



STATE OF CONNECTICUT – COUNTY OF TOLLAND
INCORPORATED 1786

TOWN OF ELLINGTON

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CONSERVATION COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES TUESDAY, JANUARY 9, 2024, 7:00 PM

REMOTE ATTENDANCE VIA ZOOM MEETING

PRESENT: Chairman Rebecca Quarno, Regular Members George Nickerson, Sean Dwyer, Robert Zielfelder, and Laurie Burstein

ABSENT: Vice Chairman David Bidwell, Regular Members James Gage, and Alternates Ann Harford and Jessica Fay

STAFF: John Colonese, Assistant Town Planner and Nathaniel Trask, Recording Clerk

OTHERS

PRESENT: None

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

III. ACTIVE BUSINESS:

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

Mr. Colonese said he will be filling in for Lisa Houlihan, Town Planner, for the foreseeable future.

Ms. Houlihan sent an email saying that many of the conservation strategies had been accomplished, but there are a few remaining, such as transfer of development rights on pages 53 to 55 of the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD), the open space or cluster subdivision on page 59, and historic preservation on page 60. According to Mr. Colonese, Ms. Houlihan asked for discussion to continue in these areas and for the commission to identify its next initiative.

The transfer of development rights is the process by which a developer may transfer development rights from one property to another. This can be done so that a developer might have an area of high density and an area of low density in another location where an open space or farm easement could be acquired. This would be completed through the zoning regulations and with the Planning and Zoning Commission.

Under the open space or cluster subdivision section, the town currently has a cluster zoning regulation, but no developer has ever utilized it. The POCD recommends some

changes to that regulation, which would have to be done in conjunction with the Planning and Zoning Commission.

The final section is on historic preservation, which is an initiative the commission discussed at the November 2023 meeting. This is a shorter section in the 2019 Plan of Conservation and Development, but the current plan refers to the 2008 plan, which has a longer section on historic preservation. Mr. Colonese said the current POCD recommends hiring a consultant to do a historic resource inventory, and he added that there has been some inventorying of the downtown area. There is a National Register for Historic Places for Ellington that was completed in 1990. The State Historic Preservation Office has taken the information from the National Historic Preservation Office and incorporated it into their mapping system where historical places can be seen. Commissioner Dwyer asked how to go about finding out what other areas of Ellington might qualify for historic preservation and what information might be collected about the properties or the land. Mr. Colonese said he was unsure of the land and would have to do some research to see how that information is categorized. He said grants are available through the historic preservation office for completing an inventory through a consultant. Mr. Colonese asked if the commission wanted to take this on as an initiative. Commissioner Dwyer said he would like to move forward on it, but asked if there is something important about the section on the transfer of development rights or the section on open space or cluster subdivision that the commission should pursue. Mr. Colonese said he would ask Ms. Houlihan when the Planning and Zoning Commission might be working on those two sections so the Conservation Commission can join them in that work, but the Planning and Zoning Commission has not talked about those yet.

Chairman Quarno said the historic preservation initiative is interesting and goes along with preserving the town's identity, especially when driving along Main Street. Commissioner Burstein said historic preservation helps to preserve the town's New England character. Chairman Quarno asked what the commission could do with a historic preservation inventory if they were to secure the funding to complete one. Mr. Colonese said he wanted to forward the 2008 Plan of Conservation and Development to commissioners because the plan goes into detail about the different options. Commissioner Dwyer added that historic preservation could potentially allow homeowners access to some grant funding designated for preservation. Mr. Colonese said he would see what grants might be available to homeowners. Commissioner Zielfelder asked what the process would be to get homeowners to buy into the idea of and establish a historic district. Mr. Colonese said a 90-day demolition would be an ordinance put in place by the Board of Selectmen, for example, but he would research how homeowners would become involved in the historic district process. He added that another layer of restriction might be favorable to some and not others. Commissioner Zielfelder said ultimately any decisions on ordinances or regulations should rest with the property owners in a designated historic district. Chairman Quarno agreed residents of a potential historic district would need to be engaged in the conversation. She added that the commission could only supplement the funding based on the current budget to complete a historic resource inventory, so most of the money to hire a consultant would have to come from elsewhere. Otherwise, the initiative could not be completed.

Mr. Colonese said he would provide the commission with more information on the initiatives and do some research on grant opportunities for the inventory.

2. Review Sustainable CT Certification Action Overview Worksheet - Conservation Sections
 - a. 5.3 Develop Agriculture-Friendly Practice.

Mr. Colonese said Sustainable CT section 5.3.5 asks for the establishment of a farmland acquisition fund. Ellington does not have a farmland acquisition fund, but instead has a farmland preservation program that was established in 2007. Ellington preserved over 630 acres of farmland in that time. According to Mr. Colonese, Ms. Houlihan said Ellington's bond authorization program was accepted by Sustainable CT and the town will receive points for their efforts, meaning that the town will receive credit for section 5.3.5. due to the farmland preservation program currently in place. The commission has championed open space preservation, natural resource and wildlife preservation, and agricultural friendly practices, so the town is anticipating getting points in those areas towards Sustainable CT certification.

