

WALLINGFORD CONSERVATION COMMISSION

REGULAR MEETING Room 315, Town Hall 45 South Main Street, Wallingford, CT

Thursday, April 11, 2024, 6:00 p.m.

This Regular Meeting of the Conservation Commission was held April 11, 2024, at 6:00 pm. in Room 315, Town Hall.

Present: Mike Miller, Chair, Conor Makepeace, Vice Chair, Dianne Lendler, Dianne Saunders, Jeffrey Borne, Jim Pyskaty, Eric Severson, Bruce Conroy, and Erin O'Hare, Environmental Planner.

Also present were several members of the public and the new Recording Secretary, Linda Allen

Chair Miller convened the Meeting at 6:02 p.m. He welcomed the new Commission member, Bruce Conroy. He introduced and welcomed the Commission's new Recording Secretary, Linda Allen.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. Regular Meeting, Feb. 8, 2024

MOTION: B. Conroy, To approve Minutes as presented.

SECOND: J. Borne

VOTE: Unanimous

2. PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

A. Fresh Meadows

1. Kiosk content & map, J. Borne

Commissioner Borne reported that he had not yet gone out there but he and Scott Gray, of the Trails Work Group, in audience, agreed to meet there soon to look at the existing kiosk. Erin O'Hare suggested lowering the existing kiosk so children could view kiosk content and installing a new standard size kiosk.

2. Graffiti – status

As the giant erratic boulder is a landmark, the consensus was that the graffiti is not to be painted over. *As directed by Chair Miller, Ms. O'Hare is to pursue getting the graffiti properly removed using chemicals.*

3. Butterfly Loop Trail wash-out

Ms. O'Hare reported that the Parks & Recreation and Public Works Departments suggested getting a contractor for the work. Chair Miller directed Ms. O'Hare to complete an RFQ for the repair of the two eroded areas in the stone dust trail considering root cause of the issues and design corrections for prevention in the future. *Ms. O'Hare is to follow-up.*

B. Ferguson Woods

1. Kiosk fabrication/installation

Mr. Gray indicated he would build the kiosk after his one-month long trip.

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

Ms. O'Hare reported that the proposal had obtained IWWC administrative approval on March 5, 2024. All agreed this route was preferable and Mr. Gray explained the proposed expenses for the bogbridge.

MOTION: B. Conroy, To approve revised shorter re-route with shorter footbridge and the expenditure for footbridge as submitted, (\$245).

SECOND: C. Makepeace

VOTE: Unanimous

C. Marcus Cooke Memorial Park

1. Proposal for trail GPS, re-blazing, mapping, trail re-routes, and signage
Commissioners Makepeace and Severson reported on their findings in the Park while completing GPS data on the trails which included Town open space boundary markers, blazing, and trails that continued offsite onto private property of Southwinds. Commissioner Makepeace distributed a six-page report with imaging depicting existing trails, suggested changes to trail layout, an old woods road by Old Rock Hill Road, and vernal pool locations. After much discussion it was agreed that he will prepare a proposed trails map that depicts town trails up to the Town border, add a proposed loop trail, propose a better blaze color system especially for interior trails, and trail markers (with mileage) for interior trails.

MOTION: C. Makepeace, To install signage "Leaving Town property" at the three trail locations where trails cross into private land, to eliminate the 'Purple' short length of trail (on the southeast) and to install a sign at the bottom of the hill at the Yellow Trail / 'Purple' Trail intersection rather than at the top of the hill, and to stop maintenance of the offsite trails.

SECOND: B. Conroy

VOTE: Unanimous

It was agreed that when the Engineering Department completes the proposed revised trail map, the new map should replace the old 'Girl Scout' map which is currently inaccurate. *Chair Miller requested members walk the park trails and look at the exit points, the possible loop trail, and other areas discussed.*

MOTION: B. Conroy, To remove the old inaccurate Trail system map currently installed.

SECOND: C. Makepeace

VOTE: Unanimous

Ms. O'Hare will complete a proposal to be submitted to the Parks & Recreation Director reflecting all changes discussed.

D. Other Property – member reports

At this time Chair Miller allowed Mr. Gray to speak about a report he prepared on Cliffside Trail.. *Chair Miller will email a copy of the report to members and it will be on next agenda.*

3. FARMLAND LEASE PROPERTIES PROGRAM

A. Farmland Lease Committee - D. Saunders, Chair

1. Town Council - bid awards (19 hayfields) - 2/13/24 Meeting

Committee Chair Saunders stated that the Commission's recommended bid awards approved at its Special Meeting, Jan. 18, were officially awarded by the Town Council by the Consent Agenda for its Feb. 13 Meeting.

