

WALLINGFORD CONSERVATION COMMISSION

MINUTES

Regular Meeting
Thursday, September 14, 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, September 14, 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 Lendler, James Pyskaty, Jeffrey Borne, and Conor Makepeace, and Environmental Planner Erin O'Hare.

Absent: Commissioners Dianne Saunders and Eric Severson.

Chair Miller called the Meeting to order at 6:07 p.m.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. Regular Meeting, July 13, 2023 - cancelled

B. Special Meeting, July 20, 2023

Motion was made by Commissioner Pyskaty to approve the Minutes of the Special Meeting of July 20, 2023 as presented; seconded by Commissioner Makepeace, and approved by Commissioners Sammis, Lendler, Pyskaty, Borne, and Makepeace.

Chair Miller abstained here because he did not attend.

C. Regular Meeting, August 10, 2023

Motion was made by Commissioner Makepeace to approve the Minutes of the Regular Meeting of August 10, 2023 as presented; seconded by Commissioner Sammis, and approved by Commissioners Miller, Sammis, Lendler, and Makepeace.

Commissioners Borne and Pyskaty abstained here because they did not attend.

2. PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

A. Tyler Mill Preserve

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

Commissioner Lendler said the Stewards are continuing their work here with the Trails Work Group too--who do the heavy-duty jobs. Commissioner Lendler said the four proposals for work at Tyler Mill have been reviewed by Parks and Recreation Director Kenny Michaels, and they were heard

briefly by this Commission in August, so she urged Commission action on them tonight.

2. Closure of trail on Morris Rock - maintenance

Ms. O'Hare pointed out that this should not be a formal proposal but a maintenance item, so no vote is needed. The Commission is in favor of this appropriate maintenance work to be done. *This maintenance item will be reported back to Director Michaels by Chair Miller.*

3. Ecological Assessment - contract, staff

Ms. O'Hare said that Anthony Zemba was contracted to do a baseline Ecological Assessment of the swamp to the side of the Green Trail on the north. He saw no species of concern there and the swamp is filling in. Mr. Zemba did not describe it as a fen, but a prior report by Tom Siccama, Yale School of Forestry, described it as a 'fen'. A 'fen' is "an herbaceous wetland defined by its acidity," Commissioner Makepeace stated.

4. Eradication of invasive plants - contract work, D. Saunders

Ms. O'Hare reported that contractor Todd Mervosh was supposed to apply chemical killer in August at a certain location, but he did not. All Habitat Services also submitted a quote. *So for August 2024, Ms. O'Hare will be issuing a purchase order to have this chemical eradication done here.*

5. Mapping - staff

Ms. O'Hare said the small map of Tyler Mill Preserve--which is handed out to the public--is old and needs to be updated to reflect the latest changes. *Commissioner Saunders will assist on this update.* Commissioner Makepeace recommended having good document control for the Tyler Mill Preserve Map and revisions, as it eventually will be put it on the Town website. *Commissioner Saunders will check the Red and Green Trails near the swamp and report back so that map reflects what was changed.*

Commissioner Makepeace suggested re-issuing the Tyler Mill Preserve trail map in yearly or quarterly updates on the Town website, and in the future, the map and other trail information could be available via an I-phone app or accessed by a downloadable code shown at kiosks in the Preserve. *Chair Miller said he will look into these possible changes.*

6. Proposal submitted to Parks & Recreation Director by S. Gray for removal of the Interpretive Trail --Typo. See 7. below.

7. Interpretive Trail

All had seen the proposal. Commissioner Lendler said this trail was damaged by the 2018 microburst and no one took care of this trail. Ms. O'Hare noted that there was also an Interpretive Trail booklet available in her office. All references to the Interpretive Trail by markers or on the map will be removed.

Motion was made by Commissioner Lendler to approve deletion of the Interpretive Trail; seconded by Commissioner Borne, and approved unanimously. *The approval will be reported by Chair Miller to Parks and Recreation Director Kenny Michaels.*

8. Proposal submitted to Parks & Recreation Director by S. Gray for kiosk by closed

bridge.

