



STATE OF CONNECTICUT – COUNTY OF TOLLAND
INCORPORATED 1786

TOWN OF ELLINGTON

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

IN-PERSON ATTENDANCE: TOWN HALL ANNEX, 57 MAIN STREET, ELLINGTON, CT
REMOTE ATTENDANCE: VIA ZOOM MEETING

PRESENT: In-Person: Chairman Rebecca Quarno, Regular Member Laurie Burstein (arrived at 7:08PM), and Alternate Ann Harford
Remote Attendance: Vice Chairman David Bidwell, Regular Members George Nickerson, Robert Zielfelder, and James Gage

ABSENT: Regular Member Sean Dwyer and Alternate Jessica Fay

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

OTHERS

PRESENT: Valerie Amsel, Ad Hoc Ellington Trails Committee Liaison (arrived at 7:28PM, left at 7:37PM)

I. CALL TO ORDER: Chairman Rebecca Quarno called the Conservation Commission meeting to order at 7:05 PM.

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

BY CONSENSUS, THE COMMISSION ADDED EXECUTIVE SESSION TO ACTIVE BUSINESS ITEM 4 FOR THE PURPOSE OF DISCUSSING POTENTIAL OPEN SPACE REAL ESTATE ACQUISITIONS.

III. ACTIVE BUSINESS:

1. Review Plan of Conservation & Development, Chapter 4 - Conservation Strategies, Natural Resource Preservation & Identify Considerations/Strategies for Action. (Distributed January 10, 2023)

a. Develop strategies for raising awareness about open space and farmland preservation efforts and benefits.

The trails committee handed out an open space brochure that had recently been updated at the Earth Day event in April. Printing of the brochure was paid by the Conservation Commission. An article about open space and farmland was also placed in the June newsletter. Ms. Houlihan contacted the Farmer's Market master to ask if there were any relevant themed days for the commission to host a booth. The Farmer's Market will be holding "Meet Your Community Organizations Day" on September 2, 2023. The master did tell Ms. Houlihan that they could pick any other day if they wish and suggested they avoid August 5 or August 26.

Commissioners began discussing what dates they would be available. Ms. Houlihan said she would not be able to attend on September 2, but the commission could still attend. Chairman Quarno said she was unable to do September 2nd too. Ms. Houlihan said the only available date in August would be August 12.

The commission will continue discussing when to have a booth at the Farmer's Market at the next meeting.

2. Pursuant to action by the Board of Selectmen (May 8, 2023) to establish the Ellington Sustainability Team, review conservation sections from the 2023 Sustainable Connecticut Certification Action Overview Worksheet
 - a. 3.4 Develop an Open Space Plan
 - b. 3.5 Create a Natural Resource and Wildlife Inventory
 - c. 3.7 Provide Education on Responsible Water Usage
 - d. 5.3 Develop Agriculture-Friendly Practice
 - e. 5.5 Inventory and Assess Historic Resources

On May 8, 2023, the Board of Selectmen passed a motion to create the Ellington Sustainability Team for the purpose of receiving Sustainable CT certification. They named Tom Modzelewski, Director of Public Works, and Ms. Houlihan, Town Planner, the co-chairs of the group. The Board of Selectmen granted the co-chairs the authority to identify other departments and staff to aid in the effort to address the action items and requirements for Sustainable CT certification. Mr. Modzelewski and Ms. Houlihan met with Adrian Huq, a Sustainable CT fellow who is available through the Capital Region Council of Governments to help towns. A kick-off meeting was held with a group of department heads and they discussed sustainable action items and Adrian provided an overview of the program. The group will be meeting monthly with the goal of applying for a bronze certification in April of 2024.

As part of the Conservation Commission's goals of achieving Sustainable CT certification, Ms. Houlihan said she is focusing on the open space plan. She spent three hours updating the town's inventory of preserved open space and farmland. Sustainable CT needs to know the location, size, and main uses of each parcel, as well as if it was protected by way of an easement and when that was filed, along with other information. She is looking to complete Item 3.4 before going to Item 5.3 because it is in a different section, which would fulfill more of the requirements. She and John Colonese, Assistant Town Planner, are working with other commissions to fulfill other action items. She suggested if commissioners want to know more about Sustainable CT to visit their website for more information.

Chairman Quarno asked who else is on the Ellington Sustainability Team. Ms. Houlihan said it is made up of a group of department heads and committee members including Susan Phillips, Library Director, Rebecca Stack, Human Services Director, John Colonese, Assistant Town Planner, Walter Lee, Emergency and Risk Management Director, Raymond Martin, Building Official, and Samuel Saunders, Recycling and Refuse Coordinator. She and Mr. Modzelewski are still working on identifying more people to join the team. Chairman Quarno asked what the commission can be doing during meetings to support the efforts of the team, such as reviewing things or providing input. Ms. Houlihan said that was part of the reason why this item needs to be a focus on the commission's agenda. She will give a status update or discuss action items monthly with the commission.

