



STATE OF CONNECTICUT – COUNTY OF TOLLAND
INCORPORATED 1786

TOWN OF ELLINGTON

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CONSERVATION COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES TUESDAY, SEPTEMBER 12, 2023, 7:00 PM

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

PRESENT: In-Person: Chairman Rebecca Quarno, and Regular Member James Gage
Remote Attendance: Regular Members George Nickerson, Robert Zielfelder,
and Laurie Burstein

ABSENT: Vice Chairman David Bidwell, Regular Member Sean Dwyer, and Alternates
Jessica Fay and Ann Harford

STAFF: Lisa Houlihan, Town Planner (In-Person) and Nathaniel Trask, Recording
Clerk (Remote)

OTHERS

PRESENT: Valerie Amsel, Ad Hoc Ellington Trails Committee Liaison (Remote)

I. CALL TO ORDER: Chairman Rebecca Quarno called the Conservation Commission meeting to order at 7:02 PM.

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

III. ACTIVE BUSINESS:

1. Review Plan of Conservation & Development, Chapter 4-Conservation Strategies, Natural Resource Preservation. *(Distributed January 10, 2023)*
 - a. Develop strategies for raising awareness about open space and farmland preservation.

An article was put in the June newsletter about raising awareness about open space and farmland preservation. The commission discussed the potential of having a booth at the farmers market. Ms. Houlihan reiterated that August 5 and August 26 were unavailable dates, which have already passed. She also said there hasn't been a lot of time to devote to the property owners on Green Road. Chairman Quarno said they could refocus on this agenda item when other initiatives quiet down.

This agenda was tabled until next meeting.

2. Review Sustainable CT Certification Action Overview Worksheet – Conservation Sections

Ms. Houlihan noted that everyone is enthusiastic with Sustainable CT. She and Tom Modzelewski, Public Works Director, have put together a team of town officials to focus on some initiatives to apply for bronze certification from Sustainable CT in April 2024. The group meets every third Wednesday of the month in the morning. In July and August, the group had

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assistance from a fellow at the Capitol Region Council of Governments who attended their meetings and gave an overview of what Sustainable CT is about as well as how to submit action items. For the August 15 submission deadline, the team submitted four action items it had completed for preliminary review. These four action items would potentially qualify for up to 90 points. Two of the action items are largely due to the work of the Conservation Commission. Some additional work was needed to bring the action items up to Sustainable Ct standards, which the group completed. She believes some product will be seen from the Board of Education and Ellington Youth Services by the end of the year. She would like for the Conservation Commission to work more on agriculture-friendly practices. She will report more on what she would like the commission to focus on at the next meeting.

- a. 3.4 Develop an Open Space Plan
- b. 3.5 Create a Natural Resource and Wildlife Inventory
- c. 5.3 Develop Agriculture-Friendly Practice

3. Report - Farmland Preservation Program.

Ms. Houlihan has been communicating with the Department of Agriculture. The last farm for Oakridge Dairy has not gone before the Board of Selectmen because they are still working on their surveys. The surveys need to be finalized in order to determine how much the town of Ellington would be contributing. The amount the town will be contributing will still be 10%, and Ms. Houlihan said the last she knew the amount was going to be around \$49,800. She will continue communicating with them.

Ms. Houlihan has not heard anything more about the 40-acre Hombach property since when she last reported on it in July. She said she spoke with the property owners twice and gave them the application.

4. Report - Open Space Preservation Program.

Ms. Houlihan said she hopes to work on Green Road this fall. The Planning Department has also been under some deadlines for the Route 83 sidewalk project. There are approximately 40 properties that have permanent or temporary easements (or both) on them. Ms. Houlihan and the town engineer have been meeting with those property owners. Out of all of the properties, only three are remaining. There was a special appropriation expiration date at the end of August which is why they had to focus on it this summer. Once all easements are secured, the town engineer will submit plans to the Department of Transportation for review and the Capital Region Council of Governments will peer review. They are hoping the project will be put out for a bid this spring. The project consists of two miles of sidewalks from the Vernon town line to Scotty's Daycare and crosses over to Agway, goes past Big Y, and goes all the way down Route 83 to connect to sidewalks on Main Street. Chairman Quarno asked if it would be similar to what they did in the center of town. Ms. Houlihan said it would be a brushed concrete. This project will be paid for by the Department of Transportation and was originally delayed due to things like COVID-19 and budget issues. The path is not on a road, but is not meant for bike riding, just walking. Commissioner Burstein asked if there were plans to continue the sidewalks along Abbott Road. Ms. Houlihan said she knew there were some sidewalks involved with the school and there are some efforts going on to use sidewalks to connect neighborhoods and businesses to the schools.

