

Draft

WALLINGFORD CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Regular Meeting

Thursday, June 8, 2023, 6:00 p.m.

Room 315, Town Hall

45 South Main Street, Wallingford, CT

This Regular Meeting of the Wallingford Conservation Commission was held on Thursday, June 8, 2023, at 6:00 p.m. in Room 315 of Town Hall, 45 South Main Street, Wallingford, CT.

Present: Chair Mike Miller, Vice Chair Brad Sammis, and Commissioners Dianne Saunders, Dianne Lendler, James Pyskaty, Conor Makepeace, and Jeffrey Borne (arrived as noted below), and Environmental Planner Erin O'Hare.

Absent: Commissioner Carl Arsenault.

Also present were Mr. Scott Gray and two other persons from the public.

Chair Miller called the Meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

Chair Miller announced that Commissioner Jared McQueen has resigned from the Commission. Jared is remembered for his knowledge of the Town's open spaces, and also for his thoughtful contributions to Commission discussions and proceedings over the years.

Commissioner Borne arrived at 6:09 p.m.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. April 13, 2023 - Consideration tabled from May 11:

In discussion for these April 13 Minutes, it was noted that only four Commissioners had been present on April 13: Chair Miller and Commissioners Sammis, Lendler, and Borne, so only those Members would vote on acceptance of the Minutes. Corrections were made by the Recording Secretary and Ms. O'Hare (at the May 11 meeting but not voted then) and by Commissioner Saunders and Ms. O'Hare tonight.

Corrections were:

- p. 1, where the public are listed, to insert after "public" the words "including three uniformed police officers on duty".
- p. 1 in the next paragraph, first sentence, to change "si" to "is".
- p. 1 first paragraph, second sentence, to change "indicting" to "indicating".
- p. 2, paragraph 7, to change "Mrs. Brent McCarthy" to "An unidentified woman" as the speaker.

Motion by Commissioner Lendler to keep Dr. Robles' record of our talk and to leave the April

13, 2023, Minutes as corrected by the Commissioners tonight; seconded by Chair Miller and Commissioner Sammis, and approved by Chair Miller and Commissioners Lendler, Sammis, and Borne.

Note: Dr. Robles had submitted his version of these April 13 Minutes pertaining to his remarks at that Meeting to Chair Miller. Ms. O'Hare had spoken with the Law Department, which advised that the April Draft Minutes should be voted on and that the Commission could determine how to report Dr. Robles' version. Chair Miller and the Commissioners tonight decided to attach Dr. Robles' version (submitted to Chair Miller a few weeks later) to the Revised Minutes voted above and to publish both for April on the Town website.

B. May 11, 2023

Commissioner Makepeace suggested this correction:

- p. 2 at 2.C., first sentence, to correct the spelling of "item".

Commissioners Makepeace and Saunders suggested this correction:

- p. 3 at 6.A.1.a., in paragraph 1, sentence 5, to add after "abilities" the words "and normal assignments."

Commissioner Saunders also suggested these corrections:

- p. 3, at 6. Property Management, A.1.a., to change the establishment year for the Stewards to 2011 both in this a. heading and in the first sentence.
- p. 3, at 6.A.1.a., sentence 4, to correct the date of the letter from Mayor Dickinson from "May 5, 2023" to "August 5, 2011".
- p. 4, at 6.A.2., in paragraph 1, first sentence, to change "Commissioner Lendler" to "Commissioner Saunders".
- p. 4, at 6.A.2., paragraph 2, first sentence, to delete "extra-wide" before "gate".
- p. 4, at 6.A.3, paragraph 3, sentence 3, to delete "and there's a vernal pool there."
- p. 5, at 6.A.3.b, Pink Trail, in the Motion to fix "as" to "was".
- p. 5, at 6.A.4, to fix Scott Gray's name.
- p. 5, at 6.B.2 to fix Chair Miller's name.

Motion by Commissioner Borne to approve the Minutes of the May 11, 2023 Meeting with the corrections made tonight; seconded by Commissioner Makepeace, and approved unanimously.

