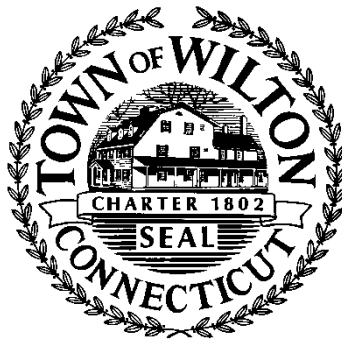


CONSERVATION COMMISSION

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TOWN HALL

238 Danbury Road

Wilton, Connecticut 06897

WILTON CONSERVATION COMMISSION

WEDNESDAY July 7, 2015 – 7:30 P.M.

TOWN HALL ANNEX - MEETING ROOM "A"

MINUTES

- I. PRESENT: Dan Berg, Chair, Donna Merrill, Jackie Algon, Susan DiLoreto, Frank Simone
- II. ALSO PRESENT: Mike Conklin, Environmental Analyst; Liz Larkin, Secretary, Environmental Affairs; Mike Russnok, Chair of Deer Committee
- III. CALL TO ORDER – Mr. Berg called the meeting to order at 7:36pm.
- IV. 2015 Deer Hunt Plan with Mike Russnok

Mr. Russnok provided a presentation handout describing the history of the program, including a summary of the past three year's harvest. He noted that there is a vacancy on the committee if anyone knows anyone that may be interested in joining. Ms. DiLoreto suggested Greg Wheeler who is active in town. Ms. Merrill noted that she is the liaison for the Conservation Commission on the Deer Committee and her focus is the conservation aspect of deer management.

Mr. Russnok wanted to provide the details of past seasons to gain support from the commissioners who voted at the last meeting to conditionally approve the 2015 hunt plan on town owned properties. Mr. Russnok stated that he is the only deer hunter on the committee, and he is fairly new to hunting. Mr. Simone asked how many deer he harvested this past season. Mr. Russnok confirmed he got four in 2013 and three in 2014 for which he is proud.

Mr. Simone asked if the hunters are concentrating more on the females. Mr. Russnok explained that the females are what the committee asks them to harvest. He indicated that each female produces two babies per year so when you harvest a female, it limits population growth. Mr. Russnok noted that he had a female in his hunting area that had two babies and he decided it would be unethical to remove the mother as the babies would not survive. He stated that hunters need to remain ethical, and they would not allow a hunter into the program that was not on board with skipping on a trophy buck.

Mr. Berg stated that he sees the need for the hunt and asked if the hunters ever encounter opposition while in the field. Mr. Russnok confirmed that they do and they are teaching the hunters how to respond properly. Mr. Russnok confirmed there was a group formed last year called Friends of Gregg when this property was added to the list. The group was adamant that the Land Trust property not be closed to the public. A meeting was held at town hall to discuss the need for the park to be closed and a

concession was made to reduce the timeframe of the closing. Mr. Russnok added that there are laws that prevent hunter harassment and one of the hunters is a Wilton Police Officer who handles all of the hunt related calls.

Mr. Russnok confirmed the DEEP came and spoke to the hunters two years ago about the use of mechanical feeders to attract the deer and provide the means to pattern their behavior. Mr. Russnok explained that the hunters purchased their own feeders and the town supplemented with a limited amount of corn to put in the feeders. He is not certain this will continue for 2015. The problem with the corn is that it is not desirable to the deer until the acorns are all gone.

Ms. Algon asked which implement is more widely used with the controlled hunt. Mr. Russnok noted that no firearm may be used when there is any structure within 500 feet so most hunters utilize bows. He then described the different trajectories for the different types of implements.

Mr. Russnok then explained the process where hunters are provided with four doe tags, and once those are harvested, they receive a buck tag. He reiterated that hunters must be amenable to passing on the bucks until they earn the tag. Many of the hunters express the wish to get bucks and when this happens, they are not allowed in the program. He added that all hunters that come through the program are put through a proficiency test and background check with our police department.

Mr. Russnok explained that this year the committee has decided not to do the homeowner match as in years past as most of the property owners that wanted a hunter have one that comes back every year. He indicated that they did some marketing last year and made 19 new matches. Some of the property owners that have requested hunters have land that is not conducive for hunting as they have deer fence, or no trees to place a stand as examples.

Ms. Algon asked if hunting is allowed on Sundays. Mr. Russnok responded that the law recently changed where Sunday hunting is allowed. This law takes effect in the beginning of October whereas the hunting season is September 15th through January 31st. Mr. Russnok explained there are two connecting properties, Sackett Preserve and Van Haelewyn-Richards Preserve that will not be open to hunting on Sundays due to the popularity of the park. In addition, no hunting is allowed for the 4-day Thanksgiving weekend, Christmas Eve and Christmas Day, except for Wren's Thicket which does not have public trails.

Mr. Berg asked if the hunters can access state land for hunting. Mr. Russnok confirmed that this is not allowed.

A discussion ensued relating to the reporting of deer harvested and the state's role in this process. Mr. Russnok noted that not all hunters can check their deer through the town's check station due to the hours they are open. Ms. DiLoreto stated that the surrounding towns should work together to get the most accurate information possible. Mr. Russnok noted that the state has still not released accurate numbers from last year's hunting season which ended in January.

