

**WALLINGFORD CONSERVATION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING
Room 315, Town Hall
45 South Main Street, Wallingford, CT**

Thursday, February 8, 2024, 6:00 p.m.

MINUTES

[Minutes scheduled to be considered and approved at the next meeting]

Present: Chair Mike Miller, Vice Chair Brad Sammis, Jeff Borne, Dianne Saunders, Conor Makepeace, Dianne Lendler, Jim Pyskaty Eric Severson, and Erin O’Hare,
Environmental Planner

Absent: None

Chair Miller called the Meeting to order at 6:05 p.m.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. Regular Meeting, Dec. 14, 2024, 6:00 p.m.

Correction: page 2, second paragraph, change “Commissioner Saunders” to “volunteers”.

MOTION: J. Borne, To approve the Minutes as corrected.

SECOND: D. Lendler

VOTE: Unanimous

B. Regular Meeting, January 11, 2024, 6:00 p.m. - (Cancelled)

Noted as ‘cancelled’.

C. Special Meeting, Jan. 18, 2024, 5:00 p.m.

Corrections: 2023 to 2024 in heading and Commissioner Makepeace was not present.

MOTION: E. Severson, To approve the Minutes, as corrected.

SECOND: J. Borne

VOTE: Unanimous

2. MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

Chair Miller announced that Vice Chair Sammis’s term is up March 1 and he is moving out of town soon he is stepping down after five years of service. Chair Miller and the members thanked him for his contribution and for serving for the last two years as Vice Chair.

3. ELECTIONS

MOTION: J. Borne, To nominate Conor Makepeace as Vice Chair and Mike Miller as Chair and vote to elect them in these positions
SECOND: J. Pyskaty
VOTE: Unanimous

4. PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

A. Fresh Meadows

1. Mowing – staff

Chair Miller stated the mowing is completed and he directed Ms. O'Hare to have Parks and Recreation Director Kenny Michaels remove graffiti from the erratic boulder. *Ms. O'Hare will follow up on that and on the wash-out of Butterfly Loop Trail.*

2. Tessa's Trail – maintenance

Chair tabled.

3. Proposal for update to kiosk content & map, J. Borne

Commissioner Borne will report on his recommendations at next Meeting as directed to do so by the Chair.

B. Ferguson Woods

1. Proposal from Parks & Recreation Director submitted by S. Gray for kiosk – cost and funding – expenses authorized

Ms. O'Hare stated funds were approved from the Open Space resources Management Fund for kiosk.

2. Approved re-routing of a portion of trail off private property & installation of a bog-bridge – status of de-blazing, new trail section creation and blazing & bog-bridge installation work

[See discussed in next item.]

3. Proposal from Parks & Recreation Director, submitted by Scott Gray, regarding revision to re-routed Yellow Trail portion by bog-bridge

Chair Miller asked Scott Gray, in the audience, to present his newest proposal.

Mr. Gray explained that he had found a shorter route than that recently approved re-route which would be less impactful to the wetlands and require a shorter bog-bridge crossing. He helped file an IWWC application in this regard to be heard in March. Commissioner Makepeace had GPS-ed re-route today and stated current trail, first re-route and new re-route are flagged. Commissioner Saunders cautioned that the location of spring ephemeral plants need to be assessed in April through may viv a vis this proposed trail route. Chair tabled to next month.

C. Beseck Mountain

1. Boundary re-marking, encroachment & unpermitted vegetation removal

Ms. O'Hare will ask Engineering Dept. to re-mark property line in area of concern as directed to do so by Chair Miller. Ms. O'Hare suggested that National Park Service signage be installed on the ridgeline trail, Mattebessett Trail, on the east and on the west Town boundaries to mark the New England Trail, a National Scenic Trail, designated in 2009. Commissioner Saunders noted that this should be promoted by the Parks & Recreation Department as a destination as part of the National Park system. All agreed to signage and idea.

2. Cliffside Trail – evaluation & maintenance

Chair tabled.

3. Proposal for installation of stone dust path & low timber rail from road to woods edge

Commissioner Makepeace suggested Commission confer with the property owners on either of side of Town land in vicinity of beginning of trail before decision is rendered on nature and type of improvements in this vicinity. Chair tabled.

D. Marcus Cooke Memorial Park

1. Proposal for trail GPS, re-blazing, mapping, and signage

Commissioners Severson and Makepeace will GPS the trails and provide to Engineering Dept.