All had seen the proposal. No location has been selected, however. After brief discussion, Commissioner Borne made this Motion.

Motion was made by Commissioner Borne that we approve the concept of placing a kiosk by the closed bridge at Tyler Mill; seconded by Commissioner Makepeace, and approved unanimously. *The approval of the concept of a kiosk at the closed bridge will be reported by Chair Miller to Parks and Recreation Director Kenny Michaels.*

9. Proposal submitted to Parks & Recreation Director by S. Gray for the Pink Trail extension

All had seen the proposal. Chair Miller asked Ms. O'Hare for her input.

Ms. O'Hare said, It is already there as a trail and just needs blazing, and it does not need a Wetlands Permit as no work is required as it exists..

Motion was made by Commissioner Makepeace that we approve the Pink Trail extension as proposed; seconded by Commissioner Borne, and approved unanimously. *This approval will be reported by Chair Miller to Parks and Recreation Director Kenny Michaels.*

10. Other reports

Chair Miller said that he and Commissioner Lendler had a communication from Mr. Doug Clark about forthcoming proposals to make some trails constructed illegally (about 5 miles) into official trails and to close some official trails. Mr. Clark will send it to Parks and Recreation Director Kenny Michaels for processing.

Commissioner Lendler wanted to know the criteria for establishing a trail. Commissioner Makepeace said he will look into criteria for safe, sustainable trails--it is a huge effort and requires standardization. Commissioner Lendler said she will be meeting with Scott Gray and Mr. Mark Cineri (former Commission member), who is a conservation officer and an authority on trails, to discuss the above plan. Ms. O'Hare said criteria used must include administrative considerations such as proximity to residential properties or utilities and other things.

B. Fresh Meadows

1. Mowing - status.

Ms. O'Hare said this is not mowed yet. The Commissioners advised her to request mowing in November after the pollinators and birds migrate away. *Ms. O'Hare will contact Public Works.*

2. Eradication of invasive plants - contract work, staff

Ms. O'Hare said that Bob Baker had cut the Japanese knotweed areas before July 1. Ms. O'Hare had asked Todd Mervosh to go in and cut Japanese knotweed just north of the northern parking lot and also at the south end by Rosick Road, but he withdrew his quote.

C. Ferguson Woods

1. Japanese knotweed removal project - contracted work, staff

Ms. O'Hare said the Commission had voted to use chemicals on invasives here by the sign,

but it is too late to treat this year.

- 2. Re-blazing to eliminate 'piggy-backing'** - status of work
Commissioner Lendler said this work was done in July.

- 3. Proposal submitted to Parks & Recreation Director by S. Gray for kiosk** - location, design, cost of materials, revised map - status
The kiosk design was approved previously. As to location, Ms. O'Hare is waiting for Public Works Director Rob Baltramaitis to approve a level location. This item was tabled.

- 4. Proposal submitted to Parks & Recreation by S. Gray and Commissioner Makepeace for re-routing portion of trail off private property with associated relocation of proposed bog-bridge** - C. Makepeace & S. Gray
Ms. O'Hare said the bog-bridge application will be acted on by the Inland Wetlands and Watercourses Commission on October 4th. *Ms. O'Hare said she will communicate with the Ferguson family about the trail that enters their land.*

E. Bertini Park

- 1. Proposals submitted to Parks & Recreation Director by C. Makepeace regarding correction of various trail issues**

All had seen the proposals. Commissioner Makepeace explained some proposals are field work and some are just map work. He has discussed these four proposals with Parks & Recreation Director Kenny Michaels. After each description by Commissioner Makepeace, the following Motions were made accordingly.

Motion was made by Commissioner Makepeace to approve the proposal as submitted regarding correction of various trail issues on the map of the Blue Trail at Bertini Park following the microburst; seconded by Commissioner Pyskaty, and approved unanimously.