2. ANNUAL OPEN SPACE USERS GROUP MEETING, Parks & Recreation Dept., May 31 - reports

Attending from the Commission were Chair Miller, Commissioners Lendler, Borne, Makepeace, and Saunders and Ms. O'Hare. The meeting was well attended by the public, and there were two police officers in attendance. This was the first Users Group meeting since two years ago due to the COVID pandemic. It was noted that the Minutes from the meeting two years ago were not distributed. Chair Miller saw it as a very productive meeting held by Parks and Recreation Director Kenny Michaels. Commissioner Saunders noted that Mayor Dickinson and the Police Chief, who usually attend, were missed. Ms. O'Hare said the two officers talked about the new police presence at Tyler Mill. Ms. O'Hare said she presented on the various uses and attributes of the Preserve and its natural diversity. Chair Miller noted his remarks given about the Commission's high interest in Tyler Mill Preserve over the years and the other Town open spaces and the Commission's active role in acquiring open space.

3. PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

A. Tyler Mill Preserve

1. Stewards of Tyler Mill, Co-Chairs Monthly Report, D. Saunders & D. Lendler

Commissioner Saunders said the Stewards' current task is to cut back the voluminous growth from the trails. It is easy to fill a 42-gallon drum. Invasives are taking over the Mustard Trail and elsewhere, but not Mile-a-Minute weed. There are four steps to eradicate invasives properly. *The Commission will assist Commissioner Saunders and the Stewards on work parties because this year's growth is exceptional.*

Commissioner Lendler reported that someone went in and cut a couple of blow-downs with a chainsaw, but only certain persons are authorized to do chainsaw work in Tyler Mill. She said at the Open Space Meeting, Kenny Michaels encouraged people to report or e-mail to him what they see going on, and also people can report to the police, who then inform him as Trails Administrator. Ms. O'Hare reported that Mayor Dickinson feels strongly that Commissioners and residents are responsible to report issues to the police so there is a record. Chair Miller agreed about the sharing of information. It's important that he and the Commission also should hear from Mr. Michaels about what is happening on the open spaces. When the police get called about unauthorized activity, they do go out, he said. As to litter, the idea is that people should pick up after themselves or Public Works will be called and do it and will send the person the bill. Chair Miller wants the Commission to have a running list of unauthorized activities to show Chief Ventura. *He requested all e-mail him, Ms. O'Hare, and the rest of the Commission.*

2. Boy Scout Trail - gate signage & 'brush-back', M. Miller

Chair Miller said the gate sign will be installed 10 feet away from the gate on a tree as it cannot be affixed to the gate. Overhanging branches have to be trimmed back for horses and riders. In rain or snow, those branches hang lower. *He will revisit this field edge area.*

3. Blue/Black Trail - closure signage installation & re-route installation, D. Lendler

Scott Gray indicated that the Trails Work Group will do this work this Sunday. Chair Miller said he had not received notice of that.

4. Pink Trail - re-route installation, D. Lendler

Commissioner Lendler complimented Scott Gray and the Trails Work Group volunteers in training who, along with her, completed the approved re-routing on June 1st. They covered the old section and installed cribbing for the new section and received training from Mr. Gray. Now this trail is a lot easier to walk and not slippery.

5. Other reports - None.

B. Fresh Meadows

1. Mowing - status

Commissioner Makepeace looked at all of Fresh Meadows. Where the cottonwoods are larger in the corner field across the road from the Butterfly Trail, he recommended that Public Works should mow soon. *So Ms. O'Hare will tell Public Works to mow the two corner fields.* Ms. O'Hare noted the other large area of cottonwood saplings (about a half acre) near Rosick Road where grassland

birds are nesting now, so that area is best mowed in October/November or in March. The Commission agreed that the larger field should be mowed in August. *Ms. O'Hare will tell Public Works, but she will wait until August.* Ms. O'Hare gave the Commissioners maps of Fresh Meadows.

C. Ferguson Woods

1. Japanese knotweed removal project

Ms. O'Hare and Commissioner Saunders said the Commissioners should do this eradication project in late July. *Ms. O'Hare will do requisition.*

2. Trails Administrator proposals

Trails Administrator Kenny Michaels had e-mailed the Commission a new proposal from Scott Gray this week about proposed improvements to Ferguson Woods, which Mr. Gray presented in three parts below:

(1) Removal of Piggy-Backed Sections of Trails: The beginning stretch would be Blue and then go Blue/Yellow to the fork, and then Yellow would be eliminated from the blaze--so we are not changing any trails here, just repainting. Chair Miller said this re-blazing proposal was endorsed by Trails Administrator Kenny Michaels.

Motion by Commissioner Pyskaty to approve the re-blazing of trails at Ferguson Woods per the proposal by Scott Gray; seconded by Commissioner Makepeace, and approved unanimously by Commissioners Miller, Sammis, Saunders, Borne, Lendler, Pyskaty, and Makepeace.

