

CONSERVATION COMMISSION

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TOWN HALL

238 Danbury Road

Wilton, Connecticut 06897

**WILTON CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MINUTES**

April 3, 2013 – 7:30 P.M.

TOWN HALL ANNEX - MEETING ROOM "A"

Present: Dan Berg (Chair), Kristen Begor, Donna Merrill, Patrice Gillespie, Frank Simone, Susan DiLoreto

Also Present: Patricia Sesto, Director, Environmental Affairs, Mike Conklin, Environmental Analyst, Liz Larkin, Recording Secretary

- I. CALL TO ORDER – Mr. Berg called the meeting to order at 7:28 p.m.
- II. Open Space Discussion with Pat Sesto

Ms. Sesto was invited to attend the meeting to review the town's Open Space acquisition process and background with the Commission. She described the three types of acquisitions: fee purchase, conservation easement, and Public Act 490.

There are two types of fee purchases: market value or bargain sale. She described that in 1999, Belknap was purchased outright at full market value which provides the seller with no option to add conditions. A bargain sale would mean that the town purchases the property under market value but would have some conditions and restrictions based on the seller's wishes. Ms. Sesto confirmed that Lion's Fields was purchased at market rate so the deed does not restrict what direction the town will take with the use of the land.

Ms. Sesto described the second option, which is a conservation easement, as being used quite often in conjunction with the Wilton Land Trust. The Land Trust Mission is to protect land from being developed in perpetuity. Ms. Sesto explained how this is useful in that the land trust relies on donations and has the reputation for protecting open space. When an easement is put in place, the vision of the parcel is always discussed so that all parties are involved with the decisions that are made in relation to the land. The easement holders do not have responsibility to maintain it, and the public is typically allowed access in designated areas.

Ms. Sesto described the third option, Public Act 490, which is not permanent, but provides tax relief for farming land. Prior to Public Act 490, farmers who had land were subject to full property taxes based on the number of lots they could support. Public Act 490 ensures that farmers can pay 10% of the typical

taxes so they can sustain their farms for ten years. In order to be part of Public Act 490, the property must appear on the Open Space Plan for the town.

Ms. Sesto reviewed a map of Wilton from the 1996 Plan of Conservation and Development where the land that was considered to be of interest of open space was marked. These landowners were contacted at that time to let them know there is an option to keep their property undeveloped in perpetuity.

Ms. Sesto reviewed the Offinger's Baseline Documentation Report as an example of the documentation that is required for each property. She confirmed that the current property conditions are very important to document. In the Offinger case, there is an easement where the property owner retains certain rights. Ms. Sesto stressed how important it is to understand the long-range plan of the property to avoid any issues in the future. She explained that the Offingers just recently cut trees and will expand their agricultural crop of fresh cut flowers, without the town's approval so she is following up with them to get everything in writing as the town has a right to know of these changes.

Ms. Sesto talked about the length of time it takes for one of these deals to take place. When open space becomes available, the timeframe to purchase the parcel is 4 – 5 months as there is a requirement to be reviewed by the Board of Selectman and the Board of Finance.

III. EXECUTIVE SESSION – Confidential Information was provided to the commission by Ms. Sesto about a current open space acquisition that is taking place. This information is not shared with the public.

IV. **Regional Projects**

1. Norwalk River Valley Trail

Ms. Sesto confirmed that the Wilton Loop East has been flagged by the Professional Trail Builders. McChord Engineering has offered to design the boardwalk. She stated that a 1.2 million dollar grant is being funded for this project. This will also allow for a connection to Broad Axe Lane near the commuter lot. The hope is that this 8 mile section of the trail will be completed by summer of 2014.

Ms. Sesto confirmed that there are three easements that need to be put in place for this section including a remote section from the Rolling Hills Country Club property.

