



STATE OF CONNECTICUT – COUNTY OF TOLLAND  
INCORPORATED 1786

# TOWN OF ELLINGTON

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## CONSERVATION COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES TUESDAY, OCTOBER 10, 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, Vice Chairman David Bidwell,  
Regular Member George Nickerson, and Alternate Ann Harford  
Remote Attendance: Regular Members Sean Dwyer and James Gage

**ABSENT:** Regular Members Robert Zielfelder and Laurie Burstein, and Alternate  
Jessica Fay

**STAFF:** In-Person: 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 7:08 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. Draft Text Amendment to Section 7.14.3 – Agricultural Special Permit Uses in  
Residential Zones, Pursuant to Recommendations from the Plan of Conservation and  
Development.

Ms. Houlihan introduced the draft regulation amendment put forth by the Economic  
Development Commission. Ms. Houlihan said there is some overlap with agricultural  
and economic development initiatives in the Plan of Conservation and Development.  
Commissioners were given examples for special permit uses that are implemented by  
other towns like Stafford, South Windsor, and Simsbury. Ms. Houlihan reviewed the  
draft text amendment with the commission, including reading through several of the  
changes that are proposed. When Ms. Houlihan read that “There shall be no on-street  
parking,” Commissioner Harford asked who is going to regulate that. Ms. Houlihan  
answered that the parking restrictions would be in the special permit that is granted to  
the business and the zoning officer would have the right to enforce it. She added that  
when a business is looking to take part in an agricultural related use for their business,  
they must go in front of the Planning and Zoning Commission to be granted a special

permit and may be given certain limitations therein. A public hearing is also held where residents and neighbors can voice any concerns before any permit is granted.

Chairman Quarno and Vice Chairman Bidwell agreed that they were in favor of leaving the draft text amendment as is and were supportive of the changes.

**BY CONSENSUS, THE COMMISSION SUPPORTED THE PROPOSED REGULATION AMENDMENT TO SECTION 7.14.3 OF ELLINGTON ZONING REGULATIONS FINDING THE PROPOSAL CONSISTENT WITH THE PLAN OF CONSERVATION AND DEVELOPMENT.**

2. Review Sustainable CT Certification Action Overview Worksheet - Conservation Sections
  - a. Report from Sustainable CT - Review of Preliminary Certification Submittal.
    - 3.4 Develop an Open Space Plan
    - 3.5 Create a Natural Resource and Wildlife Inventory

Ms. Houlihan reiterated that the Ellington Sustainability Team has been meeting monthly. The group submitted 95 points for preliminary credit to Sustainable CT, and they received all the points they applied for. Sixty (60) points for 3.4, ten (10) points for 3.5, ten (10) points for 4.2, and five (5) points for 10.4. The town can earn an additional ten points if the natural resource and wildlife inventory is included on the town's website, so Ms. Houlihan will send them a link to the town's website where the inventory is already listed. Vice Chairman Bidwell expressed appreciation for the comments that were returned to the team. Commissioner Harford asked if this was the program where the town must get a total of 200 points. Ms. Houlihan answered that they must get 200 points minimum with one item in each of the 12 different categories to qualify for the bronze certification. The team is looking to have a buffer of 50 points in the event something does not qualify. She added that 4.2 was for the promotion of cultural diversity from the library and that 10.4 was for the community garden from the recreation department.

- b. 5.3 Develop Agriculture-Friendly Practice.

Ms. Houlihan said this part of the Sustainable CT certification mostly dealt with the farmland preservation program. She said she would provide them with the farm brochure, the 2007 bond authorization, and an itemized list of all the farms that have been preserved since the program was established. Sustainable CT wants an existing fund with a balance in it to spend towards developing agriculture-friendly practices, however the town currently does not have such a fund. Instead, the town has a bond authorization. Ms. Houlihan added that Oakridge Dairy's last farmland preservation easement will have to ask for a special appropriation from the Board of Selectmen. She believed this action was worth 20 points from Sustainable CT.

