

Draft

WALLINGFORD CONSERVATION COMMISSION

SPECIAL MEETING

Thursday, July 9, 2020, 6:00 p.m.

Fresh Meadows Open Space Property
North Parking Area
136 Cheshire Road, Wallingford, CT

MINUTES

Note: The Conservation Commission Regular Meeting of July 9, 2020, 7:00 p.m., in Town Hall was cancelled. In its place, this Special Meeting for July 9, 2020, 6:00 p.m., at Fresh Meadows Open Space Property was duly posted with the Wallingford Town Clerk and on the Wallingford Town website.

Present: Chair Mary Heffernon, Vice Chair John Lathrop, Commissioners Jared McQueen, Dianne Lendler, and Dianne Saunders and Environmental Planner Erin O’Hare. Commissioner Brad Sammis arrived at 6:10 p.m. Commissioner Mike Miller arrived at 7:23 p.m.

Absent: Commissioners Jeffrey Borne and Carl Arsenault.

Chair Heffernon called this Special Meeting to order at 6:04 p.m.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES, Regular Meeting, March 12, 2020

The Draft Minutes for March 12, 2020 were not considered tonight. (Note: The Commission’s Regular Meetings for April, May and June had been canceled due to the Coronavirus pandemic.)

2. PROPERTY REPORTS

Tyler Mill Preserve – Vice Chair Lathrop said all trails are in good condition. A small branch has to be taken down. Blue Trail – At the top, a big section of trees near Bridal Lane needs to come out. There is a “notch tree” marked by a yellow ribbon—it is large and is caught in the fork of another tree, but not serious for now. Commissioner Saunders said the canopy fell over part of the Pink Trail this week. About three years ago we did the Red, Lilac and Pink Trails. We were going to rent a brush mower that a person wears—that could be done now. Since the hay is not cut yet, we could go in there. Also, Commissioner Saunders saw evidence of motor bikes on the Pink Trail and on the south trail and in the field. She believes that motor bikers felled two footbridges so they could ride in the area. Crosstrails and trail braiding have been done by motor bikes. There is evidence of people gathering in Tyler Mill. Three policemen on motor bikes went in to check.

Commissioner Lendler brought up that the White Trail behind the Vietnam Veterans Park sign is not maintained by anyone, and so it is not sustainable. Other trails are in good condition, so she felt the White Trail could be left as it is. The farmer cuts the edges now. The Committee believes that the White Trail should be shut down. *Chair Heffernon directed the Trails Committee to go out and evaluate the White Trail.*

Field 4C off Whirlwind Hill Road at the top – Commissioner Lendler said there are no hiking trails by Mr. Termini’s property. But a thick area of debris is blocking the entrance to the water. She thought it should be mowed, but it will be difficult. Chair Heffernon said it should not be mowed. Commissioner Lendler said last

year Public Works mowed in here an area 25 feet wide going across to Scard Road plus another area going down to the barn. That area sprouted the most milkweed she had ever seen. Mr. Termini did mow a small area close to the bottom. Also, the Autumn olive there has not been cut. Ms. O'Hare stated that this property has been leased. (See item 4.A.3.)

1250 Whirlwind Hill Road (near Field 4C) – Ms. O'Hare said someone mowed a 25-foot strip across. A week ago, Commissioner Saunders saw that a landscape timber was put in there. The new lessee might have put it up as a gate. Commissioner Lendler said she walked half-way across the field and saw no timber. Commissioner Lendler has tried to call the neighbor. *Ms. O'Hare will find out from Public Works whether they had mowed the 25-foot strip across that field.*

Bertini Park – Vice Chair Lathrop said on entering the parking lot at West Dayton Hill Road there is a huge pile of wood chips. The Town placed two telephone poles to block the trail at the top, and there is a second pile of wood chips at the top. Is this just for storage purposes? Commissioner Lendler suggested that the Electric Division might have done it.

Main Street Open Space in Yalesville – Commissioner Sammis reported that nothing is going on. His report included a photo of the property's Open Space sign. Chair Heffernon asked if that main sign could be changed. *Ms. O'Hare said the sign could be patch-filled by the sign carver. She will look into it.* Commissioner Sammis said someone has to be sure of where the signs go because there is an issue with the neighbor. Ms. O'Hare said the Town took the neighbor to court six years ago about this. He claimed adverse possession, but it wasn't. Two years ago, behind his house he mowed a wide path and put a playscape in. And the owner cut down the trees in a 20' x 80' area and bulldozed it to plant grass. Six years ago, Ms. O'Hare's suggestion was for the Town to put a fence there, which did not happen. Recently, Ms. O'Hare spoke with Corporation Counsel Janis Small about this. *Ms. O'Hare will follow up on this boundary and liability issue with Ms. Small.*

Marcus Cooke Park – Commissioner McQueen saw the park trails and he has a good idea of the boundaries. The property line for Marcus Cooke Park is well within the woods from any of the houses. He could not see any encroachment. The trails are used and well worn. There is no sign of damage from bikes. Trails are in good shape except the Purple Trail. Commissioner McQueen trims it regularly, but work is needed on the Purple Trail requiring a crew with chainsaws.

