

CONSERVATION COMMISSION

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TOWN HALL

238 Danbury Road

Wilton, Connecticut 06897

WILTON CONSERVATION COMMISSION

WEDNESDAY June 1, 2016 – 7:30 P.M.

TOWN HALL ANNEX - MEETING ROOM "A"

MINUTES

- I. PRESENT: Dan Berg, Chair, Donna Merrill, Jackie Algon, Frank Simone, Jade Hobson
- II. ALSO PRESENT: Mike Conklin, Director of Environmental Affairs; Liz Larkin, Secretary, Environmental Affairs; Mary Ellen Lemay, Fairfield County Regional Conservation Partnership
- III. ABSENT: Susan DiLoreto & Colleen O'Brien (notified of intended absences)
- IV. CALL TO ORDER – Mr. Berg called the meeting to order at 7:36 pm.
- V. Fairfield County Regional Conservation Partnership (FCRCP) Presentation by Mary Ellen Lemay

Ms. Lemay introduced herself as the coordinator of the FCRCP taking over from Ms. Merrill about three years ago. She explained the FCRCP is a non-profit which consists of members from 24 towns. It is an informal partnership with a goal to cooperate and collaborate with each of the towns. She confirmed there are currently 44 partnerships in New England.

Ms. Lemay presented a PowerPoint Report of the FCRCP efforts.

VI. INLAND WETLAND REFERRALS

A. WET#2394(S) LTWJ, LLC – Cannon Road – proposed 8-lot subdivision

Mr. Conklin displayed the subdivision plans and noted that two stone walls are being removed or relocated in some parts. He suggested requesting they utilize the stones already on the site for the relocation of the wall. The commission noted that the main driveway will be shared with very short driveways to each home site, which is a win with less impervious surface than most modern developments. Mr. Berg stated this seems like a compact development with one acre lots. Mr. Conklin agreed and stated this is considered low impact development with the inclusion of stormwater infiltration systems and overall is a benefit to the ecosystem preserving 45 acres as Conservation land. Ms. Merrill noted that they could have requested more lots and disturbance based on the size of the parcel. Mr. Berg added that nothing is requested inside the buffer area except

for a pervious patio.

The commission agreed the comments should include that stone walls should be preserved to the extent possible and to cut as few significant trees as possible.

VII. PLANNING AND ZONING REFERRALS - None

VIII. ONGOING BUSINESS

- A. Parks Reports** – Mr. Conklin confirmed Ms. Merrill and Ms. DiLoreto have produced a plan to address the north end of Horseshoe Pond.

Mr. Conklin also confirmed he is working with Bolton Landscapes to remove the poor quality soil and road sand and install boulders, plantings, and an irrigation system. Mr. Lavaty, a neighbor to the pond, has agreed to allow Mr. Lapnow to use an extension cord from his home to power the irrigation system. Mr. Lapnow has generously offered to pay the excess electric bill in cash on a monthly basis over the summer months. Ms. Merrill added that native grasses and Huckleberries will be planted next week.

B. Conservation Activity Log Updates

Quarry Head Trail Consolidation – Ms. Merrill confirmed Dave Francefort has scheduled the trail re-routing to take place on June 11th and June 25th so she is soliciting 25 volunteers to work 80 – 100 man hours. She described the work days will include a 5 minute tool safety lesson and a 10 minute benching demonstration. Ms. Merrill asked Mr. Conklin if an agreement should be in place for Dave Francefort to use a chainsaw to remove one small tree. Mr. Conklin stated he has no issue with Mr. Francefort using a chainsaw to remove this tree.

The logistics were discussed to obtain a good working group. The Commission will reach out to those who signed up for walks and talks that indicated they are interested in volunteering. Mr. Conklin has his own list of residents that have contacted him for opportunities that he will contact. Ms. Merrill agreed that she would write up a paragraph for distribution. Water and pizza will be provided to all volunteers. Work gloves will be available, and it was decided that signs should be hung at Schenck's Island and Quarry Head. Mr. Berg confirmed he will handle the social media release. The Wilton Y was discussed as another area where a sign could be posted to publicize the work day.

Horseshoe Pond Long-Term Management Plan – Discussed previously.

Park Walks/Talks – Ms. Algon confirmed the next walk is being held on June 12th at 1:00pm. The event will entail a tree identification walk in the Center with Kate Throckmorton, Chair of the Wilton Tree Committee.

Carry In/Carry Out Initiative – No update.

GIS Trail Maps for Walkers Guide – No update. This item will be removed from the log until further notice.

C. Work with other Commissions/Committees

- i. Tree Committee – Ms. Algon noted the Arbor Day Celebration included a tree planted in honor of Carol Russell, the chosen Tree Steward for the year. She also added that one tree was planted at Allen’s Meadows in honor of Kristen Begor which replaces the American Beech that died.
- ii. Deer Committee – Ms. Merrill stated the committee is gearing up for the upcoming hunting season.
- iii. Land Trust – Ms. Merrill stated the Land Trust is working to obtain an easement on Alice Levin’s property and also on four acres off Whipstick Road.

D. Regional Projects

- i. Fairfield County Regional Conservation Partnership – Ms. Merrill noted that the Gunderson Property, which was discussed under the Inland Wetland Referrals, is a focal area for this group as it ranks at the top for habitat and climate change.

