



STATE OF CONNECTICUT – COUNTY OF TOLLAND
INCORPORATED 1786

TOWN OF ELLINGTON

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CONSERVATION COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES TUESDAY, APRIL 11, 2023, 7:00 PM

REMOTE ATTENDANCE: ZOOM MEETING

PRESENT: Chairman Rebecca Quarno, Vice Chairman David Bidwell, Regular Members George Nickerson, Robert Zielfelder, Sean Dwyer, James Gage, and Laurie Burstein (arrived 7:09pm)

ABSENT: Alternates Ann Harford and Jessica Fay

STAFF: John Colonese, Assistant Town Planner Enforcement Officer, 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 7:04 PM.

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

III. ACTIVE BUSINESS:

1. Plan of Conservation & Development, Chapter 4 - Conservation Strategies, Natural Resource Preservation. (Distributed January 10, 2023)

Commissioner Gage said it looked good, although the commission agreed to discuss this agenda item next month when the group has more time to review it. Mr. Colonese said he would relay any conversation or comments from the commission to Ms. Houlihan. Commissioner Nickerson asked if the commission was reviewing all of Chapter 4 or just a portion of it. Mr. Colonese confirmed it was the entire chapter.

2. Report - Working Farmland Preservation Program.

- a. Notice of Acquisition of Development Rights, Oakridge Dairy, Farm I, for 101.83 acres, Recorded March 16, 2023.

Mr. Colonese said the Notice was recorded on land records. The farmland easement is over the northern portion of 76 Jobs Hill Road, 80, 87 and 115 Meadow Brook Road, and 8 Hoffman Road. The Planning Department will update the farmland brochure and the open space inventory with the new acquisition. Ms. Amsel said there was an article about the acquisition in the *Journal Inquirer* today. Mr. Colonese said the properties known as Farm I and Farm III of Oakridge Dairy have been preserved through farmland preservation.

- b. Request for Referral to Board of Selectmen for Special Appropriation for Farmland Preservation, Oakridge Dairy, Farm II, for 101 +/- acres, June 2018 Application.

Mr. Colonese said that in 2018, when Oakridge Dairy applied for farmland preservation, the proposed total acreage was 270 acres, which was Farms, I, II, and III. Farm II, which is 103 acres, was not included at the time. The Department of Agriculture recently cleared the remaining acreage for preservation and asked the town if they would like to be a funding partner for 10% of the value of the development rights. That amount would be \$49,833. Ms. Houlihan confirmed with the finance officer that it would be more cost effective to seek a special appropriation versus a bond authorization. This farmland was not ready for preservation in 2018 because of some ongoing restoration projects, but it is ready now. Mr. Colonese said Ms. Houlihan wanted to ask the commission if they would like to refer this request for special appropriation for farmland preservation to the Board of Selectmen. The commission agreed to refer the request to the Board.

MOVED (GAGE) SECONDED (DWYER) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO REFER TO THE BOARD OF SELECTMEN A REQUEST FOR SPECIAL APPROPRIATION FOR PURCHASE OF DEVELOPMENT RIGHTS FOR FARMLAND PRESERVATION FOR 101 +/- ACRES OF LAND GENERALLY REFERRED TO AS APN 091-003-0000, MEADOW BROOK ROAD, OAKRIDGE DAIRY, LLC, OWNER.

- c. [Seth Bahler, Oakridge Dairy and The Modern Milkman, Recognized as Young Farmer of the Year 2023, Ag Day at the State Capitol](#) (open link for video).

Mr. Colonese said he would send the link to the video to the commissioners.

At Ms. Houlihan's request, Mr. Colonese shared an update on the status of the February 23rd letter of interest for farmland preservation. There are some properties being considered for farmland preservation, such as 53 Wapping Wood Road. Ms. Houlihan sent one property owner the application and the owner will talk with additional owners to see if they consent to the application. Ms. Houlihan is waiting for a call back from Roberta Hambach regarding her property on Broad Brook Road. Ms. Houlihan is also working with the owners at 267 Jobs Hill Road, which is 44.89 acres, of which approximately 50% is farmland soil. She will provide an application to the owner.