3. Report - Farmland Preservation Program.

Oakridge Dairy is still waiting for the Department of Agriculture to finish a property survey for the last farm. The town's portion of the preservation will be about \$49,000, which is less than 10% of the entire deal.

Ms. Houlihan said she contacted Elizabeth Moore at the Connecticut Farmland Trust about their newsletter. Elizabeth apologized on behalf of the Trust for not including Ellington in their acknowledgement about the last farmland easement secured for Oakridge Dairy. She said it was a good opportunity to reconnect with them and

mentioned there is significant concern from the farming organizations about solar energy taking over farmland. Farmland organizations are in favor of viable agrivoltaics, which is farmland that is used for both solar panels and farming activities.

4. Report - Open Space Preservation Program.

Nothing to report currently.

#### **IV. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS:**

1. FY 23-24 Budget & Expenditure Update.

The Advertising and Printing budget shows a remaining balance of 150% due to encumbrance from the previous fiscal year. The only expense so far is for the services of the part-time recording clerk.

2. Approval of September 12, 2023, Regular Meeting Minutes.

**MOVED (DWYER) SECONDED (NICKERSON) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO APPROVE THE REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF SEPTEMBER 12, 2023, AS WRITTEN.**

3. Correspondence/Discussion:

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

Valerie Amsel, Ad Hoc Ellington Trails Committee Liaison, addressed the commission. The Boy Scouts moved and restabilized the bridge at Kimball. The trails at Metcalf and Crystal have been blazed. An Eagle Scout will be building picnic tables for Highlands. They are also looking to blaze Highlands and replace the bridge as well as getting a kiosk for that trail and Crystal. Commissioner Harford mentioned that Linda Anderson said at the last committee meeting that there are kits for building kiosks, however Ms. Amsel said the Trails Committee would not be able to afford it this year and they may not be large enough for their needs. Ms. Houlihan said she sent Ms. Anderson an email detailing an American Rescue Plan task force in town that is looking for more projects, and kiosks for the trails might be covered by this.

- b. FEMA Notice dated September 27, 2023, for the Draft Risk Map Project for the Thames and Shetucket Watersheds.

The Federal Emergency Management Agency is looking to update their Flood Insurance Rate Map, in partnership with the US Geological Survey. They are specifically focused on the Thames and Shetucket Watersheds. The database was first announced at the Workmap Review meeting held on June 20, 2023. John Colonese, Assistant Town Planner and Zoning and Wetlands Officer, received the new rate map and has been working with the town's GIS consultant to identify the properties to be removed or added to the flood plain. The Planning Department's goal is to create a list of the affected properties and find out from FEMA what the next steps are for notifying the property owners. Properties located within the flood plain might need flood insurance, however property owners have the option to do studies on their property and possibly do a letter of map amendment to refute their property being in a flood plain.

- c. US Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service (NRCS) Letter dated September 25, 2023, for the Connecticut Statewide Important Farmland Criteria Update.

The US Department of Agriculture's Natural Resources Conservation Service sent a letter to the town regarding important farmland soils. Ms. Houlihan believed they were trying to be more consistent with their criteria. She said the town has GIS layers for them already. A new version of the soil survey data was due to be published in September. The letter mentioned that 339,153 acres was changed to Farmland of Statewide importance in the state of Connecticut. These acres were previously designated as Locally Important Farmland in select towns including Ellington. The change to Farmland of Statewide importance supersedes the Locally Important Farmland designation, resulting in a more equitable designation across the state as these designations are used to assess eligibility and ranking for certain USDA program benefits.

**V. ADJOURNMENT:**

**MOVED (HARFORD) SECONDED (BIDWELL) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO  
ADJOURN THE CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEETING AT 8:05 PM.**

Respectfully submitted,

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Nathaniel Trask, Recording Clerk