IV. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS:

1. FY 23-24 Budget & Expenditure Update.

The only budget expenditure is for the services of the recording clerk.

2. Approval of July 11, 2023, Regular Meeting Minutes.

MOVED (GAGE) SECONDED (QUARNO) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO APPROVE THE REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF JULY 11, 2023 AS WRITTEN.

3. Correspondence/Discussion:
 - a. Ad Hoc Ellington Trails Committee – Monthly Agendas/Minutes.

Ms. Amsel said she hopes that some Boy Scouts will come to Kimball to put the bridge back and stabilize it. The trailhead for the Crystal trail has been moved from Crystal Ridge Road to Sandy Beach Road. This will now be the official trailhead and some blazing needs to be done there along with the Metcalf trail. This trail now has more stone as well as a bench. She indicated that she took some brochures from the Conservation Commission to give out at the Farmers' Market to support the commission.

- b. CT Association of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Commissions, Inc. (CACIWC), Sat. November 11, 2023 Annual Meeting and Environmental Conference and a copy of CACIWC Membership Renewal (July 1, 2023 thru June 30, 2024).

Ms. Houlihan shared that commissioners can attend this conference if they want to, and that \$60 will be paid to renew membership. This money will either come out of the Dues & Subscriptions portion of the budget or the Town Planner's budget.

- c. CT Land Conservation Council contribution thank you letter (July 11, 2023).

The CT Land Conservation Council sent a letter to the commission thanking them for their donation.

- d. Notice of Petition for Declaratory Ruling for a 5MW battery energy storage system, KCE CT 5, LLC, Village Hill Road, Willington/Stafford, CT.

Ms. Houlihan said this notice is required to the town. The CT Siting Council granted a solar farm but asked for some improvements, such as additional landscaping.

- e. CT Siting Council, Petition No. 1558 Decision and Order (August 3, 2023), for a 4MW solar photovoltaic facility, Community Power Group, LLC, 28.4 acres, 24 Middle Road, Rural Agricultural Residential (RAR) Zone.

The CT Siting Council approved a solar farm on Middle Road in the beginning of August. Ms. Houlihan noted that the town cannot bring petitioners in for special permits before the Planning and Zoning Commission because it is a public utility and has a greater need, however they can comment through that commission. The facility will be located on 28 acres of private property and has met the requirements of the CT Siting Council.

- f. Notice of Petition for Declaratory Ruling for a 3MW solar photovoltaic facility, USS Somers Solar, LLC, 19.2 acres, 360 Somers Road, Industrial (I) Zone.

USS Somers Solar, LLC. talked with the Planning and Zoning Commission about a solar farm at 360 Somers Road. The project did receive a \$500,000 steep grant, but the Planning and Zoning Commission was concerned because the town has spent a lot of money extending the sewer out there in that location and that this farm could be hazardous to skydivers in the area because sometimes jumpers miss the drop zone and land in that area. This application is scaled back from

the original application. It is no longer in the area where the airport runway could potentially be extended and has been reduced by one megawatt. Commissioner Burstein said it was a shame they were picking the airport for this facility since the airport is valuable to the area. The town did complete a feasibility program a while ago to determine if the town should buy it, but the matter has since been tabled. Commissioner Nickerson asked if the runway extension has been tabled. Ms. Houlihan said all the town has done is study extending it, and a consultant informed the town that the runway would need to be extended if it were to become a more active airport. Chairman Quarno asked if the airport would lease their land to the solar company. Ms. Houlihan said they would generally enter in a 20-year lease with a 10-year right to extend.

V. ADJOURNMENT:

**MOVED (ZIELFELDER) SECONDED (NICKERSON) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO
ADJOURN THE CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEETING AT 7:50PM.**

Respectfully submitted,

Nathaniel Trask, Recording Clerk