

Draft

MINUTES

WALLINGFORD CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Regular Meeting

Thursday, May 11, 2023, 6:00 p.m.

Room 315, Town Hall, 45 South Main Street

Wallingford, CT

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

Absent: Commissioners Jared McQueen and Carl Arsenault.

Also present were seven persons from the public.

Chair Mike Miller called the Meeting to order at 6:03 p.m.

1. COMMISSION MEMBERSHIP CHANGES

Environmental Planner Erin O'Hare stated that Commissioner John Lathrop has resigned from the Commission. Commissioner Borne said Mr. Lathrop served first with the Wallingford Land Trust, was a Member of the Conservation Commission since its inception over 30 years ago, and most recently, he was Vice Chair. Chair Miller stated that Commissioner Lathrop has done trails work and served in nearly every capacity. Ms. O'Hare emphasized that we will especially miss his contribution of carpentry work on kiosks and at Fresh Meadows and other open spaces. Chair Miller added, "A heartfelt thanks to John Lathrop for his service to the Town and to the Commission!"

Chair Miller introduced Commissioner Conor Makepeace and welcomed him. Mr. Makepeace grew up in town, has an environmental background, and currently works as a Soils Scientist with an engineering firm.

2. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. March 9, 2023

Motion was made by Commissioner Lendler to approve the Minutes of March 9, 2023; seconded by Commissioner Borne and approved by Commissioners Miller, Sammis, Saunders, Lendler, Pyskaty, and Borne.

B. April 13, 2023

The Recording Secretary noted three spelling changes to be made. Ms. O'Hare noted that it was brought to her attention that "*Mrs. Brent McCarthy*" was quoted but she was not actually in attendance so that reference needs to be changed to "*an unidentified woman*" and that those under "Also present" from the public should include note of the three police officers present. A member of the public, Dr. Joseph Robles, requested changes in the Draft Minutes as he felt his statements referenced therein were inaccurate and misleading in some instances. *Ms. O'Hare will check with*

the Law Department on how best to handle requested corrections to the Minutes from persons other than the Commissioners. Vice Chair Sammis felt the matter should be tabled. Chair Miller decided that consideration of this item will be tabled to the June agenda.

C. Discussion regarding protocol for decisions in the Minutes

Ms. O'Hare said this item is in response to Commissioner Lendler's concern that we often have a discussion and we don't jell it at the end unless there is a vote on the matter or a consensus and we should have a conclusion for the Minutes. Commissioner Lendler said, We think we vote a decision, but it's more of an opinion if we don't follow up. Ms. O'Hare said, In that instance, the Minutes should state: "There was no decision reached."

3. ROLE OF COMMISSION

Ms. O'Hare said, when someone new joins the Commission I give them background material but I decided to address several documents tonight and provide copies as a refresher for all the Commissioners.

A. State enabling legislation for Conservation Commissions Ordinance

Ms. O'Hare gave the Commission copies of Sec. 7-131a. - "Conservation Commission", from the CT General Statutes relative to the establishment of local commissions, appointments, the role for conducting research, planning greenways, formulating watershed management plans, completing inventories of natural resources, the distribution of materials, advising on the use of open space land, and the supervision and management of town lands upon the delegation to do so, etc.

Commissioner Borne said, next week the Democratic Town Committee wants to hear from the Conservation Commission, so I will speak to them and this material is very useful.

B. Town Ordinance

Ms. O'Hare gave the Commissioners copies of the Town Ordinance, Chapter 8, Article II. - 'Conservation Commission' - that established the Commission consisting of nine members. Originally it was seven members, and about five years ago we went to nine by the Town Council's vote. Commissioners "*serve for five years or until a successor has been appointed*" by the Town Council.

C. Mission Statement

Ms. O'Hare said, The enabling legislation allows commissions to do a range of things, but what we have concentrated on and what do we really want to focus on moving forward? How do we promote conservation with the residents? What does the Town need? I'd say more open space land to protect representative habitats and public education on this area. She suggests that the Commission should work on developing a new Mission Statement as we are facing new challenges: climate change, invasive species, changes in public demand, etc. All were in agreement.

4. BY-LAWS

Ms. O'Hare said all Commissions have By-Laws. Ours were last changed in 2012 to change membership number from seven to nine. Per the Law Department, the Commission simply votes on a change and I am requesting a change of the time of meetings from "7:00 p.m." to "6:00 p.m.". Chair Miller suggested, that meetings would be "at a time to be determined before the meeting," since during COVID we were meeting at different times and places. Ms. O'Hare explained that Regular Meetings are held in a time and place in accordance with our approved Regular Meeting

Schedule Notice which is posted in late December for the next year and any changes to time or place must be noticed as a "Special Meeting" and that is why we had a number of Special Meetings recently.