Cooke Road, Field 5A – Commissioner Saunders said this field is not leased. The perimeter is overgrown and there are no formal hiking trails, but people are allowed to use the perimeter. At the north end, the boundary markers are not up yet. After the neighbor cuts his hay, Commissioner Saunders will go in the laneway and look. Also, in March or April, she heard good numbers of wood frogs after sunset and also in late morning. She will put this frog watch and a copy of that protocol into the Biota file.

Ms. O'Hare stated there are green frogs and bullfrogs on this Fresh Meadows property.

Ferguson Woods – Chair Heffernon said this area is pretty good. The trails are encroaching more than years ago. Commissioner Arsenault had used a brush machine to clean up the site. *Chair Heffernon and Vice Chair Lathrop will go out there.*

Field 20A, Beseck Meadow, off Powder Hill Road, Durham – See Commissioner Miller's report after item 4.A. below.

Speakers on Mountain Biking: Ms. Lisa Maloney, Vice President of the Central Connecticut chapter of the Northeast Mountain Bike Association, and Mr. Bruce Taylor of the group, asked to address the Commissioners. Their organization was founded in the 1990s and has chapters all over New England.

Ms. Maloney and Mr. Taylor said their chapter heard recently that a mile of illegal biking trail was built at Tyler Mill Preserve in Wallingford. They asked how their organization, NMBA, could assist the Commission. They do work with organizations elsewhere. Commissioner Saunders said the Property Stewards here do cleanup parties, but the Commission does not want workers cutting through habitat. Chair Heffernon said the trail has been put back. Ms. Maloney said their group promotes the use of established trails and they could reinforce that message to users. Commissioners noted that some historic foundations have been taken down—unauthorized—by riders in order to make trail bumps. Commissioner Saunders said the object is to have mountain bikers ride on the blazed trails and not disturbing the surrounding area. Mainly, Commissioner Saunders has seen bikers being respectful of the areas. Also, she mentioned the Parks and Recreation Department’s mountain biking program for youth. Ms. Maloney and Mr. Taylor left the meeting at this time.

3. PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

A. Tyler Mill Preserve

1. Stewards of Tyler Mill

Commissioner Saunders spoke about the loss of three longtime Property Stewards. Commissioner Lendler added that she asked the Mayor to formally acknowledge these persons and their service. Also, Commissioner Saunders commended Commissioner Lendler’s work with the Stewards.

2. Brush mower work

This has not been done yet, but the purchase order remains open.

3. Trail head signage – Is in progress.

4. Kiosk sign correction – Has been made.

5. Yellow Trail – proposal to address wet trail

Two Stewards rerouted this small section of trail, and it fixed the situation.

6. Other reports – None.

B. Fresh Meadows

1. Tour of new plant installations and vine removal

After this meeting was adjourned, Ms. O’Hare led the Commissioners to see the new Pollinator Pathway plantings and native bushes and trees that were planted by the vendor in the Butterfly Meadow from the Commission’s budget. Then the group walked around the glacial erratic across the street.

2. Kiosk content proposal

Ms. O’Hare gave Commissioners the new map of “Fresh Meadows Open Space Property” tonight. Ms. O’Hare recommended that the kiosk needs this new map plus a new plexiglass and a panel that features the native species here. This has been a five-year project. Chair Heffernon asked that the kiosk content should depict the year-round features, rather than to have a changing exhibit. Ms. O’Hare suggested the habitats could be shown on the reverse side of the main kiosk panel. Commissioner Saunders thought of a chronological story board with art and labels/explanations. Ms. O’Hare said she often finds people of different ages using Fresh Meadows areas.

3. Trees by glacial erratic

Mayor Dickinson had received a letter from a citizen who asked for trees by this boulder to be cleared away. Vice Chair Lathrop suggested that some trees could be limbed up and some trees could be removed to give greater visibility for the rock. *The Commissioners agreed, and they will consult with*

Commissioner Arsenault.

4. Name on Town Open Space property signage

Chair Heffernon recommended that the words “Fresh Meadows Property” could be on a separate sign that is added to the main sign here.