Commissioner Harford asked what the benefit of getting a bronze certification was. Ms. Houlihan said there is an awards ceremony and grant money involved. She said the grant money is a maximum of \$15,000 per project and the town needs to match \$7,500. To

make up the \$7,500, there needs to be crowdsourcing or donations. The town has already fulfilled some of the action items for certification, but some items still need to be addressed. Now that the team has been created, the town will have a better shot at achieving since the categories will be assigned to particular town departments. Chairman Quarno said she is glad the group has been revived.

3. Report - Working Farmland Preservation Program.

Ms. Houlihan said in June the commission passed a motion to become a funding partner for Farm 2 at Oakridge Dairy, which is 101 acres. The town's portion will be 10%, or just about \$50,000. She said she is working with the Finance Department to determine if there is funding available from the existing bond authorization. This is important so they know where the funding is coming from when she presents it to the Board of Selectmen (BOS). Ms. Houlihan is working with Tiffany Pignataro, Finance Officer, and could be presenting to the BOS to ask for appropriation on August 14. She will confirm with the commission when the presentation will be and encourage commissioners to attend the meeting if they wish to.

The Planning Department sent a letter of interest asking landowners if they wanted to preserve any of their farmland. Three responses came back to the Planning Department. One of the responses was from Roberta Hambach, Broad Brook Road, whose 40-acre property has been actively farmed for years. Ms. Houlihan spoke with the property owner last week. The process to protect this property could take 1-2 years minimum. Ms. Houlihan noted that this parcel is perfect for farmland preservation and 40 acres of land is sizeable. Chairman Quarno expressed her pleasure that the effort to send the letters of interest generated some interest.

Another one of the responses that was returned to the Planning Department was about a piece of farmland that has eight different property owners. To start the process of preserving this parcel, each of the property owners needs to sign the application to do so. All the property owners live in different places. Ms. Houlihan believes it will not proceed further.

4. Report – Open Space Preservation Program.

Vernon and Ellington talked about the Hockanum River Linear Park. There was a strip of land that was due to be turned over to Ellington when Vernon bought the land. Due to the comprehensive recreational facility being constructed there, Ms. Houlihan said town officials did not think it made sense for Ellington to maintain or be responsible for the portion of the Linear Park that abuts Vernon's recreational fields. Therefore, Ellington will be conveying 5.1 acres on the south side of the Hockanum River to Vernon. Ellington will be retaining the portion of the parcel on the north side of the river. Contained in the deed, there will be the rights for the town of Ellington to access that portion of the property for passive recreation since there has been some conversation about putting a bridge there. There is an inter-town facility use agreement where Vernon has given Ellington some use rights on the park.

5. Executive session for purpose of discussing potential open space real estate acquisitions.

MOVED (HARFORD) SECONDED (BURSTEIN) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ENTER INTO EXECUTIVE SESSION AT 7:41PM FOR THE PURPOSE OF DISCUSSING POTENTIAL OPEN SPACE REAL ESTATE ACQUISITIONS INVITING COMMISSION MEMBERS, THE RECORDING CLERK, AND THE TOWN PLANNER.

The Conservation Commission moved into Executive Session.

MOVED (HARFORD) SECONDED (QUARNO) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO EXIT OUT OF EXECUTIVE SESSION AT 7:57PM. NO MOTIONS OR DECISIONS WERE MADE DURING EXECUTIVE SESSION.

IV. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS:

1. FY 22-23 Budget & Expenditure Update.
 - a. Memo to Finance Department (dated June 29, 2023) for disbursements from Dues & Subscriptions for FY22/23.

The budget report and disbursements were reviewed. There was an expense for advertising and printing, as well as the services of the part-time recording clerk.

2. Approval of the May 2, 2023, Regular Meeting Minutes.

MOVED (NICKERSON) SECONDED (GAGE) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO APPROVE THE REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF MAY 2, 2023 AS WRITTEN.

3. Correspondence/Discussion:

- b. Ad Hoc Ellington Trails Committee – Monthly Agendas/Minutes.

The commission went out of agenda order to address this item.

Valerie Amsel, the Ad Hoc Ellington Trails Committee Liaison, reported to the commission on the opening of the Crystal Lake open space property and a bridge that was built there. Four volunteers from Key Bank came to help complete the bridge, and another volunteer came to help. A new man on the committee helped finish the bridge. The committee is working with the town to see about creating a parking lot at Crystal Ridge. The committee is also preparing to hold a raptor event. Ms. Amsel said bridges are being replaced near the culvert on Windermere Avenue and confirmed that some material was sourced from the Public Works Department. Vice Chairman Bidwell asked if anything had been decided on the Highland property. Ms. Amsel said no and that Dustin Huguenin, Recreation Director, does not want to commit to that. She said she would like to see if she can salvage the framework of the bridge at the property. She expressed concern that someone might destroy the bridge again if it were to be rebuilt. She would like another one to be rebuilt, but wanted some assurances that the work would be completed. Ms. Amsel confirmed there has been no further vandalism at the property.

Ms. Amsel reported that there was no trails committee meeting last month.

V. ADJOURNMENT:

MOVED (HARFORD) SECONDED (BURSTEIN) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ADJOURN THE CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEETING AT 8:00 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Nathaniel Trask, Recording Clerk