



TOWN OF ELLINGTON

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**CONSERVATION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY, FEBRUARY 4, 2020, 7:00 PM
TOWN HALL ANNEX, 57 MAIN STREET, ELLINGTON, CT**

PRESENT: Chairman Rebecca Quarno, Regular Members Sean Dwyer, Robert Zielfelder, Laurie Burstein and James Gage

ABSENT: Vice Chairman David Bidwell, Regular Member George Nickerson and Alternate Ann Harford

STAFF: Lisa Houlihan, Town Planner and Christine Post, Recording Clerk

I. CALL TO ORDER: Chairman Rebecca Quarno called the Conservation Commission meeting to order on February 4, 2020, at 7:00 PM in the Ellington Town Hall Annex, 57 Main Street, Ellington, CT.

II. PUBLIC COMMENTS (On Non-Agenda Items): None

III. ACTIVE BUSINESS:

1. Determination of open space for a 25.6 acre parcel for a two lot subdivision, West Road, APN 037-003-0000, Planned Commercial (PC) Zone, James A. Moser, owner/Everett Skinner IV, applicant.

Ms. Houlihan presented the following background information: The parcel is in the planned commercial zone. The minimum acreage is 3 acres, with a minimum of 300 minimum lot width. The subject parcel is 25.6 acres, and the plan suggests creating two lots each over 12 acres. Barn Yard and Earthlight are working together to develop the parcel comprehensively and the plans include a shared access from Route 83, a shared main interior road, and shared drainage facilities.

In accordance with the Subdivision Regulations (4.18), the commission has found development of land for residential or business use will increase population, intensify use of land, and present the need for open space. Open space may be met via land set aside or fee in lieu of land, equal to 10% of the land area to be divided or 10% of the value of the land to be divided before development.

One prominent factor to consider when contemplating land set-aside or a fee in lieu of land for open space is if there is opportunity to connect to adjacent open space. In this case, there is no adjacent land to connect to and the applicant is requesting a fee in lieu of. Since there is no adjacent open space protected land, it is reasonable to recommend a fee in lieu of.

Everett Skinner VI, Barn Yard, introduced himself and described the 26 acre parcel, and indicated they intend to split the property down the middle with Barn Yard owning the half that is adjacent to their current property and Earthlight taking ownership of the northern half. Mr. Skinner also described the intended uses for the 2 parcels and described the surrounding properties.

Discussion ensued between the commission members, Ms. Houlihan, Mr. Skinner and Mr. Chris Skinner regarding the dimensions of both parcels and the existing buildings, improvements, and various landmarks on the surrounding parcels.

Commissioner Burstein asked about sewer capacity on the parcel. Ms. Houlihan verified there is sewer capacity reserved for commercial and industrial uses. This parcel is in the process of obtaining all the approvals from Water Pollution Control Authority (WPCA) and anticipates there will be no issue receiving same. Ms. Houlihan indicated the detention basin on the map and stated it will be the owner's responsibility to maintain it. Commissioner Zielfelder asked about whether Earthlight would be installing solar panels on their parcel and Ms. Houlihan indicated that is their potential long term plan.

MOVED (GAGE) SECONDED (DWYER) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO RECOMMEND TO PLANNING AND ZONING FEE IN LIEU OF OPEN SPACE FOR A PROPOSED TWO LOT SUBDIVISION OF A 25.6 ACRE PARCEL, WEST ROAD, APN 037-003-0000, PLANNED COMMERCIAL (PC) ZONE, JAMES A. MOSER, OWNER/EVERETT SKINNER IV, APPLICANT.

2. Sustainable Ellington Initiative
 - a. 2.5 Create a Natural Resource and Wildlife Inventory

There was nothing new to report.

- b. 2.7 Provide Education on Water Conservation

There was nothing new to report. Discussion will be tabled until the spring.

3. Update – Ellington Hockanum River Committee: Harford/Nickerson – Leads
 - a. Ad Hoc Ellington Trails Committee – Monthly agenda/minutes

There was nothing new to report.

4. Report - Working Farmland Preservation Program: Gage/Staff – Leads

Ms. Houlihan reported that the Department of Agriculture (DOA) has confirmed that 2 of the farm easements will move forward. They presented an offer to Oakridge Dairy on February 3, 2020, and Oakridge has 45 days to either ask for an extension or to respond. Ms. Houlihan reached out to the DOA regarding financing and was told that generally the local match is 25% of the offer balance after applying federal funds. There will be 2 easements that may close at different times. Chairman Quarno asked about the bond and Ms. Houlihan stated the bond expired. The bond process was reviewed. The DOA recommends waiting to hear from Oakridge before discussing specific dollar amount contributions from the Town of Ellington.