V. INLAND WETLAND REFERRALS

A. WET#2166(S) ASML – 77 Danbury Road – widening of the Norwalk River and relocation of the existing pedestrian bridge

Mr. Conklin reviewed the proposed plans with the commissioners. He noted that the most important piece for this commission would be the sediment and erosion control

measures. The commission agreed that precautions must be taken to complete the work during the dry season. The commissioners also stated that the elm tree should be protected.

VI. PLANNING and ZONING REFFERALS - None

VII. ONGOING BUSINESS

B. Parks

Mr. Conklin confirmed that a new sign was created for the Cherry Lane Park entrance. He stated that the tree work is completed from Hurricane Sandy and that Chip-Away did a great job.

Mr. Berg confirmed he is working to rehabilitate the Lions Field Trail parallel to the Norwalk River.

Park of the Month – Mr. Conklin stated he will schedule a walk in Bradley Park in the next few weeks. He also confirmed that he created an Arboretum Trail a few years ago at this location.

B. Work with other Commissions/Committees

Tree/Bench Committee –

Ms. Begor reported that last year's Garden Club calendar photo contest was a success in that they were able to use the proceeds to restore the greenhouse at Comstock. She stated they had 73 entries from residents aged 13 years to 93 years old. Ms. Begor confirmed that Alice Levin and Liz Craig will run the contest again this year. It was suggested that we invite the public on our park walks to take photos for this purpose. The commission agreed that these walks should take place during the week, as well as weekends so that more people would have a chance to attend based on their schedules.

Ms. DiLoreto confirmed that the Go Green Festival is taking place on May 5th from 11:00am to 4:00pm in Wilton Center. In addition, the Tree Festival will be held on May 11th. She confirmed that maintenance agreements are being obtained by land owners in the center where trees have been donated. Mr. Berg and Ms. Gillespie confirmed they would cover the Conservation table at the Tree Festival.

Deer Committee –

Ms. Merrill stated that the committee is lamenting on a poor hunting season. She noted that the committee was very appreciative of Mr. Berg's article he is placing in the Spring Newsletter.

Energy Committee –

Ms. Gillespie confirmed that the committee is still working on the CT-PACE Clean Energy Program. She stated that Wilton is officially becoming a clean energy town. Ms. Begor suggested that proceeds be put back into town organizations.

Go Green Committee –

Ms. Gillespie offered to complete the Go Green Booth Application on behalf of the Conservation Commission. Mr. Berg confirmed he has a 10ft. x 10ft. tent that can be used for this event. Ms. Merrill and Ms. DiLoreto stated they would be available for the table. Ms. Begor stated that she may be able to attend towards the end as well. Ms. Begor also suggested that materials are provided as handouts and that we publicize the monthly park walks at this event.

Land Trust –

Ms. Merrill confirmed that the annual meeting was held, and reported on at the last meeting. Nothing new to report.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

Spring Newsletter – Ms. Larkin confirmed there are two more pieces to receive prior to sending the newsletter out to the graphic designer but that the first draft should be done shortly.

A discussion ensued about emailing the newsletter. Mr. Conklin confirmed that part of the commission's responsibility is to have public outreach so the mailing should be done for all residents. The town does not keep email addresses for residents, so this would not get out in the way that it does through the mail.

Town-wide Clean-Up Day Update – Mr. Conklin confirmed that he is in good shape for the clean-up day and stated he hoped to see everyone there on Saturday.

IX. LIAISON REPORT

Mr. Berg confirmed that no conservation related items were heard at either Planning and Zoning and Inland Wetlands Meetings in March so he has nothing to report.

Ms. DiLoreto is the liaison for April.

X. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – 3/6/13 –

Ms. DiLoreto MOVED to APPROVE the meeting minutes as drafted, SECONDED by Ms. Begor, and CARRIED 6-o-o.

XI. ADJOURN – Mr. Berg MOVED to adjourn at 10:20pm, SECONDED by Ms. DiLoreto, and CARRIED 6-o-o.

Next meeting will be May 1, 2013.

Respectfully submitted,
Liz Larkin
Secretary, Environmental Affairs

DRAFT