2. Lease status

Committee Chair Saunders reported there is one lessee new to the Program, J&J Bros., LLC, the Carabettas from Meriden. Ms. O'Hare reported all lessees have signed their leases for respective fields except the new farmer who will be meeting with the Committee Chair and her regarding the required orientation session. A liaison will need to be assigned.

3. Field Monitoring Reports

Committee Chair Saunders indicated Fields 5A and 7A need to be mowed especially due to Autumn olive.

4. Revised field monitoring form

Committee Chair Saunders will distribute form to Committee members when done.

5. Committee members and assigned lease areas/lessees

Chair Miller appointed Commissioner Conroy to the Committee. Committee Chair Saunders indicated the fields former Commissioner Sammis was monitoring need to be reassigned.

6. Field 3A – East Center Street – gate

Committee Chair Saunders reported the gate for Field 3A has been re-installed presumably by the lessee.

7. Next Committee Meeting

Committee Chair Saunders will email Committee members to send copy of orientation sheet and to set up next meeting to be held soon.

4. BUDGET FY24-25 – staff report

Ms. O'Hare reported on the Mayoral review meeting for the proposed budget and the Mayor is not proposing any changes to it. She did 'start the conversation' with the Mayor about creating two job positions in place of the current Environmental Planner position sometime in the future.

5. PROFESSIONAL NATURAL RESOURCES SERVICES – discussion

Discussion ensued about possible uses for remaining funds by fiscal year end, June 30.

A. Bat box installation

Ms. O'Hare stated she has one contractor interested in doing the work.

B. Eradication work

Commissioner Saunders indicated there is always plenty of eradication work needed in particular at Tyler Mill Preserve where Tree of Heaven remains a problem, Japanese knotweed stand in the Muddy River and invasives in the "blow-down" area (about 3 acres) and at Fresh Meadows regarding Japanese knotweed.

C. Evaluation of Farmland Conservation Management Areas

Prior to five years ago, or so, these areas were included inside the lease area to be maintained by the lessee. *Commission Saunders will compile a list (with descriptions) for these areas for a possible RFQ for a consultant to complete review and recommendations.*

D. Evaluation of open space properties

Ms. O'Hare indicated this type of work is typically a big-ticket item and may be best accomplished using the Open Space Resources Management Fund – to be pursued during FY24-25.

E. Field 20A improvements

This work is not ready to go forward. *Chair Miller and Commissioner Saunders will go see the areas in Field 20A that the consultant report indicated were not comporting with lease areas to see these areas and determine why they came to differ, and to decide where marker posts would be best located.*

F. Maltby Lane/Mill race washout-out

Ms. O'Hare will discuss the erosion issue with Director of Public Works to see if the Town can design and implement a permanent fix for this perennial problem or if a consultant/contractor should be used.

G. Other proposals

Ms. O'Hare was requested by Commissioner Saunders to pursue the possible mowing of the one hayfield that had received no bids, Field 14A, Main Street, Yalesville – which will need to be done sometime this summer.

The logistics and timing of each of the above proposals were discussed with the consensus that one large contract would be most feasible such as the proposal then put forth in a motion made by Commissioner Conroy. This motion - which would entail using the funds in this account - appears below as then amended by Commissioner Conroy to exclude GPS-ing of Bertini Park as Commissioner Makepeace had already completed same.

MOTION: B. Conroy, To have a professional surveying firm complete GPS sub-meter accuracy mapping of all trails in Tyler Mill Preserve to including features (lengths, streams, blazing colors, culverts, jumps, stunts, etc.) – not to include the area of Bertini Park - with a deliverable of spatial data coordinated with the Town of Wallingford Engineering Department

SECOND: C. Makepeace

VOTE: Unanimous

6. PROPERTY MANAGEMENT – TYLER MILL PRESERVE

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

Commissioner Saunders presented the Stewards report indicating more graffiti (which Parks & Recreation personnel have painted over), the construction of several new unauthorized trails including one by the Red South Trail that encircled a known vernal pool, a trail connecting to the Mustard Trail that was blazed with the mustard color, and stones taken from an old stone wall deposited in the swamp creating a fording area, a trail as wide as a jeep eroded by bike use, evidence of chain saw removal of DEEP fishing

signage activity (which she reported to DEEP), reported a man cutting Town trees to police, three areas of new pink flagging near trails, and several more trail issues.