Commissioner Gage wanted to know the acreage, which is collectively around 250 acres. They anticipate that a 3rd easement area currently being restored will be eligible in the future for farmland preservation.

5. Report - Open Space Preservation Program: Gage – Lead

Commissioner Gage passed out a map and asked the commission for support for the Northern Connecticut Land Trust (Land Trust) to ask the Town of Ellington to help fund the purchase of the 114 acre Wraight property for open space preservation. It abuts the state forest, is a wildlife habitat, and contains important watercourses that feed Shenipsit Reservoir. This parcel will also provide an access trail from Webster Road connecting to the whole trail network within Shenipsit State Forest.

Commissioner Gage and Ms. Houlihan had a meeting with Lori Spielman, Ellington First Selectman, at the end of 2018 to see what her thoughts were on whether the town would assist with financing. The Land Trust has negotiated a price to \$265,000.00, 75% of the appraised value, and raised grant money to date totaling the amount of \$168,000.00, leaving \$97,000.00 balance. The Land Trust will use \$7,000.00 from their treasury. The Land Trust would like to approach the Board of Selectmen with the Conservation Commission's support for \$90,000.00. Commissioner Dwyer pointed out this is a very good deal especially in light of the cost of the other properties the commission is currently interested in preserving. Conversation ensued regarding where the parking would likely be placed for trail access and the issue of crossing Charter's Brook. Chairman Quarno asked and was told there are no structures on the property. Commissioner Zielfelder asked about mowing the hay field which Mr. Wraight maintained. Commissioner Gage talked about the pheasant and woodcocks that live in said hay field. Ms. Houlihan asked Commissioner Gage if he thought that the appraisal could be shared with the Board of Selectmen at the time of his request.

Chairman Rebecca Quarno and Commissioner Dwyer asked about the balance in the Open Space Fund and was advised by Ms. Houlihan that the last known balance was over \$750,000.00. There would still be a requirement to have a town meeting.

MOVED (DWYER) SECONDED (ZIELFELDER) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO RECOMMEND THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN ENTER INTO PARTNERSHIP WITH THE NORTHERN CONNECTICUT LAND TRUST FOR PRESERVATION OF OPEN SPACE FOR THE WRAIGHT PROPERTIES ON THE WEST SIDE OF WEBSTER ROAD, GENERALLY 114.4 +/- ACRES, KNOWN AS ASSESSOR PARCEL NUMBERS 164-001-0000, 165-002-0000, AND 165-001-0000, IN THE AMOUNT OF \$90,000 UTILIZING AVAILABLE FUNDS FROM THE OPEN SPACE FUND ACCOUNT. IN SO RECOMMENDING THE COMMISSION FINDS THE PARCELS TO MEET OPEN SPACE PRIORITIES IN THAT IT ABUTS SHENIPSIT STATE FOREST, IS WITHIN ONE OF THE DEPARTMENT OF ENERGY AND ENVIRONMENTAL PROTECTION'S NATURAL DIVERSITY DATABASE, PROVIDES OPPORTUNITY TO INCREASE PASSIVE RECREATION TRAILS WITHIN SHENIPSIT STATE FOREST, AND MEETS RECOMMENDATIONS OF THE PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT.

Conversation ensued that the commissioners will work to gather support for the motion so that residents can supportively attend the presentation to the Board of Selectmen sometime in March. Ms. Houlihan will prepare a packet of information for the presentation.

IV. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS:

1. FY 19-20 Budget Expenditure Update

Ms. Houlihan reported there was another charge of \$37.04 from the Hockanum River Trail Committee which came up at the end of January that had not been approved by the commission in advance of expenditure. She will talk to Commissioner Harford when she is back from Florida about procedure.

Ms. Houlihan reported it is budget season and the official directive from the Board of Finance is to submit zero percent increase proposals with the exception of contractual obligations like salary increases. Ms. Houlihan's suggestion is to carry forward the budget amounts from last year. The Commission agreed to present the same budget for FY 20/21 as last fiscal year's budget.

2. Approval of the January 7, 2020 regular meeting minutes

MOVED (QUARNO) SECONDED (ZIELFELDER) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO APPROVE THE REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF JANUARY 7, 2020 AS WRITTEN.

3. Correspondence: Sustainable CT Materials

Commissioner Dwyer discussed the Sustainable Connecticut matching grant program which is donor based and matched by the State of Connecticut dollar for dollar up to \$50,000.00. The grant program has been streamlined so there's a faster process of receiving grant money.

V. ADJOURNMENT:

MOVED (ZIELFELDER) SECONDED (DWYER) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ADJOURN THE CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEETING AT 7:55 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine Post, Recording Clerk