Chair Miller moved to change the By-Laws, ARTICLE I, Section 1. to say that the Regular Meetings of the Conservation Commission hereafter shall be held on the second Thursday of each month at 6:00 p.m.; seconded by Commissioner Pyskaty, and approved unanimously.

5. OPEN SPACE INVENTORY

A. Database document

B. Updated Town of Wallingford Official Open Space Map (keyed to database)

Ms. O'Hare pointed to the Official Wallingford Open Space Map on the wall updated recently by the Engineering Department and handed out copies of the "Wallingford Town Owned Open Space" database document, which coordinates with the property label numbers on the Map. This database was originated by former Town Planner Linda Bush and kept updated by successive Town Planners. This information is important for inclusion in the Town's Plan of Conservation and Development (the Master Plan) and also for this Commission's use. The total acreage of dedicated open space land is about 2,858 acres. The recent acquisition of the Barrett properties, the Stevens property, and the Liney Hall Lane property are on the Map but need to be added to this database. Prior Commissioner Tom Pietros, Soils Scientist, had delineated and flagged the wetlands in Tyler Mill Preserve. *Commissioner Makepeace will work with Ms. O'Hare to add wetlands and other resource factors to the database and to complete a database more tailored for the Commission's use.*

Commissioner Borne said the State committed years ago to achieve 21% open space, not necessarily State-owned land - it could be municipal open space or rural land that is protected in some way - to preserve the rural aspect of Connecticut. We should obtain the percent open space in town.

Ms. O'Hare gave Commissioners copies of the latest the Farmland Lease Properties Chart of the Town's 38 farm fields that can be leased out representing the last 18 years of history and data about the properties - including acreage and lease rental prices. These parcels are stewarded by the Farmland Lease Committee with each member assigned to a farmer lessee and they visit the lessee's fields several times a year.

6. PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

A. Tyler Mill Preserve

1. Stewards of Tyler Mill

a. 2010 Establishment / Role

Ms. O'Hare handed out copies of a letter that formally established the Stewards of Tyler Mill Preserve group in 2012 (*not "2010" as above*). Their function was based on work done by Commissioners Saunders and Lendler and later expanded and updated through the Open Space Users Group meetings held at the Parks and Recreation Department. The Stewards have been quite successful. Ms. O'Hare read from a May 5, 2023 letter from Mayor Dickinson, who requested that the Stewards would keep Mr. John Gawlak at the Parks and Recreation Department "*informed about concerns and progress*" on work items that they plan. Commissioner Lendler said the Stewards regularly contacted Mr. Gawlak, and now Kenny Michaels, and/or Public Works for assistance on tasks outside of their abilities. The Stewards report to the Parks and Recreation Department regularly and annually to the Open Space Users Group. The list of current Stewards completed by

Commissioner Saunders, dated May 2023, was passed out which indicates those few persons certified to do chainsaw work, plus the trained spotters, all of which are registered with Town Risk Manager Kurt Treiber.

b. Co-Chairs Monthly Report, D. Saunders & D. Lendler

Commissioner Lendler reported that Stewards Larry Stowe and David Bedell went out to work on invasives and she also cut back invasives, which are everywhere right now. We have not heard if the blow-downs have been cut yet.

2. Boy Scout Trail - relocation of markers in field & gate signage

Commissioner Lendler said the farmer had cut back the hedges and moved the blazed posts closer to the tree so he has more field area to use. Mr. Scott Gray had added the new blazes. *Chair Miller will go out to check if this trail needs to be "brushed back" more and he will put the "No Parking" sign on the field gate.* Commissioner Saunders reminded them that 9 feet of height clearance is needed for horses to pass there.

Commissioner Saunders requested that Ray Johnson, who leases Field 8B nearby, needs a 'No Parking' sign also and she stated that the extra-wide gate there is in poor condition. *Ms. O'Hare will confer further with Commissioner Saunders and pursue this matter with Water Division and Public Works.*

3. Response to proposals forwarded by Trails Administrator

a. Blue/Black Trail - re-routing proposal, Scott Gray

Chair Miller said there are two problems, the safety issue and the proper trail route here. Ms. O'Hare, Scott Gray, and Town Risk Manager Kurt Treiber and Parks and Recreation Director Kenny Michaels went out to see it. Chair Miller asked the Commissioners to consider the proposed re-route. As the Commission had approved the closing of the very steep eroded portion of the Blue/Black Trail in March, Ms. O'Hare gave the new signs for that closure to Scott Gray to install as well as signs for the closing of the Red Trail South and the White Trail (North).