Motion was made by Commissioner Borne regarding the proposal to place signage on an unauthorized trail coming in off Pond Hill Road at Bertini Park to say "This is not an official trail. The Town does not maintain it." or whatever statement Ms. O'Hare and the Parks and Recreation Department agree on in this situation; seconded by Commissioner Makepeace, and approved unanimously.

Note: The Commissioners recommended to put this sign on a tree.

Motion was made by Commissioner Borne to approve the proposal to modify the Tyler Mill Trails Map by removing at Bertini Park the small section of trail "where the Blue Trail comes out at Woodhouse Avenue and hooks back in" from the official map and to post a sign there which has the same wording as the sign that is already posted in the ravine; seconded by Commissioner Makepeace, and approved unanimously.

Motion was made by Commissioner Makepeace to approve the proposal to eliminate the Blue Trail shortcut at Bertini Park and to realign the Blue Trail with the Yellow and the Green Trail; seconded by Commissioner Borne, and approved unanimously.

Commissioner Makepeace will provide 'spatial data' to the Engineering Department for mapping.

These approvals will be reported by Chair Miller to Parks and Recreation Director Kenny Michaels.

F. Beseck Mountain

1. Contracted work, staff

Ms. O'Hare will report on this contract work in October.

2. Discuss proposal for kiosk, staff

Chair Miller said Cliffside Trail off Cliffside Drive is a nice location to access the trail at Beseck Mountain. Ms. O'Hare would like to see a sign near the ridgeline that recognizes that portion of the National Scenic Trail. Chair Miller suggested installing signage for "Town of Wallingford Open Space Property" on the trail at each end of the Town property as well. The Commission all agreed.

3. Discuss Cliffside Trail, staff

Ms. O'Hare said the Engineering Department had put markers along the property boundaries. She asked if the Commission wants to get this trail refurbished/rebuilt? The last time it was refurbished was in 2009 or so, when Wayne Fogg fixed it and then 89 hikers walked on it during the Celebrate Open Space event held by the Commission. *Commissioners Makepeace and Severson are working on a report, to be presented at the next meeting.* Commissioner Makepeace turned in his monitoring report. He said that he and Commissioner Severson had hiked the whole area. He noted that the Mattabassett Trail has three different DEEP-recognized "Critical Habitats" and NDDDB polygons. He uses GPS to track his steps and record data. There are some invasives (mugwort and others, but not Mile-A-Minute weed) near the power line easement. She said the Engineering Department had put markers along the property boundaries.

G. Wharton Brook/Doolittle Park

1. Proposal for contracted work (Wharton Brook floodplain) - Not discussed.

2. Discuss proposal for kiosk, staff - Not discussed.

3. PROPERTY STEWARDSHIP

A. Property Monitoring Reports

1. Fresh Meadow, J. Borne

Commissioner Borne reported that Tessa's Trail is underused and getting overgrown by multiflora rose and other invasives. Chair Miller knows a person who lives nearby to assist here *and will ask him to maintain the trail.* Commissioner Borne stated that the fields nearby are mostly golden-rod now. The Butterfly Meadow has a few milkweed, but no Joe Pye weed, and needs diversity. The cottonwoods at the southeast corner are 6 feet tall and more.

Commissioner Borne requested: conducting field mowing in cycles, coordinated by Public Works; maintaining along Tessa's Trail; removing the two chairs at the top of the knoll trail and eradicating invasives there. He also saw mature Trees of Heaven just off the trail at the top of the knoll trail and eradicating invasives there. He also saw mature Trees of Heaven just off the trail at the top of the knoll. Ms. O'Hare reported that she had contracted with All Habitat to spray those trees and more last fall (2022). Commissioner Borne said that Fresh Meadow could be a good Field Day project. Commis-

sioner Lendler noted that she and Commissioner Saunders removed the weed canary grass by the Memorial Tupelo Tree dedicated to former Commissioner Ken Ryan.

Commissioner Borne suggested these items: making a stone dust trail going along the western edge of Galko Pond and installing a small boat launch there. Also, he recommended developing a new Management Plan here for wildlife, to keep some fields as "transitional", and possibly with some recreational uses.