3. Report - Open Space Preservation Program.

- a. Open Space Brochure, Revised October 2022.

The commission discussed strategies to increase awareness about open space preservation efforts and the benefits of open space. Ms. Amsel said the Ad Hoc Ellington Trails Committee can hand out the open space brochures at the town's Earth Day event on April 22nd. The commission also noted that the Ellington Farmer's Market would be a good venue to increase awareness. Mr. Colonese added that the next town newsletter will be issued at the beginning of May and said a statement of open space benefits can be included. He asked the commissioners if they had any additional content to suggest. Chairman Quarno said the recent Oakridge Dairy farmland preservation should be included in the newsletter as well.

At last month's meeting, the commission asked about the amount of money in the open space fund. Mr. Colonese reported there is \$741,954 in the fund, of which

\$203,597 was from the State in 2007 for land purchase within the Shenipsit Forest. The \$203,597 is intended to be used for open space preservation for land in the vicinity of the Shenipsit State Forest.

Mr. Colonese said efforts are underway with Green Road property owners. There will be updates provided at future meetings. Commissioner Gage noted he had a meeting with Ms. Houlihan on the matter.

Commissioner Gage reported the Northern Connecticut Land Trust is currently working on properties in Stafford.

b. Guide To Open Space Recommendation.

Mr. Colonese said the guide is for informational purposes for the commission to review.

IV. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS:

1. FY 22-23 Budget & Expenditure Update

There are no new charges in the budget except for the part-time recording clerk services.

2. Approval of the March 14, 2023, regular meeting minutes.

MOVED (GAGE) SECONDED (BURSTEIN) TO APPROVE THE REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF MARCH 14, 2023, WITH VARIOUS CORRECTIONS.

3. Correspondence/Discussion:

a. Ad Hoc Ellington Trails Committee – Monthly Agendas/Minutes.

Ms. Amsel said the trails committee is working to get Metcalf reopened. The trails have been blown and the group is getting ready to install the emergency locator signs. The committee recently blazed a new trail at Crystal Ridge. A 16-ft bridge that was recently installed at Highlands was destroyed due to vandalism. Commissioner Nickerson asked if the town could put cameras on the trails. Vice Chairman Bidwell said that there is a wildlife camera in the area, but the camera did not capture anybody suspected of vandalism. Ms. Amsel said she sent a picture of the wreckage to First Selectman Lori Spielman.

b. March 30, 2023, Notice of Public Hearing for May 18, 2023, Connecticut Siting Council for Petition 1558 - Request for Declaratory Ruling for a 4 MW Photovoltaic Facility, 24 Middle Road, Ellington.

Mr. Colonese shared the hearing notice with the commission. The hearing will be held over Zoom. Those who want to participate in the meeting need to sign up by May 17, 2023.

Mr. Colonese stated that Ms. Houlihan asked if the commission wanted to continue remote or return to hybrid (in-person and remote availability) meetings. Mr. Colonese noted remote meetings have taken place the last few months and prior to that they were hybrid although few people attended in-person. Mr. Colonese said Ms. Houlihan heard from Ann Harford, and Ann's feeling is that remote meetings don't create personal contact that is conducive to good conversation and new ideas. He added

there should be a consensus direction on the venue for future meetings. Commissioner Burstein said that participating virtually works best for her schedule at this time. Chairman Quarno said she favored hybrid meetings to allow for members to stay engaged. Commissioner Zielfelder said he would favor hybrid meetings if some previous technology issues can be resolved. The commission decided to hold a hybrid meeting next month.

V. ADJOURNMENT:

**MOVED (ZIELFELDER) SECONDED (DWYER) AND PASSES UNANIMOUSLY TO
ADJOURN THE CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEETING AT 7:54 PM.**

Respectfully submitted,

Nathaniel Trask, Recording Clerk