Mr. Russnok confirmed the Diversion parcel, Bradley Park, Cherry Lane Park, and Charter Oak will not be hunted due to low deer counts. Mr. Simone, who lives in the area of Charter Oak, asked about the hunter from last year as he never saw anyone. Mr. Russnok explained that the hunter assigned to that property went out and found two existing stands in close proximity so it was not hunted through the town's program. He added that the neighbors may have a private agreement with a hunter already.

Mr. Simone and the commission thanked Mr. Russnok for his informative presentation and clarity of the process to help the commission to make an educated decision.

Mr. Berg MOVED to APPROVE the 2015 Hunt Plan as amended, SECONDED by Mr. Simone and CARRIED 5-0-0.

V. INLAND WETLAND REFERRALS - None

VI. PLANNING AND ZONING REFERRALS - None

VII. ONGOING BUSINESS

A. Parks Reports – Ms. Merrill asked Mr. Conklin if he was aware of work being started at Quarry Head where the yellow trail was eroding. Mr. Conklin was not aware this work had started but noted that he has a new volunteer willing to help out with this property. Mr. Conklin also confirmed Terri Goodwin has gifted the town funding to get the driveway paved. He is looking to schedule this work with American Pavement as soon as they are available. Ms. Merrill stated that each year there is a picnic lunch with Terri Goodwin and some of her friends. She volunteered to arrange for this picnic again this year.

Mr. Conklin confirmed the scheduled tree work was completed at Horseshoe Pond. Mr. Simone noted that the pond is currently looking very good with much less lily pads. Mr. Berg stated he saw some positive feedback on social media regarding the cleanup of the pond. Mr. Conklin confirmed the Marley's event to benefit the pond that was held on June 8th was a success. Ms. DiLoreto asked that something be put into writing about the legality of fund raising for a town project.

Mr. Conklin noted that he has been working with the Wilton Land Conservation Trust on the management of Schenck's Island. The town and the Land Trust share the stewardship of this park.

Ms. Algon stated that the Conservation Committee of the Wilton Garden Club will be holding Conservation related movie showings at the Gilbert & Bennett site in north Wilton. She asked if the Conservation Commission would like to partner with the Garden Club for these events. The commission agreed that this would be something we could co-sponsor.

Ms. Algon suggested a Sunday walk at Sackett Preserve in the fall now that we know the hunting schedule. The tentative date for this walk was set for September 27th and Ms. Merrill indicated she can most likely lead this walk.

Ms. Algon stated that the next talk will be with the Pesticide Free New Canaan Group. Mr. Conklin noted that he attended a recent talk at town hall from this group and he was concerned that many of the statements made were not based on science, but emotion. Ms. Algon stated that she would attempt to find someone from UCONN to provide a talk instead.

Mr. Conklin stated that he met with Harbor Watch, a group out of Westport that historically tested the waters of the Norwalk River in Wilton. He confirmed that the town can contact them if there are any concerns about water quality.

The commission briefly discussed the need for the bi-annual newsletter in paper format. Mr. Simone noted that many people enjoy receiving the newsletter and he thinks we should continue. This item will be added to the next agenda for a longer discussion.

B. Conservation Activity Log Updates

Quarry Head Trail Consolidation – The commission skipped this item as it was previously discussed under parks.

Horseshoe Pond Long-Term Management Plan – The commission skipped this item as it was previously discussed under parks.

Park Walks – The commission skipped this item as it was previously discussed under parks.

Carry In/Carry Out Initiative – It was decided that Schenck's Island will be the pilot for this program. Mr. Berg stated he would look at signs and send ideas to Mr. Conklin for discussion.

GIS Trail Maps for Walkers Guide – Mr. Berg noted that he would visit Mr. Conklin during office hours to address this item.

C. Work with other Commissions/Committees

- i. **Tree Committee** – Ms. DiLoreto stated the committee has adopted a watering plan and some trees that did not survive are being replaced.
- ii. **Deer Committee** – The commission skipped this item as it was previously discussed with Mr. Russnok.
- iii. **Land Trust** – Ms. Merrill stated there was no meeting but there was a recent work day at Schencks Island that went well.

Mr. Berg asked about the Keiser Property walking trails. Ms. Merrill stated there are trails along the perimeter.

D. Regional Projects

- i. **Fairfield County Regional Conservation Partnership** – Ms. Merrill noted the group is currently active with outreach.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

- A. Kent Pond** – Ms. Algon noted that Kent Pond is becoming invaded with

phragmites and asked what the commission can do. Mr. Conklin responded that perhaps this can be the next project to work on after the Horseshoe Pond plan is completed.

IX. LIAISON REPORT

Mr. Simone reported that he attending a Wetlands meeting and a Planning and Zoning meeting in June. He stated he was impressed with the way the commission was vested by the Conservation Memo we submitted in response to the referral. He noted Planning and Zoning was more difficult as they were discussing the turf field which is controversial. He added that the Wilton Youth Football group does not own the property.

Ms. Algon is the liaison for July.

X. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – 6/3/15

Mr. Simone MOVED to APPROVE the meeting minutes as drafted, SECONDED by Ms. Merrill, and CARRIED 4-0-1 with Mr. Berg abstaining as he was absent.

XI. ADJOURN – Mr. Berg MOVED to adjourn at 9:34pm, SECONDED by Ms. Algon, and CARRIED 5-0-0.

Next meeting will be September 2, 2015.

Respectfully submitted, Liz Larkin, Secretary, Environmental Affairs