(2) Bog Bridge: Mr. Gray presented the proposal for the installation of a low bog bridge for about 25 feet at a location he has flagged over a wet area. It would be made of cedar with 2" x 8" cross pieces. This proposal has to go before Inland Wetlands for approval, and Parks and Recreation will apply for the permit. Commissioner Makepeace said there is skunk cabbage in the middle of the trail. Commissioner Lendler asked the height of the bridge, but it was not specified tonight. A proposed design and materials list was requested to be submitted for the Commission's review.

Ms. O'Hare showed the Town Ferguson Woods map with wetlands mapped on it from years ago. Ms. O'Hare requested a detailed drawing of the proposed bog bridge and the wetland itself, which is 100 feet across, so the proposed 25-foot bridge location needs to be mapped.

The related issue of the trail going off onto private property near this vicinity was discussed and shown on the Map. *The Commissioners agreed that Scott Gray and Commissioner Makepeace will go out there and GPS a revised location for a low bog bridge.*

(3) Kiosk: Mr. Gray presented his proposal for a kiosk which is needed there at the cul-de-sac for trail maps for the public, as the name sign is in pretty far. He marked the location there. Mr. Gray indicated the actual trailhead begins at the cul-de-sac. Discussion ensued about suitable location, given that the unpaved public road is there and on the north outside of the right-of-way is private land. *Ms. O'Hare will have the Engineering Department document the accurate R.O.W. and boundaries and install markers.* Mr. Gray said he will provide a kiosk design and the Trails Work Group will make the kiosk.

Commissioner Saunders noted that someone cut a lot of trees in there. How is it now? Mr. Gray did not know the status.

Motion by Commissioner Makepeace to put a kiosk for Ferguson Woods at the end of the cul-de-sac on Dibble Edge Road based on a design to be submitted by Scott Gray to Erin O'Hare with final location to be determined and with the funding source to be determined; seconded by Commissioner Pyskaty and approved unanimously by Commissioners Miller, Sammis, Saunders, Borne, Lendler, Pyskaty, and Makepeace.

Ms. O'Hare will find out if the kiosk can be put in the right-of-way, given several factors and since Mr. Gray said school buses go there now. Ms. O'Hare indicated to Mr. Gray that the Commission will need a list of materials to build the kiosk and cost to be submitted for the next meeting for review.

Although not on the agenda, Chair Miller honored Mr. Gray's request to remark on Trails Work Group matters at this time.

Mr. Gray said that Mr. Michaels said he currently has no funding for trail improvements, but he will find out about any funding that is to come. He has a tentative work list to finish the Blue/Black Trail work and other items. Commissioner Lendler suggested taking care of the trees that overhang the Boy Scout Trail, since Public Works will not do it. Commissioner Saunders suggested that the Tyler Mill Stewards should not do overhead work. Mr. Gray said the Trails Work Group has been together only a few weeks. Their focus is trails maintenance; they have determined the "Closed Trails"; they started rehabbing the closed part of the White Trail North; and they did footbridge repairs on the Red Trail at north of the Tyler Mill bridge; they GPS'd Ferguson Woods and did the bog bridge bridge planning. Soon they will do the cribbing on the Blue/Black Trail. Still to do is brushing on two trails:

- Orange Trail south end (brushing and blazing). *Commissioner Saunders will inform Scott Gray about invasives on the southern edge to be handled first.*
- And the Purple Trail, which is overgrown. Commissioner Saunders said usually the Stewards do the Purple Trail twice a year due to undergrowth.

Mr. Gray will e-mail his Trails Work Group summary to Chair Miller as requested.

4. PROPERTY STEWARDSHIP

A. Property Monitoring Reports

1. Ferguson Woods, J. Pyskaty

Commissioner Pyskaty presented his report to Ms. O'Hare. He said the trails are open and there are no issues--and a kiosk is a good idea.

2. Fresh Meadows, J. Borne

This report is tabled to the July 13 meeting.

3. Bertini Park, C. Makepeace

Commissioner Makepeace reported finding unauthorized trails made in Bertini Park. *He asked that a Commissioner would go out soon to verify that.* As to invasives, Bertini looked good. Near the entry, he saw some material placed there. Commissioner Saunders said it is there because the Parks and Recreation Department will run a ropes course soon.