Chair Miller thanked Commissioner Borne for his report and asked him to see whether the Wallingford Garden Club could assist at Fresh Meadows with plants for diversity. *He will do.* Commissioner Lendler asked Commissioner Borne to create a proposal for work at Fresh Meadows. Ms. O'Hare reported seeing there a bobcat and her kitten, two green herons, and a red-throated loon this month. *Ms. O'Hare will ask again for Public Works to take care of the rut on the trail located at the end of the northern parking lot.* Commissioner Borne noted that Public Works personnel should install a berm to direct water around a particular catch basin where the Cheshire Trail is continually overtopped. *Ms. O'Hare will suggest it.*

2. Marcus Cooke, E. Severson - This will be reported in October. Commissioner Makepeace said he and Commissioner Severson walked this property.

4. FARMLAND LEASE PROPERTIES PROGRAM

A. Field Monitoring Reports - Not received.

Vice Chair Sammis stated that he will look at the leased fields that former Commissioner Carl Arsenault was responsible for.

B. Field 2A - recent illegal accessway across eastern edge of field, D. Saunders.

Commissioner Makepeace said that he and Commissioner Severson had seen this field trespass issue. Ms. O'Hare noted Commissioner Saunders has been tracking it, too, and suggested that the Open Space Resource Management Fund could be used to provide a gate with guardrails near North Branford Road.

C. Field 6B - water hemlock issue (also at Vietnam Veterans Memorial Park) - Chair Miller indicated Commissioner Saunders will report in October.

D. Fall bid proposals - discussion of revisions to lease document

The Farmland Lease Committee and Chair Miller will meet to simplify the lease language overall and to tailor each lease more closely to the property.

E. Field 20A - Contractual work proposal, staff

Ms. O'Hare had sent a copy of this scope of work to Chair Miller and a contractor.

5. PURCHASED SERVICES - NATURAL RESOURCES FY 23-24

A. Invasive plant species eradication - several properties. Tabled to the October meeting.

B. Wharton Brook floodplain informational signage/brochure - No report.

C. Other - No report.

6. REPORTS / CORRESPONDENCE

A. DEEP/CLCC Open Space Grant Program (zoom series) - Green Plan Update, Aug. 3, 2023 - report, staff

Ms. O'Hare had attended the first webinar in this program series. She described the State's "Green Plan" (developed 2001, updated 2015 and 2020, and currently), with which the towns have to comply in order to receive State Open Space grant funds. The State has a goal of 21% land in open space--10% of which is State property. The State has reached 76.67% of their goal. However, there is no consistent definition of "open space". During the webinar, Ms. O'Hare said that "Critical Habitats" were not included in the DEEP open space draft definition, but should be. The DEEP personnel acknowledged that, but indicated their characteristics are included though.. The State definition does not include private unrestricted lands or Homeowner Association lands. A lot of work remains to be done to clarify this Draft Plan in progress at the state level.

B. EPA Climate Pollution Reduction Grant Program: SCRCOG's "Climate Planning Stakeholder Workshop", Aug. 29, 2023, 2-3:30 p.m. - report staff *Ms. O'Hare said she attended and will report at next Meeting.*

C. CFPA correspondence, email, dated 8/11/23, re: foundation document - Noted.

D. Trails Work Group - information not discussed above, D. Lendler

Commissioner Lendler reported that Scott Gray had presented a summary of the Trails Work Group work completed over the summer, its origins, its mission, and goals to the Parks and Recreation Commission Meeting on September 13. She handed out copies of Mr. Gray's monthly report to the Commission. She suggested funds should be spent on mower equipment, given the extent of trail maintenance work.

7. NEXT MEETING - Oct. 12, 2023

8. ADJOURNMENT

Motion was made by Vice Chair Sammis to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Commissioner Pyskaty, and approved unanimously.

The Meeting was adjourned at 8:51 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen L. Burns