have several points to make in support of my request, and I ask that my remarks be reflected in the minutes. I will make a copy of my notes available to the CC for that purpose.

First, I want to acknowledge that I appreciate the justification for closing the lot. Noisy nighttime visitors were a problem for nearby residents, a problem that needed to be addressed. However, I'm not convinced that closing the lot was the best solution for the town.

Why Was This Particular Facility Closed, and Why Now?

As you know, the overlook parking lot was not the only recreation facility in Mason that hosts trouble from time to time. Both the Rail Trail and the Mason Quarry share this unfortunate attribute. Notably, the overlook parking lot was the easiest of the three sites for police to patrol. Yet only the overlook parking lot has been closed. Why?

Perhaps it seemed appropriate to solve the noise problem by closing the lot because the lot was thought of as nothing more than extra parking for the view. Because roadside parking remains, little was lost by closing the head-in lot, or so the thinking goes.

I challenge this idea. To me the head-in lot was fundamentally different from roadside parking, offering a superior visitor experience. (I'll say more about this later.) Indeed, if head-in and roadside parking were equivalent, closing the head-in lot would not have solved the noise issue; miscreants would simply have parked on the roadside to continue their antics. So clearly there was something special about the head-in lot. I think that specialness was appreciated by all visitors, both well-behaved and otherwise, and it's the reason I think closing the lot is a serious loss to the town.

I also wonder about the timing of the closure. Why, after at least 35 years of use (as long as I've been in Mason) and probably longer—did the nighttime noise problem at the parking lot become bad enough in 2020 to require action? Is it possible that the increase in issues at the site in 2020 was a result of the COVID-19 pandemic? As you'll recall, at the height of the pandemic folks generally were desperate for something to do and for a chance to leave their homes. Many outdoor facilities were closed in Mason and elsewhere because of overcrowding. Trouble at the overlook lot escalated during this time.

Now at the end of 2022, pressure on outdoor facilities has eased. Perhaps closing the parking lot was premature, a "permanent solution to a temporary problem" If the lot were to reopen, would noise complaints return to their pandemic levels, or would things go back to the way they were during the prior decades? The lot was first blocked off during the pandemic and has not reopened since, so we have no way of knowing the answer to this question.

What Has Been Lost?

I believe the head-in lot was more than just extra parking. It was unique in several ways:

1. The most obvious and significant benefit of the lot was that it allowed people to park *head-in* to enjoy the view through their car windshields. This is not a trivial distinction. Taking in a view through a side window (or around a passenger or driver) as required with roadside parking is an option only somebody who's not tried it could recommend.
2. The head-in lot provided off-street parking. Granted the traffic on Greenville Rd. is not so heavy that roadside parking is particularly dangerous, but it still felt better to pull off the road into a lot, even if I then left my car to sit on the bench or a log. For me it made the view feel like a *destination*, an actual recreation spot, not just a place where you can pull off the road.
3. Because the Mason road crew used it as a turnaround, the head-in lot was plowed in winter (at no cost to the CC), making it the *only outdoor facility in Mason available year round* to the general public (especially those who can't or don't want to use snow equipment). I often parked there in winter (or bad weather) to enjoy the view from my car.

Roadside parking offers no equivalence here. Does the CC intend to keep the roadside plowed so people can park there in winter? Where are visitors expected to sit? And referring back to point number 2, roadside parking in winter would indeed be hazardous.

4. The head-in parking lot, where people could enjoy the view from their cars, made the vista accessible to those with mobility handicaps. I don't want to overstate this point because I have no information about if or how many such folks used the lot. But the fact remains that roadside parking with logs for seating is not a reasonable alternative for people in this group.

Yes, when the weather's nice visitors can park along the road and sit on the logs to take in the unobstructed view. But when it's cold or raining or windy, whether winter or not, this option disappears. With the head-in lot gone, the overlook is now effectively unavailable much of the time to most town residents (except as they drive by).

How Was The Decision Made To Close The Lot?

I'd like to understand how the decision to close the parking lot was made. As you'll recall, there was no plan to close the lot when I left the CC in Nov. 2021. I haven't been to meetings since then so I don't know what's been discussed. But there is no record in CC minutes of a decision to close the lot, or even a discussion of the issue. Closing a popular longstanding public recreation facility seems

to me an important matter worthy of at least a vote, if not a public hearing, and certainly seems important enough to record in meeting minutes.

