

**CONSERVATION COMMISSION MINUTES**  
**Regular Meeting of October 13, 2020 at 7:00 pm**

*Zoom Information:*  
<https://zoom.us/j/96529511740>  
Call-in Number: 1 929 205 6099  
Meeting ID: 965 2951 1740 #

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

**Present:** Holly Kocet, John Dixon, Mark Boland, and Mark Lurie

**Absent:** Justin Kaiser

**Staff:** Christine O'Neill, substitute clerk

**Public:** Patrick Cushing

Ms. Kocet opened the meeting at 7:04 p.m.

**APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

Mr. Dixon moved to approve the minutes of September 22, 2020. Mr. Boland seconded. All in favor. The minutes from September 22, 2020 were approved.

**PUBLIC PARTICIPATION**

Patrick Cushing of 9 Turkey Roost Road, Newtown, CT presented a slideshow regarding Open Space access at Turkey Ridge. He displayed a site plan of the Turkey Ridge conservation subdivision and called attention to the access corridor to the Open Space. Next, he shared some photos of what the area actually looks like - unfortunately, the access is blocked by fallen trees and overgrown vegetation. Mr. Cushing explained he would like to work with his neighbors to clear the corridor so that they access the Open Space.

Mr. Lurie and Ms. Kocet asked for some clarification on the map. Ms. Kocet commented that the access corridor almost looks to be part of the nearest homeowner's backyard. She wondered if the resident is aware that the access corridor abuts their backyard, and Mr. Cushing commented that he has not met those neighbors yet.

Mr. Lurie asked about a shaded area on the site plan. Mr. Cushing replied that it is a "buffer zone." At the meetings for approval of the subdivision, Mr. Cushing explained, the developer had indicated that he would leave it wooded, but it has actually been clear cut.

Mr. Boland asked if there was still overgrowth of barberry, which he remembered observing on a former site walk. Mr. Cushing confirmed that a lot is still there. Mr. Boland also asked if the steep slope to the west of the Open Space was a quarry. Mr. Cushing said it is land owned by Mr. D'Addario.

Mr. Lurie wondered what Mr. Cushing's interest is. Mr. Cushing shared that he is a neighbor, and he would simply like to access and enjoy the Open Space for hiking.

Ms. Kocet asked if there are existing trails in the Open Space. Mr. Cushing said that the land was once farmland, so old farm trails and stone walls still exist. Ms. Kocet wondered if he had an interest in removing invasives. Mr. Cushing said he would certainly be interested, though he did not have much expertise.

The Commission agreed that they would like to cooperate with and aid Mr. Cushing in his quest to clear the access to the Open Space. Ms. Kocet suggested that the Commission take a look at the area. Mr. Lurie suggested Saturday, October 17, 2020 at 2 p.m. to meet with Mr. Cushing to review the area. Ms. Kocet will join Mr. Lurie and Mr. Cushing, and Mr. Dixon stated he will likely visit at some other time.

## CORRESPONDENCE

No updates.

## AGENCY REPORTS

### ***Board of Finance***

Mr. Boland said nothing that impacts the Conservation Commission happened during the most recent meeting.

### ***Fairfield Hills Authority***

Mr. Boland mentioned the referendum for the upcoming election regarding residential development on Fairfield Hills campus. Additionally, there is the possibility of a bike park (roughly the same size as the skate park at Dickinson Park) coming to campus behind the Community Center. Mr. Lurie contributed that it would be a "kiddie bike park," with the possibility of adding an adult pump track in the future. The dimensions would likely be 30ft x 30ft. Mr. Boland continued his report, explaining that Parks and Recreation is looking to site a frisbee golf course on campus, much of which would run alongside the walking trails. Mr. Dixon wondered where exactly this would be located. Ms. Kocet also wondered about the increase in traffic that would occur with the potential of residential units. Mr. Lurie said it was odd that Parks and Recreation would try to locate the frisbee golf course alongside walking trails. The Commission decided to keep an eye on the approval process of the project.