Mr. Colonese said he was tasked with streamlining solar energy permitting which involves reviewing the zoning regulations for small solar panel installations and presenting those findings to the Planning and Zoning Commission. He said he believes the town's zoning regulations are pretty good along with other contractors, but they still must go through the process to see if there are any barriers that need to be addressed. A barrier that could be addressed might be something like a setback requirement or a height restriction. He said he would be writing a memo to the Planning and Zoning Commission about those barriers in accordance with Sustainable CT requirements.

Sustainable CT wants the town to have a solar landing page that outlines the town's solar installations, such as the ones on three of the town's schools and the library. The page will also have information on how to get solar approved for a home. Mr. Colonese asked if commissioners would like to see the memo that will be sent to the Planning and Zoning Commission. Commissioners indicated they would like to receive it.

Chairman Quarno asked Mr. Colonese if there is anything else the commission can be doing to help with the Sustainable CT application. He said the town is focused on making sure that Ellington gets points in all 12 of the sections as required by Sustainable CT prior to the April submission deadline, but that the commission has done a lot to support the application. However, he added that historic preservation is included under section 5, but completing a historic resource inventory would likely take longer than the April deadline. Chairman Quarno asked if completing the inventory could get the town points in the future. Mr. Colonese said if the town were to apply for recertification, then accomplishments in the meantime would apply. He will confirm how long certification lasts for Sustainable CT.

3. Report - Farmland Preservation Program.

Mr. Colonese said the Planning Department was notified by the Connecticut Department of Agriculture that the land survey for Farm 2 of Oakridge Dairy has been completed and they are waiting for Oakridge Dairy to be determined "landowner eligible" by the Natural Resources Conservation Service, a division of the U.S. Department of Agriculture (USDA). Once that has been done, then the Department of Agriculture can proceed with the closing, which they hope can be completed this quarter. The town will share 10% of the cost to preserve the land, which is about \$49,000 and is a special appropriation that will have to be brought to the Board of Selectmen for approval. Mr. Colonese spoke with Seth Bahler, owner of Oakridge Dairy, who said he submitted the required paperwork to the USDA and is waiting for a response.

As reported by Mr. Colonese, Ms. Houlihan had a meeting with the Department of Agriculture who said they closed on 20 different farmland easements in 2023.

The Connecticut Farmland Trust also contacted Ms. Houlihan to do an outreach program for Ellington farmers and farmers of adjoining towns to educate them on federal programs and grants that are available to them as well as a service called FarmLink, which connects farmers with farmland. The event will be on February 27, 2024, from 6:00 PM to 7:30 PM at the Ellington Town Hall Annex. Mr. Colonese will forward along a formal invitation to commissioners once when it is available.

4. Report - Open Space Preservation Program

Commissioner Zielfelder said there are two parcels for sale near the Northern Connecticut Land Trust property. The commission reviewed the locations quickly and noted they do not touch the Northern Connecticut Land Trust parcel. One of the parcels on Tolland Turnpike is under contract.

Chairman Quarno believed Ms. Houlihan was sending letters to landowners in the areas targeted for open space preservation along Green Road which had been discussed previously. Mr. Colonese said he would check to see when the last time letters were sent to parcels along Green Road and the status of this item.

IV. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS:

1. FY 23-24 Budget & Expenditure Update.

a. Request to approve Annual Contribution to the Northern Connecticut Land Trust.

MOVED (DWYER) SECONDED (BURSTEIN) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO CONTRIBUTE \$450.00 TO THE NORTHERN CONNECTICUT LAND TRUST.

2. Approval of November 14, 2023, Regular Meeting Minutes.

MOVED (DWYER) SECONDED (NICKERSON) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO APPROVE THE REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 14, 2023, AS WRITTEN.

3. Election of Officers.

BY CONSENSUS, THE COMMISSION TABLED THE ELECTION OF OFFICERS TO THE REGULAR MEETING ON FEBRUARY 13, 2024.

4. Correspondence/Discussion:

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

Commissioners were given a copy of the meeting minutes from the last two meetings, but no report was made.

b. Letter from Connecticut Land Conservation Council Re: Recent Contribution

The Connecticut Land Conservation Council sent a letter thanking the Conservation Commission for their continued support and the donation that was approved at the November 2023 meeting.

V. ADJOURNMENT:

**MOVED (ZIELFELDER) SECONDED (DWYER) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO
ADJOURN THE CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEETING AT 7:56 PM.**

Respectfully submitted,

Nathaniel Trask, Recording Clerk