E. Other Property - reports

[None reported]

5. FARMLAND LEASE PROPERTIES PROGRAM

A. Farmland Lease Committee - D. Saunders, Chair

1. Report on bids submitted Jan. 9

Committee Chair Saunders reported only one field did not receive bids, Field 14A, Main Street, Yalesville and there is one new farmer in the Program, J & J Brothers, LLC, Meriden. The Town Council is expected to award the bids at its Feb.13 Meeting.

2. Special Meeting, Jan. 18, 2024, 5:30 p.m.

Committee Chair Saunders reviewed discussion of items per agenda posted.

3. Special Meeting, Feb. 22, 2024, 5:00 p.m.

Committee Chair Saunders reminded Committee members of this upcoming second meeting.

4. Field Monitoring Reports

Committee Chair Saunders is developing a new monitoring report form, a descriptive piece on the Farmland Lease Program, and she reported a hang-glider in Field 12A, Tamarac Swamp Road.

Chair Miller will contact Lessee Bozzuto to restore the gate on Field 3A, East Center Street.

B. Recommendation to Town Council re: Consideration of bid award (19 hayfields), for its Feb. 13 Meeting

Chair Miller noted that the Commission approved recommending the bid awards at its Special Meeting for this sole purpose held Jan. 18, 2024.

C. Field 20A – addressing issues per consultant report

[Not taken up]

6. BUDGET FY24-25 – discussion of proposal

Mayoral budget review meeting is slated for March 1. Ms. O’Hare indicated she is preparing a new job position description proposed to be created for something like an open space coordinator to provide oversight and maintenance of natural open space properties which would be separate from the Environmental Planner position as duties have increased over the last decade – to be discussed with the Mayor for a future budget. Commissioner Saunders indicated more monitoring of all the open spaces is needed and noted that since she has kept track in 1999 there have been 96 events or incidents reported to the Police and/or DEEP, ranging from stolen property, to hunting issues, to trash disposal, etc., and that the effects of Climate Change will present new challenges for these positions.

7. PROPERTY MANAGEMENT – TYLER MILL PRESERVE

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

Commissioner Saunders highlighted the report which she handed in. Stone dust and screen dust is washing down into the Mill Race area off the steep eroded slope area located near where

Maltby Road meets Tyler Mill Road and a permanent solution is needed to protect trout populations and for users as well. Perhaps Maltby Road can be re-graded. Commissioner Makepeace said an engineered plan needs to be devised for Public Works to install. *Ms. O'Hare will confer with Rob Baltramaitis, Director, Public Works.*

B. Kiosk – expenses authorized

Ms. O'Hare reported the Mayor had approved use of the Open Space Resources Management Fund for the expenses for the kiosk construction.

C. Boy Scout Trail – permanent blazing status

Commissioner Lendler discussed several improvement to be made to the trail by the field. Chair Miller said Mr. Gray and Commissioner Lendler have established a new trail 8 feet in towards the hedgerow from the temporary trail in this vicinity.

D. Proposal - from K. Michaels, Director, Parks & Recreation, submitted by Doug Clark, Regarding two existing unnamed trails that connect to the 'Boy Scout Trail'

Chair Miller noted Mr. Clark had presented the proposal at Dec. 18 Meeting and members had been asked to walk the two proposed trails.

Commissioner Borne reported that he and Commissioner Pyskaty walked the two proposed trails on Jan. 6 and feel the trails are too close to one another, some new holes and some old holes were observed in stone walls there, there was no erosion observed and it is a pleasant walk.

Chair Miller felt that trails are high-density, unnecessary and intermeshed. We need a master plan to provide an overview of what we have maybe some unauthorized trails are not all bad, and there are certain natural areas that must be preserved, he said.

Commissioners Saunders brought up Wayne Fogg's suggestion of using an evaluation form like the ones used by CFPA or US Forest Service or DEEP or American Trails- no one size fits all settings. She drafted a TMP map depicting unpermitted trails which now needs to be updated as there are more. If you go on the "All Trails" app, TMP trails appear like spaghetti and the ERT (Environmental Review Team report completed by DEP 20 years ago) recommended no more improvements to be done to the interior of the property as it is not a park, and there have been many biological reports completed on special biotic habitats/occurrences. We now have four unauthorized trails on the four sides of one vernal pool. We need to evaluate trails in the context of an overall plan for the Preserve.