IX. NEW BUSINESS

A. Meadow Management – Mr. Conklin stated that he is trying to manage our meadows in the most economical way. He confirmed Sackett Preserve and Belknap Preserve are currently mowed two times per year. He advised that doing the minimum is causing a shift from grasses and meadow plants to vines. He added that Sackett is full of poison ivy and wild grape which is taking over. He has considered more frequent mowing but in speaking with Jeff Lapnow at Bolton Landscape, he realized more mowing may not be the best solution since it may promote vine root growth. Mr. Lapnow recommends using a pesticide applicator to apply herbicides to specific target plants.

Mr. Conklin stated this targeted application process was completed on the Granite Drive Open Space. The property is swampy and special herbicide treatments were used to control invasives. The area did very well after this treatment so Mr. Conklin asked the commission if they would agree to this plan. This will allow the important pollinators to remain. Ms. Algon and Ms. Merrill agreed that this process will be more effective than mowing but will need strict supervision. Ms. Merrill asked if there was a timeframe for this approval. Mr. Conklin responded that it will be ongoing and will be done by a licensed professional.

Mr. Simone asked what would happen if we continued to address the invasives by mowing two times per year. Mr. Conklin responded that he is simply working to find the best management approach that would be cost effective. Ms. Algon added that these invasives could spread with mowing and it is best to have them treated. Ms. Merrill added that new plantings or native seed bed will take over. Mr. Conklin suggested that ferns are relocated into the treated areas. Ms. Hobson stated that her meadow has very interconnected roots and it is difficult to remove plants and drill down to specific plants only. Mr. Conklin responded that the spraying will start with certain plants in certain areas.

Mr. Simone asked if there was money in the budget to cover the expense and Mr.

Conklin responded we have money in the budget and no fundraising will be required. Mr. Simone asked Mr. Conklin what benefit a meadow brings. Mr. Conklin stated it is good for habitat and education for residents. Mr. Simone confirmed the commission should promote meadows in town managed properties.

Mr. Berg MOVED to APPROVE the spot treatment of invasives with herbicides in Belknap, Sackett and Schenck's Island, SECONDED by Mr. Simone and CARRIED 5-0-0.

Mr. Conklin agreed to meet with Ms. Hobson at a meadow to discuss other potential options in the near future.

- B. Schenck's Island Committee** – Mr. Conklin confirmed that the Town has partnered with the Land Trust on the management of Schenck's Island since 2003 but this agreement is ending in December of this year. As such, he suggested starting a steering committee to evaluate the uses of the park going forward. He noted that the park is in a floodway so there are limitations on what would be allowed there. He added the park has been under 3 – 4 ft. of water during flood events. Mr. Conklin addressed rumors of building a skating rink, dog park, or other large buildings as these would not be allowed in the floodway.

Mr. Conklin stated the First Selectman would like an area set aside for events and any improvements would be paid for through private funding. Ms. Merrill asked who would create the vision so the intent is not high-jacked. Mr. Conklin confirmed that he and the Board of Selectmen have a vetting process. Ms. Merrill suggested that there is a vision and coherence to the approach. Mr. Berg stated that this is the commission's opportunity to have a say in what eventually happens at Schenck's so he thinks a committee, under this commission would be appropriate. The commissioners agreed that one or two Conservation Commissioners should be appointed to the group. The commissioners who will be recommended for this committee will be tabled until the next meeting in July as there were two absent commissioners.

Mr. Berg MOVED to CREATE a Schenck's Island Management Committee, SECONDED by Mr. Simone and CARRIED 5-0-0.

- C. Deer Management Nomination** – Mr. Conklin reported that the Deer Committee has had a vacancy for some time and a resident and hunter, Ben Couch, has expressed interest in becoming a member. Mr. Conklin confirmed Mr. Couch has hunted with Mike Russnok, Chair of the Committee, and has attended meetings to see how the meetings are held. Mr. Conklin has also interviewed the candidate and offered his recommendation to the Commission.

Ms. Merrill MOVED to NOMINATE Ben Couch for the Deer Committee vacancy, SECONDED by Ms. Algon and CARRIED 5-0-0.

- D. Liaison Schedule** – This item was tabled until we have all members present to discuss.
- E. Park Assignments** – This item was tabled until we have all members present to discuss.
- F. Set-Aside Assignments** – This item was tabled until we have all members present to discuss.

X. LIAISON REPORT

Ms. Merrill confirmed she attended an Inland Wetland Meeting where the 3-level parking garage was heard for the ASML property at 77 Danbury Road. She stated it was interesting as the applicant team seemed to have their plans buttoned up nicely and the third party consultant hired by the town had plenty of constructive criticism. She noted that the biologist that spoke for the applicant confirmed there is no habitat loss as the site is already urbanized.

Mr. Simone is the liaison for the month of June. Ms. Larkin confirmed that the ASML hearing continues on June 9, 2016 so this will be a meeting he should attend.

XI. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – 5/4/16

Ms. Algon MOVED to APPROVE the meeting minutes, SECONDED by Ms. Hobson, and CARRIED 5-0-0.

XII. ADJOURN – Mr. Berg MOVED to adjourn at 10:10pm, SECONDED by Ms. Merrill, and CARRIED 5-0-0.

Next meeting will be July 6, 2016.

Respectfully submitted,
Liz Larkin, Secretary, Environmental Affairs