Commissioner Makepeace used GPS to follow the trails. The top course on the Blue Trail looks to be

rerouted. But Commissioner Saunders said that trail was rerouted because of the storm in 2018. *So Commissioner Makepeace will give his GPS notes to Ms. O'Hare, who will work on it with the Engineering Department.*

Commissioner Makepeace asked: Opposite Pond Hill Road the S2/SZ Trail that ends at the Green Trail, is there supposed to be a gate? Commissioner Saunders said that is probably a homeowner's gate. Then he asked if there is an entrance to Bertini on Pond Hill Road, because there is a trail that does not seem to be official. *Commissioner Makepeace will post a sign that "This is not an approved entrance", but only after Chair Miller checks with Mr. Michaels.* Commissioner Lendler thought that the blazing on that part of Bertini is not clear. Commissioner Makepeace recommended that when a trail sign is put up, it should be photographed in place. He thought that some trail locations should be signed as "Not an approved exit". Commissioner Borne thought this kind of sign should be put up wherever they are appropriate. Commissioner Saunders stated that laminated signs are available from the Law Department. Ms. O'Hare invited Commissioner Makepeace to review the Bertini Park file in her office.

Commissioner Makepeace resumed his report on Bertini Park: A portion of the Blue Trail connects to Woodhouse Avenue, where you can come in off the road. It's dangerous there because cars are flying by. Getting to that entrance in the middle of Woodhouse Avenue is difficult. Commissioner Saunders said the Blue is not supposed to go in there, but people have made it go out to the road. Commissioner Makepeace said the Town map shows it goes to the road.

Chair Miller said, I think we need to make an official proposal to Kenny Michaels to close that exit from Bertini Park and to find a different way to get to Tyler Mill from Bertini Park. The group agreed that a proposal will be made in the future.

Commissioner Makepeace will write a proposal (with maps) to address these trail issues as discussed.

8. REPORTS / CORRESPONDENCE

A. Trails Work Group Meeting, May 17, report D. Lendler

Commissioner Lendler reported on this meeting held on May 17 by Trails Administrator Kenny Michaels. There are three persons in charge to advise the Trails Work Group: herself, Scott Gray, and Chair Miller. Associated with the Work Group are volunteers: Amy Anderson, a walker; Bill Holroyd, a hunter; and Larry Stowe, a botanist and a recent Steward; Doug Clark, a mountain biker; Kirsten Mara, who rides horses; and Dr. Joe Robles, a mountain biker. She said that she, Mr. Michaels, and Scott Gray had developed a Mission Statement for the Trails Work Group, which was reviewed. Mr. Michaels requested quarterly meetings of the group. He has completed a Trails Work Group work list.

Mr. Gray left the meeting at 8:11 p.m.

B. 264 Williams Road property - conservation easement. This item was tabled.

Commissioner Saunders reported on what she had heard at UConn's Farm Day at Ceccarelli Farm in North Branford, where the theme was "Climate Change's Effects on Farming".

Commissioner Lendler left the meeting at 8:21 p.m. One person in the audience left a few minutes later.

5. FARMLAND LEASE PROPERTIES PROGRAM

A. Field Monitoring Reports

This report was deferred until July.

6. EXECUTIVE SESSION - pursuant to General Statutes Sect. 1-200(6)(D) with respect to discussion of the purchase of real estate

Motion by Commissioner Pyskaty to go into Executive Session; seconded by Commissioner Sammis and approved by Chair Miller and Commissioners Saunders, Sammis, Makepeace, Borne, and Pyskaty.

The Recording Secretary and the remaining person in the public left the room at this time, 8:26 p.m.

The Recording Secretary and the remaining person in the public were asked to return to the room at 8:55 p.m.

Motion by Commissioner Pyskaty to come out of Executive Session; seconded by Commissioner Sammis and approved unanimously.

7. PURCHASED SERVICES - NATURAL RESOURCES - discussion

Suggestions were made for end-of-year projects. The Chair requested Ms. O'Hare to pursue and contract for any needed services from suggestions and other needs. *Ms. O'Hare will process purchase orders ASAP.*

Commissioner Borne reported that on May 17th he and Chair Miller had made an informational presentation about the work of the Conservation Commission to the Democratic Town Committee.

9. NEXT MEETING - July 13, 2023

10. ADJOURNMENT

Motion was made by Commissioner Makepeace to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Commissioner Borne and approved unanimously.

The Meeting was adjourned at 9:23 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen L. Burns
Recording Secretary