

Dismal Swamp Commission Meeting

Location: South Plainfield Municipal Complex

Date: January 29, 2019

Attendees: Bob Diehl, Treasurer; Walter Stochel, Jr. Vice Chair, Dorothy Rasmussen, Chair, John Wiley, and Kenneth Sammond, Secretary, Robert Spiegel, Joe Scrudato.

- Chair Dorothy Rasmussen opened the Meeting at 7:08 pm.
- Chair Rasmussen asked the commissioners if there were any concerns or corrections to be made to the minutes. If there were none, she asked for a motion to approve them.
- Bob Diehl made a motion to approve.
- Walter Stochel seconded.
- All commissioners voted yes to approve the minutes.
- Chair Rasmussen recounted how commissioners had toured the Dismal Swamp on Sunday, January 27, 2019. She described the various parts of the swamp that the commissioners entered, including from the South Plainfield Public Works, Coolidge Road in South Plainfield, the Jersey Avenue entrance in Metuchen, Liberty Avenue and the Triple C Ranch in Edison. She stated also that there were concerns with some capacitors on site.
- Bob Spiegel asked what was meant by capacitors.
- John Wiley stated that the capacitors are in the Gulton tract and that there was an access road created as part of the remediation of that site which abuts the Dismal Swamp. He also stated that there was interest in activating and extending the rail line into the part of the Swamp which is a Superfund site, so as to help facilitate cleanup of the site through soil and debris removal. He pointed out that Bob Bucco of Najarian stated that they are done with South Plainfield portion of the metes and bounds now and that they will have the report ready in February.
Wiley recommended that we do property searches for all of the properties located within the metes and bounds in order to get permissions for trails and other improvements to the land.
- Rob Bengivenga can we just have Najarian overlay the metes and bounds map on the tax maps to determine which properties fall within the Dismal Swamp.
- Stochel stated that maybe they have already done that.
- Bob Diehl asked if we want to wait?
- Rasmussen stated that we see what the status is once we have the report delivered
- Stochel recommended that we follow property lines
- Wiley stated that this is why metes and bounds are being done, since some properties are in the wetlands and others industrial.

- Spiegel reminded everyone that there are boundary markers placed in the Dismal Swamp back when Raritan Township existed.
- Wiley stated that Raritan Township came from Woodbridge; South Plainfield from Piscataway. There have been many changes over the years.
- Stochel pointed out that there is a marker behind St. Joe's.
- Spiegel commented that there remain three boundary markers remaining from earlier in the century, do you think they are valid?
- Wiley stated that we shall see if they are valid.
- Spiegel asked when the report will be deliverable.
- Rasmussen stated that it will be in ten days or so.
- Spiegel asked if the report will be emailed out.
- Rasmussen responded yes
- Wiley stated that once the plan is delivered then the Dismal Swamp Commissioners can authorize the first payment to Najarian.
- Rasmussen stated that each municipality should reach out to the impacted property owners to make them aware that their property falls within the confines of the Dismal Swamp per the determined metes and bounds.
- Wiley stated that each mayor and town or borough council will have to accept or reject the metes and bounds as determined by Najarian and the Dismal Swamp Commission. We have to go back to the governing bodies first.
- Joe Scrudato asked what will be proposed to these governing bodies.
- Wiley stated that the purpose is to create the Dismal Swamp preservation area, so each town has to concede some sovereignty over the land that is determined to be part of the Dismal Swamp. Each town council must formally confirm such a concession.

The next step is for the Commissioners to adopt a master plan – the various uses and purposes for the land, etc.,; one notion is that in the Woodbrook site, that there should be a siding to cart out the excavation from the superfund site.

The purpose here is that would like to help mitigate the environmental damages. Dedicate a portion of the abandoned railroad to the Dismal Swamp or towns for conservation; creating trails; also, to determine what can and should be done with the structures that already exist within the confines of the Dismal Swamp.

- Spiegel stated that there are many positives. The municipality and EPA will clean Woodbrook. Access roads for the cleanup can be reused and reworked to become trails/access points. Cost of the cleanup – doubled from \$25 → \$50 million due to design plan input from Edison Wetlands and the Dismal Swamp Commission. Interests are not only on human health, but the environment in general.

- Wiley stated that there is also work being done at the Gulton tract due to site contamination. Some of the land will be given to the Dismal Swamp or the local municipality based on the metes and bounds.
- Spiegel asked if the Dismal Swamp is a land conservancy and if the commission works to administrate it as such
- Wiley stated that was true; however, he pointed out that that usually works on the county or municipal level.
- Spiegel stated that the county sometimes sends park rangers into the Dismal Swamp. He also pointed out that he has seen homeless people now and then in the swamp.
- Wiley stated that the commission must coordinate the uses and practices of the property.
- Stochel stated that the towns should lease their property (within the swamp's metes and bounds) to the county in order to promote coordination of planning and administration. They have the manpower, management, and resources.
- Spiegel stated that private groups can help too.
- Stochel pointed out that he cannot see the municipalities providing stewardships and rangers.
- Bencivenga asked if there a deer problem.
- Spiegel stated that the coyotes deal with them for the most part and he described the coyotes.
- Wiley pointed out that he was describing coydogs.
- Stochel restated that there had been a field trip on Sunday, January 27, 2019. Several commissioners attended. It gave us a better sense of the property. He mentioned that we could do an informational trip to the Great Swamp (including meeting folks with Fish and Wildlife service, etc.)
- Chair Rasmussen stated that the next meeting would focus on Najarian discussing the determination of the metes and bounds, stating that that February 25, 2019 at 7pm in Metuchen is the best available date and time for everyone.
- Rob Spiegel made motion to adjourn the meeting
- Bob Diehl seconded.
- All commissioners voted yes the adjourn the meeting at 7:57pm