I wonder if perhaps the lot was closed “by accident.” In Nov. 2020 the CC met at the site with Eversource to ask them to line the field with logs to prevent people from illegally driving into the field. I was at that meeting and know that Eversource representatives were explicitly told to lay logs *around the perimeter* of the parking lot. (We also discussed engaging the road crew to place boulders for this purpose instead of logs.)

For some reason, Eversource failed to follow the CC’s instructions, and placed logs across the mouth of the parking lot, closing it off. With the pandemic still present, and soon major road work taking place, there was no rush to correct this error, so perhaps the CC simply allowed it to stand (understandable at the time). Now, after two years, it just seems like an established fact: the lot is “closed”.

If what I suggest here is actually what’s happened, it’s another reason the CC needs to revisit the lot closure. Clearly, allowing Eversource to decide the fate of this unique public recreation facility, or allowing it to close “by accident”, is not in the best interests of the town. Such a decision needs to be made explicitly, officially, with public input, and only after both the costs and the benefits of keeping the lot open have been carefully considered.

Conclusion

Even if the overlook parking lot were an ongoing trouble spot, closing the facility should be the option of last resort. What else was considered? In Dec. 2020 the CC discussed the idea of relocating the lot to the north, but this idea was never fully pursued. What about parking permits as was done at the Quarry? (Maybe you could even use the same parking placards.) What about a closeable gate or chain? Restricted hours of use? An ordinance closing the area at night that police could easily enforce? Many options exist.

For all of these reasons, I respectfully ask the CC to revisit the question of closing the Greenville Rd. overlook parking lot. In fact, I’ll go further and ask you to consider improving the lot. A more well-defined perimeter (appropriately barricaded to prevent driving into the field) plus an official-looking entrance with a sign and gate, and some good seating, would improve the visitor experience. Beyond that, it might discourage misuse by signaling to folks that it’s an official recreation facility, not a convenient pull-out spot for private parties. You’ll never know unless you try.

Respectfully,

Bob Dillberger

1030 Townsend Rd.

Marie Baker and Dorothy Minior

March 8, 2023

We are here to ask that the Conservation Commission (CC) not create another parking lot in the hayfield on Greenville Rd. We ask that these notes be included in the minutes of the CC meeting.

First, we would like to congratulate the CC on the innovative solution to the ongoing problems at the hayfield which the town was lucky to have gifted to us by the late Bronson Potter. It is with dismay that we are here to talk about a parking lot again as problems have been solved based on reports from the police and from other Mason residents.

The litter, noise, intimidation, and property destruction have been an ongoing concern with residents as numerous complaints to police and selectmen can document. We believe that every resident of Mason should be able to feel safe in their homes and surroundings and ask that the CC keep in mind these concerns during their deliberations.

A confluence of events has escalated the severity of the problem including land going from private to public, lack of policing at night (the previous police chief used to come out late at night to address complaints) and increasing problems in society which have forced other towns to close off public areas or restrict access to townspeople.

The official statement of the Mason Police: Since the logs covered the old turnaround, (a) they've received no service calls on Greenville Rd and (b) they consider the problem on Greenville Road solved. Further, one of our Mason police officers said he wouldn't take his wife and kids to the overlook when the turnaround was open. Now he will.

The CC are not good stewards of the land by allowing destruction of it – camping, fires, driving in the mud, etc. Discarded food and other litter is picked up by birds and other wildlife. Wildlife hung out at the parking lot knowing there was discarded food there. Those problems no longer exist.

Walking on Greenville Rd was intimidating and scary. Convoys of cars filled with young people – many with Mass plates – would meet on Rte. 31, drive together down to the hayfield, park next to each other (sometimes backing into the lot) making residents walking down the road very uncomfortable with rude comments and bizarre gestures.

Meetups sometimes lasted until 4 AM, with loud pumping music, doughnuts in the field, trespassing on adjacent land, speeding, fireworks, sleeping and passing out in cars. Residents would be awakened in the middle of the night by their dogs and the noise.

The lot and road were full of broken bottles, drug paraphernalia, vape pipes, used condoms, trash, cans, bottles, and discarded food.

The boy scouts made a bench in honor of Bronson Potter. The next day a drawing of a penis covered the entire bench. It remained that way until it was stolen. Penis and bench were recovered. The penis was finally covered up with spray paint by a local resident. All these problems no longer exist.

It was with great relief and happiness that these problems went away with closure of the parking lot. It is nice to see children and baby carriages walking on the road. There are now cars parked along the road with people enjoying the view.

We trust that the Conservation Commission will continue their successful stewardship of the land on Greenville Rd. for the present and future residents of Mason.

Thank you for your time,

Marie Baker and Dorothy Minior
Greenville Road, Mason NH