### ***Parks and Recreation Commission***

Mr. Dixon said the meeting is occurring tonight.

### ***Planning and Zoning Commission***

The Planning and Zoning Commission has decided to continue with Zoom meetings, Mr. Dixon shared, rather than going back to in-person meetings.

### ***Board of Selectmen***

Ms. Kocet reported that the Board of Selectmen is mostly concerned with filling open positions on Boards and Commissions. There was also an update on the new Police HQ.

### ***Bikes and Trails Committee***

Mr. Lurie said there was nothing to report.

## DISCUSSION AND ACTION ITEMS

### ***High Meadow Wildflower Meadow***

No updates.

### ***Stone Bridge Preserve (Visit 9/27)***

Ms. Kocet and Mr. Boland visited Stone Bridge Preserve on September 27, 2020. Mr. Boland shared that the land has dramatically changed, and he provided the regular Commission clerk, Dawn Fried, with photos which he hoped would be distributed before next meeting. Originally,

the main stand of the property was about 75% oak trees. Another stand was predominantly red maple. That thick canopy of the trees would not allow vegetation to grow on the forest floor. Yet now, it is difficult to walk through the land for all the growing plant life. On the site walk, Mr. Boland noted trees including sassafras, poplar, beech, spruce, tulip, oak, etc. Birds and other animals have started to inhabit the area. The attempt to create habitat for rabbits and plants was highly successful. Ms. Kocet added that there was an abundance of biodiversity. Both Commissioners were amazed by the transformation.

Ms. Kocet and Mr. Boland felt the next step would be to contact biologist Lisa Wahle to determine if Cottontails had inhabited the property.

Ms. Kocet noted that the kiosk had suffered a bit of vandalism.

Mr. Boland suggested referencing the "before" photos on [newtownconservation.org](http://newtownconservation.org). The Commission would like to contact the Newtown Bee to do an article on the transformation.

### ***Native Plant Policy***

No updates.

### ***Conservation Table***

Ms. Kocet shared that she had put up a poster about Monarch butterflies at the table in the Municipal Center, along with a certificate saying that the Commission had sponsored a Monarch habitat in High Meadow.

### ***Website & Kiosks***

Ms. Kocet would like to get the "after" photos from Stone Bridge on the website. Mr. Lurie is working with an app called "Natural Atlas" to see if he can post Newtown's Open Space areas.

### ***Appointment of Commissioners***

Ms. Kocet stated that the two gentlemen who submitted their resumes for consideration, John Fung and Michael Ablondi, may not have necessarily had Conservation Commission as their first choice. Ms. Kocet explained that she would like to interview the candidates to make sure they are truly a good fit for the Commission and want to be here, not just as a "stepping stone." The Commissioners liked the idea of interviewing the candidates. Ms. Kocet will have Ms. Fried contact the candidates to come one at a time for an interview.

### ***Open Space Evaluation***

Ms. Kocet reviewed the Google Form that Mr. Lurie created, and she found it to be very comprehensive. Mr. Lurie and Ms. O'Neill discussed some of the technical obstacles to creating a form, and Ms. O'Neill offered to discuss the best way to make the form accessible to the Commission when she was back in the office. Ms. Kocet wondered if it could be reformatted to save paper. Mr. Lurie said that because it is a form, he has little flexibility with the layout.

### ***Ideas for Summer 2021***

Ms. Kocet proposed the idea of a "Mugwort Pulling Party" where participants would be invited to pull one plant or stay for the whole morning. She hoped this would draw in those who regularly walk at Fairfield Hills, so they could learn to identify this invasive and feel that they are contributing. Mr. Dixon liked the idea and wondered if there would be a catchy way to "market" this event, possibly with a Harry Potter theme.

## **ADJOURNMENT**

Mr. Boland moved to adjourn. Mr. Lurie seconded. All were in favor and the meeting was adjourned at 7:54 p.m.

*Respectfully submitted,  
Christine O'Neill, substitute clerk*

A recording of this meeting is available at the following URL:

<https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1zw6E2GyadKirGQduhObjq8YrwJhKIYdg>