Ms. O'Hare will forward Commissioners Saunders' map with locations of unauthorized trails (new and older ones) when submitted to her office to Kenny Michaels for their removal.

Commissioner Makepeace called for GPS-ing of all unauthorized and authorized trails, and noted an illegally installed culvert at marker #44 and a steep, downhill stunt by Barrett's former property (now part of TMP).

State Representative Mary Mushinsky – who had joined the Meeting a while ago – stated that she has worked on many resolutions involving user conflicts on public lands and they can be intense. She offered to assist the members charged with putting together a proposal for a TMP management plan perhaps to make application under the CT Recreational Trails Grant Program. Current deadline is March 11 but its available almost annually. Commissioner Lendler suggested applying under that Program for a footbridge across the Pink Trail.

Chair Miller directed Commissioner Saunders and Commissioner Lendler to begin preparing respective background materials and documents so Commission is ready for the next available grant application date which may be fall 2024.

E. Proposal - from K. Michaels, Director, Parks & Recreation, submitted by Scott Gray, Regarding trail changes, “4 Recommended Items for Tyler Mill Remapping Project” - presentation & discussion per below:

1.a. Re-blaze unclosed portion of Red floodplain trail to blue (to be part of Blue Trail)

Mr. Gray explained current issues wherein trail “goes off the map” near #36 and how #36 to #37 changes from Red to Blue Trail, etc.

MOTION: E. Severson, To approve the proposal 1.a.

SECOND: D. Lendler

VOTE: Unanimous

1.b. Re-blaze ‘Red/Green connector’ to blue to eliminate ‘piggy-backing’ (to be part of Blue Trail)

Mr. Gray presented this proposal # 1.b.

MOTION: E. Severson, To approve the proposal 1.b.

SECOND: J. Pyskaty

VOTE: All except D. Saunders abstained

2. Re-blaze a portion of Green/Blue blazed section of trail on old jeep trail to red to eliminate ‘piggy-backing’ (to be part of Red Trail)

Mr. Gray presented this proposal # 2. Ms. O’Hare asked if blazing will continue to the road and not stop, as currently, at marker #84. Mr. Gray, affirmative.

MOTION: B. Sammis, To approve the Minutes.

SECOND: E. Severson

VOTE: Unanimous

3. Eliminate White South Trail & de-blaze it

Mr. Gray presented this proposal #3. Ms. O’Hare asked if trail is eliminated only from marker #93 to Woodhouse Avenue. Mr. Gray, affirmative.

MOTION: E. Severson, To approve the Minutes.

SECOND: B. Sammis

VOTE: Unanimous

4. Extend Gold Trail to unofficial trail that currently connects with Blue Trail & re-blaze it to become the ‘Purple/Yellow Trail’

Mr. Gray presented this proposal #4. Chair Miller tabled this proposed item to allow Ms. O’Hare to conduct a site investigation to observe unauthorized footbridge installation and to determine if wetlands permitting is required and also to allow any members who have not walked it to see it.

F. Other reports

None.

8. REPORTS / CORRESPONDENCE

A. Trails Work Group – TWG information/matters not discussed above, D. Lendler Commissioner Lendler suggested installation of signage, “Unblazed trail” on unauthorized trails and bikers should get rid of the trails they made. Chair Miller said the latter is the role of the Trails Work Group. Commissioner Saunders stressed that we need to focus trails work on what we have.

B. Gray-Wulff Environmental Series: “*The Temptation of Trees*”, film & discussion, Community Room, Wallingford Public Library, Dec. 6, 7:30 p.m. – reports

No reports.

C. Memorandum to All Boards and Commissions & Members of Town Council. from Janis M. Small, Corporation Counsel, re: Freedom of Information Act and Ethics Training, Feb. 29, 2024, 6:30 p.m., Town Council Chambers, dated 1/25/24

Not taken up.

9. NEXT MEETING – March 14, 2024

10. ADJOURNMENT

MOTION: J. Pyskaty, To approve the Minutes.

SECOND: E. Severson

VOTE: Unanimous

Chair Miller adjourned the Meeting at 9:00 p.m.

Individuals in need of auxiliary aids for the effective communication in programs and services of the Town of Wallingford are invited to make their needs and preferences known to the ADA Compliance Coordinator at 203-294-2070 five days prior.

Respectfully submitted,

Erin O’Hare, Environmental Planner
Acting Recording Secretary