Mr. Gray indicated the pink flagging marks two new proposed trail re-routes which he has submitted to Kenny Michaels, Director, Parks & Recreation Dept.. Chair Miller indicated he received these proposals last week.

Commissioner Saunders stated she had drafted a suggested form for trail-related proposals for Kenny Michaels, Director, Parks & Recreation Dept. to consider using to standardize the information provided in proposals to facilitate review. Chair Miller would like Mr. Michaels to use a spreadsheet to track the progress of work completed by the Trails Work Group.

Discussion ensued about a 'Sustainable Trail Plan' to be reviewed by the public for input which led to the following motion.

MOTION: B. Conroy, To put a temporary moratorium on all trail expansions and additions in Tyler Mill Preserve until after the GPS data is back - with the exception of approved safety issues – and to be revisited in July.

SECOND: D. Saunders

VOTE: All voted "Yes" except D. Lendler abstained

Chair Miller stated that this approval is a recommendation to be conveyed to Mr. Michaels and that proposals can still be submitted but they will pile up. Commissioner Makepeace explained that once the GPS data is in the Commission would apply criteria in the evaluation of proposals and Commissioner Conroy added there would be public comment period. Commissioner Conroy said we are pausing this kind of trails changes not stopping them. He reported seeing electric bikes in TMP, about two out of every five bikes he sees, and motorized vehicles are not allowed.

Ms. O'Hare stated that these two motions just approved are separate from the trails map update in progress which will reflect approved implemented changes.

B. Kiosk – expenses authorized

Ms. O'Hare indicated this expenditure was authorized. Chair Miller wanted the kiosk installation located away from the guardrails, not too close to parked cars and not to block access by horseback.

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

At first the Chair felt this item should not be entertained but tabled due to the above Motion regarding a moratorium regarding trail expansions and additions but then he reconsidered and allowed it to be entertained. Commissioner Saunders reported the trails encircle an active vernal pool and she saw three new unpermitted trail spurs off one of the proposed trails. After a brief discussion, there was a motion.

MOTION: D. Saunders, To not approve the proposal at this time but to be revisited after the GPS trails mapping project is

completed.

SECOND: B. Conroy
VOTE: Unanimous

D. Proposal - from K. Michaels, Director, Parks & Recreation, submitted by Scott Gray, Regarding trail changes, "*4 Recommended Items for Tyler Mill Remapping Project*" -

4. Extend Gold Trail to unofficial trail that currently connects with Blue Trail & re-blaze it to become the 'Purple/Yellow Trail' (*presented Feb. 8 Meeting*)

Chair Miller brought the item to the floor.

MOTION: B. Conroy, To not approve the proposal at this time but to be revisited after the GPS data is done.

SECOND: J. Pyskaty
VOTE: All voted "Yes" except D. Lendler abstained.

E. Comprehensive review of attributes and management concerns

Chair Miller said this item is to be taken up next month due to lateness of the hour.

F. Other reports

None

7. REPORTS / CORRESPONDENCE

A. Trails Work Group – TWG information/matters not discussed above, D. Lendler

Commissioner Lendler updated on work efforts. Mr. Gray said there are about 15 volunteers and asked Commissioner Saunders if she would give him a letter listing all the undone trails work to date she reported. Ms. O'Hare asked Commissioner Lendler to shed light on a few new trail proposals she said were submitted to Mr. Michaels but not to the Commission as of yet. Mr. Gray said they involve improving the dangerous crossing from the Coyle Field parking area across Woodhouse Avenue to access the Blue Trail and a bridge installation over the Muddy River on the Pink Trail but the proposals will take some time as they are very large undertakings. A re-route of the Blue Trail due to a fire was completed by TWG and will be submitted to Mr. Michaels soon.

Ms. O'Hare asked who the TWG Coordinators referred to. Commissioner Lendler indicated that Doug Clarke has been 'submitted' to be added to the Trails Work Group now titled the Trails Work Group Coordinators, and the Mayor is looking to have a total of five Coordinators.

B. CT Land Conservation Council – Conference, March 23, 2024 - member Reports

Tabled to next meeting.

C. Memorandum from Janis Small, 3/21/24

Not taken up.

D. Quinnipiac University volunteers

Commissioner Saunders indicated there was not enough time to get involved this year.

8. NEXT MEETING – May 9, 2024

9. ADJOURNMENT

Chair Miller adjourned Meeting at 9:28 p.m. by Consensus.

Respectfully submitted,

**Erin O'Hare, Environmental Planner
Acting Recording Secretary**