Mr. Gray presented his proposal: Months ago, I walked there with Director Kenny Michaels, Ms. O'Hare, and Kurt Treiber. We looked at the definitions of "cribbing" and "side-hill" work, and I demonstrated those. They were in favor of it, and those areas have been flagged. Ms. O'Hare showed the orange flags in photos where the cribbing and side-hill work is proposed. One steep-notched area washed into the river, so it was agreed to put gravel and 2" riprap in there. Mr. Gray said, I had proposed "cribbing" at the bottom to prevent sediment from the closed portion of the Blue/Black Trail from going into the river.

Commissioner Saunders said, where the Black Trail came down before, it's a horse crossing at the base of that trail where they cross the river to go over to the White Trail. Mr. Gray suggested to level it there. Commissioner Saunders said sometimes it floods there; it's deep and there's a vernal pool there. It was agreed to revisit this part of the plan later. *Commissioner Saunders will map all horse crossings.*

Motion was made by Chair Miller that we go ahead and approve the re-route work to the Blue/Black Trail; seconded by Commissioner Lendler.

The vote was: **Yes: Chair Miller, Commissioner Lendler, Commissioner Makepeace.**

No: Commissioner Saunders.

Abstained: Commissioners Sammis, Pyskaty, and Borne.

The Motion passed.

Chair Miller will notify Mr. Michaels, Trails Administrator, of this approval..

b. Pink Trail - re-route (near river near emergency markers #47 & #48)

Motion as made by Chair Miller that we approve Scott Gray to move forward with his proposed reroute of the Pink Trail, dated 3/24/23; seconded by Commissioner Lendler, and approved unanimously.

Chair Miller will notify Kenny Michaels, Trails Administrator, of this approval.

4. Signage for trail closures - proposed installation

Per item #3.a., above, Scott Grey was requested to install the new signage. Chair Miller explained that these trails are officially closed, the signs give notice but the public can still use them.

5. Other reports - None.

B. Fresh Meadows

1. Proposal for field appreciation document contract – (Not taken up)

2. Bluebird boxes

Chair Mill reported he had cleaned out 8 of the 10 bluebird boxes as needed.

3. Mowing

Ms. O'Hare stated that she and Commissioner Borne had observed the fields recently and discussed mowing options but she had not requested mowing by Public Works yet and feels some of the fields should not be mowed now to protect nesting birds. The movement, "No Mow May" was discussed. *Commissioner Makepeace will observe the stand of young cottonwoods growing there. Ms. O'Hare will bring consultant Anthony Zemba's report regarding Grassland mowing protocols to the next meeting per Commissioner Borne's request.* Mowing options will be on the next agenda.

Ms. O'Hare will request Parks and Recreation remove the graffiti from the glacial erratic's west side per Chair Miller's request. She will bring the concern about the practice of keeping lights on at night in the vicinity of the northern parking area near the pond to the attention of the Directors of Parks & Rec. and Public Works.

7. PROPERTY STEWARDSHIP

A. Property Monitoring Reports

1. Beseck Meadow, M. Miller

Chair Miller reported no new concerns but the accessway erosion is worsening.

2. Ferguson Woods, J. Pyskaty – (deferred to next meeting)

3. Fresh Meadows, J. Borne – (deferred to next meeting)

B. Stewardship Re-assignment - Bertini Park

Commissioner Makepeace took on this assignment from former Commissioner Lathrop. *He will conduct a site visit and report back next time. Ms. O'Hare will get him Mr. Lathrop's property file.*

Commissioner Saunders will provide all Commission document digital files to Commissioner Makepeace.

8. PUBLIC EVENTS

- A. Quinnipiac University 'Big Event', April 15**
Commissioner Saunders indicated this event had been cancelled.

9. REPORTS / CORRESPONDENCE

- A. CT Farmland Trust** - email notices, several
B. CT Land Conservation Council - Conference, Sat., March 25, 2023 - reports
C. Reminder for Next Meeting: Property Monitoring Reports
D. CFPA magazine, CT Woodlands, Spring 2023; received 4/10/23

10. NEXT MEETING - June 8, 2023

11. ADJOURNMENT

Motion to adjourn was made by Commissioner Lendler; seconded by Commissioner Makepeace and approved unanimously.

The Meeting was adjourned at 8:30 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen L. Burns
Recording Secretary