

WALLINGFORD CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Regular Meeting
Thursday, April 13, 2023, 6:00 p.m.
Room 315, Town Hall
45 South Main Street
Wallingford, CT

Present: Chair Mike Miller, Vice Chair Brad Sammis, Commissioner Dianne Lendler and Commissioner Jeffrey Borne arrived as noted below.

Absent: Commissioners James Pyskaty, Jared McQueen, Dianne Saunders, Carl Arsenault, John Lathrop.

There were 37 individuals from the public and two more persons arrived later.

Chair Miller stated that there is no quorum yet, so it is not a Regular Meeting but he opened the discussion at 6:02 p.m.. He invited Dr. Joe Robles, of Northford Road, to speak indicating that it had been agreed that there would be no further discussion of the subject of his presentation to the Commission and no debate on the topic.

Dr. Robles stated that he has issues with a Commissioner. For some of his remarks he referred to a prepared letter he and another person wrote that he had forwarded to the Chief of Police and also posted on the internet. He stated the letter has 50 co-signers, the latter obtained via the internet. He thought that the Stewards of Tyler Mill Preserve report to the Conservation Commission. He felt that one member of the Commission, Commissioner Dianne Saunders, who is also a Steward, has been speaking as an authority on Tyler Mill and he feels that he and the group he represents have a problem with this Commissioner. His research has shown that the Conservation Commission does not manage Tyler Mill Preserve but by law is charged with finding land that is deemed worthy of conserving and with finding grants that would support/enhance the Preserve. He has found no bylaws or mission statement for the Commission. He asked to know how Commissioners are appointed and how they could be removed.

Chair Miller stated Commissioners are appointed by the Mayor and serve a 5-year term.

Dr. Robles said he believes that his group of mountain bikers, which recently reconstructed the bog bridge in the Preserve, is disliked by Commissioner Saunders and that she has called the police to report incidents. He feels this Commissioner should be communicating to the Director of Parks and Recreation instead. The 2018 microburst storm damaged areas in Tyler Mill, and it was not reopened for a while. After it was reopened, he felt there was an impression that trails were being made in the Preserve and that the prior Commission Chair had wanted to ban mountain biking there.

Commissioner Borne entered the meeting at 6:10 p.m.

Dr. Robles continued, adding that his group has tried to bring things to the Mayor. And now we have to work with the new Director of Parks and Recreation. It has been asserted that mountain bikers have been making and rerouting trails there. So we went to Parks and Rec and to the Open Space

Committee and explained that Tyler Mill was valuable and was funded by the Land/Water Conservation Fund from the Bureau of Outdoor Recreation in the 1970s when the Preserve was created. A grant was made for it to be purchased by the Town, and it was to be “for all users of the Town” by the terms of the grant for passive recreational uses. So they cannot restrict access by the public - picnicking, biking, cross country skiing.

Dr. Robles continued, Mr. Michaels is the recently appointed Director of Parks and Recreation. He offered to be part of the solution. We reconstructed the Bog Bridge on the Green Trail, which was originally made 25 years ago. We went to Inland Wetlands. We did it for free and used materials available there. The Stewards should have nothing to do with the trails. The Trails Work Group will manage all the trails in the town. The Boy Scout Trail has been there for years, but it was never in the system. It's good for mountain biking, and this Commissioner opposed it. Now it's approved. We think this Commissioner, who is not an official, is opposed to us. So we would like to see this person removed. The Chief of Police said the problem at Tyler Mill does not meet the level of their work. He added: We tried to do the process to get the White Diamond Trail also. In sum, he offered ten or so suggestions to improve the matter.

Chair Miller asked for public comment.

Mrs. Holly Potvin said: I am a resident and not a mountain biker. I am afraid to go in there right now. It's one of the biggest assets the Town has, but I'm a senior citizen with an old dog and I'm afraid to go in there. I feel that this Commissioner will call in people to come after me.

Commissioner Lendler asked: Have you witnessed that?

Mrs. Potvin said: Yes.

Mrs. Michelle Rowe said: My husband has a mountain bike. Someone came and assaulted my husband and broke his phone. He called for help to this Commissioner, and the police came and arrested my husband.

Mrs. Brent McCarthy said: We own near the park, and I take my kids in there. I don't want people to tell me when I can be there. It happened to others. Also, no one is supposed to be in there after closing. And I saw someone cutting up trees in the open space.

Chair Miller said: Thank you for speaking out. I appreciate it. This has gotten the attention of the Mayor, the Chief of Police, and Kenny Michaels. A lot of people are thinking about this.

With the exception of one person, the members of the public left at this time, 6:38 p.m.

The Commissioners waited for a while but no more members arrived to reach a quorum. The Chair indicated items on this agenda will be carried forward. The Commissioners dispersed soon thereafter..

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen L. Burns

Recording Secretary