5. Graffiti

Ms. O’Hare said graffiti was removed by Parks and Recreation and Public Works personnel.

6. Private memorial request & bench relocation

Ms. O’Hare said the family purchased a new bench, and the Town Council approved it as a donation. The family will have a name plaque installed on it as a memorial, and the new bench will be installed near the boulder in place of the current bench, which the Town will use elsewhere. Public Works personnel will pour the concrete base and install the new bench. *The Conservation Commission needs to choose the location for the new bench, according to Ms. O’Hare.*

C. Ferguson Woods

This was discussed above at Item 2. Property Reports.

D. Other properties

1. Hope Hill Road area – incident – open space boundary markers removed

Ms. O’Hare said the Community Police officer has not returned her call. Chair Heffernon said the students involved should be made to do some task for the Town. Ms. O’Hare said Town Engineering personnel reinstalled all of the Town Open Space Property signs, but Engineering did not put yet up the Wetlands signs.

2. Grand Street Park garden

Chair Heffernon said this is in planning, and the garden will be planted in September.

4. FARMLAND LEASE PROPERTIES PROGRAM

A. Farmland Lease Committee

1. Bid proposals: Fields 5A, 7A, & 8B

Commissioners Lendler and Saunders reported that there are persons interested in leasing these fields, but they do not want the responsibility to do the associated conservation work. Ms. O’Hare proposed that the fields could be let out for bid but without the responsibility of doing the conservation work. She proposed that a vendor could be asked to do specific conservation work. *The Commissioners agreed to proceed on bidding out these fields either with or without the conservation work requirements.*

Commissioner Mike Miller joined the meeting at 7:23 p.m. He gave his report, to be included with Item 2. Property Reports above:

Field 20A, Beseck Meadow (off Powder Hill Road, Durham). Commissioner Miller said the lessee has not mowed or brush worked this field. He called the lessee today and left a message. He had taken photos showing that: 1) The access road is grown in with bamboo. 2) The access itself is grown over. 3) A neighbor farther in (at the south side rear house) is putting in a pool and took down a section of the Town fence. In addition, that neighbor built a road that meets the Town access road. So he believes the neighbor is using the area for access and staging of materials. Chair Heffernon noted that a prior owner there was likely using the Town access road for his project. Ms. O’Hare believes that the owner is not building on Town property, but it is not acceptable. *Chair Heffernon instructed Ms. O’Hare to call or write to the owner “to cease the trespass use of Town property.”* Also, Ms. O’Hare told the Commission that it is written in the Field 20A lease that the

lessee must cut the access road. *Ms. O'Hare asked Commissioner Miller to see if the lease shows a deadline to mow Field 20A and the access road plus the bamboo there.*

Commissioner McQueen left the meeting at 7:38 p.m.

2. Bid waiver: Field 18A, 995C East Center Street

Ms. O'Hare said this Field 18A lease is not being renewed with the current lessee. A new lessee is interested in leasing it for pasture and hay. Commissioner Saunders reported that other properties owned by the prospective lessee appear to be well managed. *The Committee will issue the appropriate bid paperwork.*

3. Bid to be awarded: Fields 4A, 19A, & 4C

A farmer's bid for these fields is being processed.

B. RFQ Autumn olive tree removal – Field 4C, Whirlwind Hill Rd./Scard Rd.

Ms. O'Hare said she believes that the bid farmer for this Field 4C (at 4.A.3. above) might take down the Autumn olive trees.

C. Field 7A, Northford Rd. – hunter parking proposal & vehicle trespass issue

Ms. O'Hare said the parking area is at the top in the Right-Of-Way. Commissioner Saunders said a large tree fell about half-way down the hill. *Commissioners agreed to leave it there, as it is.*

5. BUDGET FY 20-21

Ms. O'Hare reported that the Town Council removed \$500 from the Commission's Professional Services budget line, so \$5,500 remains available this fiscal year.

6. PUBLIC EVENTS – History Hike in Tyler Mill Preserve – June 2021

Commissioner Saunders' plan for this History Hike is now set for next year.

7. REPORTS/CORRESPONDENCE

A. CFPA magazine, CT Woodlands, Summer 2020 was received.

B. DEEP magazine, CT Wildlife, Mar.-Apr. 2020 was received.

8. NEXT MEETING – August 13, 2020

9. ADJOURNMENT

Motion by Commissioner Lendler to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Vice Chair Lathrop, and approved by Vice Chair Lathrop and Commissioners Lendler, Miller, Saunders, Sammis and Chair Heffernon.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:45 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen L. Burns, Recording Secretary