

## **CONSERVATION COMMISSION MINUTES**

### **Regular Meeting**

March 28, 2023 at 7:00 pm

Meeting Room 3, Municipal Center, 3 Primrose Street, Newtown, CT

**These minutes are subject to approval by the Conservation Commission**

Present: Holly Kocet, Michael Ablondi, Mark Lurie, Will Drew, John Fung

Staff: Rob Sibley, Deputy Director of Land Use, Dawn Fried, Clerk

Ms. Kocet opened the meeting at 7:00 p.m.

### **APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Mr. Lurie moved to approve the minutes of January 10, 2023. Mr. Ablondi seconded. All in favor. The minutes from January 10, 2023 were approved. Mr. Drew abstained.

### **DIRECTOR'S REPORT**

#### Open Space

Mr. Sibley gave an update of the three open space (OS) parcels previously approved by the Conservation Commission (CC). Mr. Sibley stated the three parcels have gone through the P&Z process and are currently in front of the Board of Selectmen (BOS) for final approval.

Mr. Sibley gave a brief overview of the open space process. After the CC receives an offer, donation or recommendation the CC rates the parcel and decides whether or not they would like to acquire it. The OS parcel then goes to the P&Z Commission as a C.G.S. §8-24 Referral. After the P&Z approves the parcel it moves forward to the BOS for final approval. As long as the parcel's value is under \$20,000 the BOS can accept the donation or recommendation to purchase. From there the properties are transferred and recorded with the Town.

Mr. Sibley stated the final transfer of the Riverside OS donation is being recorded.

Mr. Sibley reviewed the Scout projects currently being proposed on OS properties.

- Bridge over Meeker Brook.
- Invasive removal along Deep Brook
- Trail marking project for equestrians

The Commission congratulated Mr. Sibley on his promotion to Newtown's Director of Planning. Mr. Sibley stated he is stepping away from the open space process but will stay on board until the new Deputy Director is hired.

#### POCD

Mr. Sibley gave an overview of the POCD. He explained the POCD is a statutory requirement that every municipality has to complete every ten years or so. It is a comprehensive plan for the Town's development and conservation. Newtown's last major POCD revision was in 1994. Other updates over the years have been minor. Mr. Sibley stated the CC will be asked to give their input. He suggested creating a subcommittee or hold special sessions to discuss the POCD. Mr. Sibley stated the public sessions will most likely start this fall.

## Pootatuck Watershed Management Draft

Mr. Sibley stated the town of Newtown has acquired a grant along with the Pootatuck Water Association (PWA) and Housatonic Valley Association (HVA). The grant is for raising impaired watercourses. To date the Aspetuck River and the Still River have been completed. Over the next 3 or 4 months the Committee will be looking for input from the Conservation Commission.

## CT Recreational Trail Grant Update

Mr. Sibley stated the Land Use Agency and the Parks and Rec Dept. have applied for a grant to the Jeniam Foundation. The grant will be used for a bench and sign to be placed at the end of the Housatonic Trail, which is located at the end of Town open space on Swamp Road. The vision for this area is to welcome those entering Newtown from other towns and invite them to visit the trails. Eventually this area will be connected with Newtown's trail system. Currently, the Batchelder property, the beginning of the trail, is being remediated and monitored.

## **DISCUSSION AND ACTION ITEMS**

### AI's Trail Corridor Draft Action Plan

Mr. Sibley gave an overview of the AI's Trail Corridor Draft Action Plan. The Commission received a copy of the plan prior to the CC meeting. The plan states "In the fall of 2019, the Newtown Bike and Trail Committee applied for and was awarded a grant of technical assistance from the National Park Service Rivers, Trails, and Conservation Assistance Program (RTCA) to help assess the current state of the trail and to develop an action plan to restore the trail and bring it to its full potential as an outdoor recreational asset for the community."

Mr. Sibley stated several areas of AI's Trail traverses through Town open space. Mr. Sibley asked the Commission if they had a chance to review the plan and do they have any questions. Mr. Sibley also asked whether there is an interest in improving the trails, participating in community activities, or including the plan in the POCD. Ms. Kocet stated she looked at the plan briefly and requested more time to review. Mr. Sibley stated the plan should be finalized soon.

### Educating the public on invasive plants using QR codes.

Mr. Fung will stop by the library this week and make copies of the QR codes. Mr. Fung will send the PDF to the Commission.

### Hometown National Parks Initiative

Ms. Kocet wanted to make the Commission aware of the kickoff of the Hometown National Parks Initiative on Saturday, April 29<sup>th</sup>. It's co-sponsored by the Pootatuck Watershed Association and Protect our Pollinators. It's a grassroots approach to conservation to establish gardens and wild areas which will become "parks" in our own backyards. It also encourages use of native plants.

### Planting native plugs on open space

Ms. Kocet asked the Commission if planting "plugs" on open space would be allowed. A plug is a small cup-size plant. Ms. Kocet stated the Pollinator group has been growing plants in their homes. The Commission agreed planting native plants would be beneficial to open space. Ms. Kocet stated it would be for habitat creation.

#### Putting posters in kiosks

Ms. Kocet stated a friend asked her to ask the Commission if she can hang her Pollinator Pathway posters in kiosks. The Commission thought this was a good idea.

#### Lights out for Birds

Ms. Kocet reminded everyone that birds are migrating at this time and lights at night are dangerous. The lights can distract the birds and cause collisions. Please turn your lights off at night.

#### Earth Day

Ms. Kocet stated Earth Day is Saturday, April 22. Ms. Kocet will not be available to participate at the Conservation table. She asked the Commissioners whether they were available. At this time only 2 Commissioners can participate. A decision will be made after all the Commissioners confirm their availability. In the meantime Ms. Kocet will reserve a table.

#### CT Land Conservation Council Environmental Conference

Ms. Kocet attended the CT Land Conservation Council conference last week. She stated it was very informative, had great speakers and she enjoyed meeting people, but hearing about the climate change was depressing.

#### ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Ablondi moved to adjourn the CC meeting. Mr. Drew seconded. All in favor. Meeting adjourned at 7:36 pm.

Respectfully submitted, Dawn Fried