



STATE OF CONNECTICUT – COUNTY OF TOLLAND
INCORPORATED 1786

TOWN OF ELLINGTON

55 MAIN STREET – PO BOX 187
ELLINGTON, CONNECTICUT 06029-0187
www.ellington-ct.gov

Tel. 860-870-3120 Town Planner's Office Fax. 860-870-3122

CONSERVATION COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES TUESDAY, JANUARY 10, 2023, 7:00 PM

REMOTE ATTENDANCE: ZOOM MEETING

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

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

STAFF: Lisa Houlihan, Town Planner and Nathaniel Trask, Recording Clerk

OTHERS

PRESENT: Valerie Amsel, Ad-Hoc Ellington Trails Committee Liaison

I. CALL TO ORDER: Chairman Rebecca Quarno called the Conservation Commission meeting to order at 7:03 PM.

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

III. ACTIVE BUSINESS:

1. Sustainable CT - Review of Section 3.4 Develop an Open Space Plan and Section 5.3 Develop Agriculture-Friendly Practices.

The Commission talked at the last meeting how to move forward with Sustainable CT. Ms. Houlihan asked First Selectman, Lori Spielman, if a focus group was going to be established to determine if the process would move forward. A focus group will not be established at this point. The Shared Services Committee acknowledged that they haven't established a committee. In speaking with other communities like Coventry and Vernon, Ms. Houlihan said Vernon went through a certification process whereby they hired someone to work part-time to help them complete and submit actions to Sustainable CT. Ms. Houlihan said the Shared Services Committee may possibly talk about implementing a focus group at a later date. Currently, the committee is not looking to obtain certification for the town. Ms. Houlihan noted that if the Planning Department were to complete all the action items under their purview, the town would still not be eligible for Sustainable CT certification without other departments doing the same.

BY CONSENSUS, THE COMMISSION AGREED TO REMOVE THIS ITEM FROM FUTURE AGENDAS, NOTING IT MAY BE ADDED AT A LATER DATE IF THE TOWN ESTABLISHES A SUSTAINABLE ELLINGTON COMMITTEE.

2. Plan of Conservation & Development, Chapter 4 - Conservation Strategies, Natural Resource Preservation.

Ms. Houlihan presented the Commission with Chapter 4 of the Plan of Conservation and Development. The chapter addresses the areas that have changed from the previous plan to the most current plan, as well as conservation initiatives to focus on. Ms. Houlihan provided them with a copy so they can review it and choose areas to focus on. Chairman Quarno asked when the last time the commission touched Chapter 4 and addressed the content within. Ms. Houlihan answered the group focused on some of the open space parcels and grading them for priority last year and Chapter 4, which is the responsibility of the Conservation Commission, was last updated in November of 2019. She said this current plan is the one the Planning Department is working with for the next ten years. The commission will read through the chapter and identify areas where there are questions or updates that may be needed.

Commissioner Dwyer asked if the group should focus on areas the commission has accomplished and figure out a way to input that. Ms. Houlihan said there should be a record kept of the areas that have been accomplished and the commission should work on other initiatives that haven't been accomplished. She added that when the next update for the Plan of Conservation and Development is reviewed, any accomplishments should be acknowledged in the chapter. Commissioner Dwyer asked if there was an additional section in the Plan of Conservation and Development that mentions how goals are going to be accomplished. Ms. Houlihan said there is an implementation chapter that summarizes and identifies the initiatives as ranking "high," "low," and "medium." She clarified that the objective is to pick areas for the commission to focus on for 2023.

The commission members will read Chapter 4 and discuss what they want to initiate in 2023 at the next meeting.

3. Report - Working Farmland Preservation Program.

Ms. Houlihan said the Planning Department is still waiting for Oakridge Dairy to close on their second property. Oakridge Dairy said they are not going to pursue the extra 300 acres of land, so the Planning Department will send out a letter of interest to see if any other farms want to file an application for farmland preservation. Commissioner Gage asked if Oakridge Dairy had completely given up on the land. Ms. Houlihan said that they may come back to it later, but they would have to file a new application. The business did get approval to convert a 15,000 sq. ft. empty barn at 80 Meadowbrook Road into a production and cooler area. There will be three overhead doors at the property for loading. Commissioner Gage mentioned that they could get some funds for the new project from the preservation of the 300 acres, however Ms. Houlihan said they were getting lease money from the methane digester.

4. Report - Open Space Preservation Program.

No new interest currently. The Northern Connecticut Land Trust was working a lot on land in Ellington; however, Commissioner Gage said the Land Trust is currently working in Stafford.

IV. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS:

1. FY 22-23 Budget & Expenditure Update.

The only budget item from last month to this month was for the services of the part-time recording clerk.

2. Approval of the December 13, 2022 regular meeting minutes.

MOVED (GAGE) SECONDED (ZIELFELDER) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO APPROVE THE REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF DECEMBER 13, 2022 AS WRITTEN.

3. Election of officers.

The commission agreed to table the election of officers until next month's meeting so the absent commissioners could vote. Until then, the chairman and vice chairman of the commission will remain the same.

BY CONSENSUS, COMMISSIONERS TABLED ELECTION OF OFFICERS UNTIL NEXT MEETING.

4. Correspondence/Discussion:

- a. Ad Hoc Ellington Trails Committee – Monthly Agenda/Minutes.

Ms. Valerie Amsel, the Ad Hoc Ellington Trails Committee Liaison, addressed the commission. Ms. Amsel said the committee talked about upcoming events at a meeting last week. She indicated that some members of the committee were going out to the trails to check on any storm damage after December's weather. She indicated that many, but not all, issues have already been taken care of. At their next month's meeting, the group will finalize their programs for 2023. The committee is still waiting for money for the Metcalf trail and the Highlands trail has been blazed. Ms. Amsel said the trail maps are now finished with QR codes on all maps, which are located at the trail kiosks. The public can also access the map on their cell phones. Ms. Houlihan said the maps include the locations of emergency markers.

- b. Department of Energy and Environmental Protection Request for Proposals for Recreational Trail Grants through March, 2023.

Ms. Houlihan said Commissioner Dwyer provided her with a copy of the Department of Energy & Environmental Protect, (DEEP), Request for Proposals. This has also been circulated to other departments. Complaints have been made by some town residents about the lack of sidewalks on Abbott Road, which is used for recreational activities such as walking, biking and jogging. Ms. Houlihan said there is interest in creating a multiuse trail that would start near the Windermere School and connect to the roundabout near Cumberland Farms. The trail would make its way to the area of Main Street. Chairman Quarno and Commissioner Dwyer liked the idea. The trail would be no less than eight feet wide to accommodate for two-way traffic, and it will be some form of concrete.

The plan for the group managing the proposal is to develop a master plan for recreational trails so that there are projects lined up whenever grants like these are requested. The deadline for proposals is March 1, 2023. The \$9 million allocation, of which the town could be eligible for a portion of, is also available for planning, designing, and construction.

- c. Copy of Approved Conservation Commission 2023 meeting schedule.

Ms. Houlihan provided the commission with a copy of the 2023 meeting schedule for the Conservation Commission.

- d. CT Land Conservation Council donation thank you letter.

The commission received a letter from Vanessa Giannasi, the Development Director at the CT Land Conservation Council thanking them for their donation.

V. ADJOURNMENT:

MOVED (DWYER) SECONDED (ZIELFELDER) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ADJOURN THE CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEETING AT 7:36 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Nathaniel Trask, Recording Clerk