

CONSERVATION COMMISSION MINUTES
Regular Meeting of March 26, 2019 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, Mike Santora, Gail Friedman, Mark Lurie

Staff: Rob Sibley, Deputy Director of Land Use & Planning, and Christine O'Neill, Clerk

Ms. Kocet opened the meeting at 7:06 pm.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES for March 12, 2019

Mr. Santora moved to approve the minutes from March 12, 2019. Ms. Friedman seconded. All were in favor and the minutes from March 12, 2019 were approved.

AGENCY REPORTS

Parks and Rec - Mr. Santora reported that there was nothing having to do with Open Space in the Parks and Recreation minutes.

Inland Wetlands - Ms. Friedman did not have anything to report from the Inland Wetlands Commission.

Board of Selectmen - Ms. Kocet stated that in the Board of Selectmen minutes, a part of Laurel Trail was accepted as Open Space. Mr. Sibley contributed that any parcel that is less than \$20,000 can go right from the Planning and Zoning Commission to the Board of Selectmen.

Bike and Trails - Mr. Lurie shared that the Committee would like to co-locate with the Conservation Commission on Earth Day. They are doing a campaign called Save AI's Trail. They are going to do a trail building/maintenance program (one day event, date TBD) and do some work on the sections of AI's trail near the sewage treatment plant and by I-84. Ms. Kocet pointed out that this will probably include some clearing of invasive plants.

DISCUSSION

High Meadow

Ms. Kocet is waiting to hear back from Carl Samuelson, but she is hoping to get High Meadow mowed this month. Still working on invasives.

Pole Bridge

Mr. Lurie contributed that the Bike & Trails Committee walked the trail two weeks ago. There is renewed interest in redoing Paula Burton's original trail (started in 2015 or so). Mr. Sibley stated that the Conservation Commission gave many approvals that can be used to fill the trail. He suggested comparing the old approvals and to the current state of the land given the storms that have passed through since then. The next step, according to Mr. Lurie, would be to come up with a trails plan. He drew up a trail plan for the Bike & Trails Committee. Ms. Kocet wondered if there was enough interest to invest energy into the trail, and Mr. Lurie replied that it is an ideal beginner mountain biking trail. There is good potential for making relatively flat trails in the Pole Bridge area as well as eliminating barberry. Mr. Lurie specified that he would like to keep the

existing hiking trail free of bikes and create a new trail system that is multi-use (bikes, horses, snow-shoers, etc.).

Director's Report

A homeowner at Eden Hill is looking into potentially improving the Town's Equestrian Easement that connects two pieces of Open Space (this Commission is named as caretaker). Mr. Sibley will look more into this.

A lot of tree damage that happened throughout the winter has resulted in calls to the Land Use Agency regarding trees that fell from Open Space onto private property. Mr. Sibley stated that the Town Attorney says the Town is responsible for this, and that he has received more calls than usual this year. Ms. Friedman asked if this impacted the budget, but Mr. Sibley reported that so far Public Works has been paying for it.

Four Eagle Scouts have approached Mr. Sibley wanting to do trail improvements to Al's Trail on Open Space, specifically along the I-84 underpass, near the sewer plant, and near the Hubbard Sanctuary. Mr. Sibley said that the Bikes & Trails Committee needs to ask the Conservation Commission for permission to work on the Open Space. This request can be made via a memo attached to an email. Mr. Lurie will facilitate this process as the Bikes & Trails liaison.

The Legislative Council accepted an almost 40-acre donation on Robin Hill as Open Space. This brings the number to 128 acres of the original 178 that were set aside as Open Space.

Native Plant Policy

Ms. Kocet and Ms. Friedman have been researching if what is on the New York native plants list is also native to Connecticut. Ms. Kocet plans to use the same format as the existing list. The hope is to get the list on the website soon and to bring it to the Board of Selectmen and Planning and Zoning for approval so that when new development is done on public lands, they would consider it. Ms. Kocet has been distributing flyers for the Pollinator Pathway Kickoff Event, after which the focus will shift to invasives for Earth Day.

Invasive Task Plant Force

Ms. Kocet has spoken with Dan Holmes and identified a few volunteers willing to help. She has also contacted the High School's Environmental Club to see if there is interest in volunteering.

Website

Ms. Kocet updated the list of Commissioners and updated the list of native plants. She has also updated the site with a description of what native plants are.

Mr. Sibley will laminate some of the conservation flyers and will put them up on kiosks. Ms. Kocet commented that signage indicating the Commission is working on invasive management would also be a good idea.

Newtown Earth Day, April 27th

Ms. Kocet said Donna Ellis from UCONN has retired. Ms. Kocet is ordering 25 brochures on backyard invasives as well as fact sheets from the Master Gardeners. Mr. Sibley said he is responsible for tables and chairs, and that the space has been secured. He has a tarp that can be used if the day is windy.

Newtown Pollinator Pathway Kickoff, April 7th

Ms. Kocet distributed brochures to the Commission that had been created for the Newtown Pollinator Pathway. Speakers are lined up for the Kickoff event.

Other business

Ms. Kocet suggested cutting back the July and August schedule to just one Conservation Commission meeting rather than two. July 23rd and August 27th are the meetings that will be retained, and the first meetings of those respective months will be canceled.

ADJOURNMENT

Ms. Friedman moved to adjourn the meeting. Mr. Lurie seconded. All were in favor and the meeting was adjourned at 7:34 pm.

*Respectfully submitted,
Christine O'Neill, Clerk*