



STATE OF CONNECTICUT – COUNTY OF TOLLAND
INCORPORATED 1786

TOWN OF ELLINGTON

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CONSERVATION COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES TUESDAY, MARCH 12, 2024, 7:00 PM

REMOTE ATTENDANCE VIA ZOOM MEETING

PRESENT: Chairman Rebecca Quarno, Vice Chairman David Bidwell, Regular Members James Gage, Sean Dwyer, and Laurie Burstein

ABSENT: Regular Members George Nickerson, Robert Zielfelder, and Alternate Ann Harford

STAFF: John Colonese, Assistant 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 7:15 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 the commission was reviewing the Plan of Conservation & Development (POCD) as it relates to conservation strategies and natural resource preservation. The three areas that were pointed out that the commission might want to focus on include the transfer of development rights, the open space cluster subdivision, and historic preservation.

Mr. Colonese investigated funding for a town-wide inventory of historical resources which can be accessed via grants through the state historic preservation office. The office is managed by the Connecticut Department of Economic and Community Development. They accept applications on a rolling basis and funding is awarded when it is available. Requirements for the grant include that the work must be completed by a consultant that meets the grant's standards and that the project must be approved by the Board of Selectmen as payment must first come from the town. The project would then be reimbursed by the state historic preservation office. Mr. Colonese said he would speak with the state historic preservation office to get an idea of cost, however the cost of the project would be fully covered by the grant.

Chairman Quarno said the commission wants to understand the historic preservation piece of the POCD until they get further along with the initiative. She said they can return to discussing transfer of development rights and open space cluster subdivision if the historic preservation is no longer viable to move forward with.

2. Review Sustainable CT Certification Action Overview Worksheet - Conservation Sections
 - 5.5 Inventory and Assess Historic Resources.

Mr. Colonese said Sustainable CT said approval lasts for three years and the spring certification deadline is April 10. The town committee in charge of Sustainable CT certification has almost all their items submitted, and they anticipate a bronze designation. The town is well beyond the point requirement for this goal. At this point, the town doesn't have to complete 5.5.

- 5.6 Streamline Solar Permitting for Small Solar Installations.

Mr. Colonese has applied for a silver designation with SolSmart, a federal program that helps towns limit their barriers to permitting solar installation. A SolSmart designation equates to 20 points available for 5.6 of Sustainable CT. This step required a landing webpage for solar, which was added to the Conservation Commission's webpage on the town's website. The page has information on how to apply for solar permits and which municipal buildings currently have solar installations. These buildings currently include the town library, Crystal Lake School, Center School, and Ellington Middle School. The town also has grant money for a solar carport at the state trooper's parking area which will be completed this construction season. Mr. Colonese said he hopes to hear about the SolSmart application soon and will keep it on the agenda so he can report back.

Chairman Quarno asked how long after the April 10 deadline does Sustainable CT give their awards. Mr. Colonese said he would find out that information. Chairman Quarno said it would be important to publicize the information when the town receives an award, either in a press release or putting it on the town's website.

3. Report - Farmland Preservation Program.

There is no update on Farm 2 of Oakridge Dairy. Mr. Colonese said he has not heard from Oakridge Dairy or the Department of Agriculture. Commissioner Gage said he had not heard anything either.

The Connecticut Farmland Trust held a public informational meeting on Tuesday, February 27 at the Town Hall Annex. There were approximately 40 people in attendance. Topics of discussion included soil health, farmland preservation programs, and grant opportunities. The Trust shared a link with PDFs from the slideshow from the meeting with the Planning Department. Chairman Quarno asked if that could be included on the Conservation Commission's website. Mr. Colonese said he would investigate adding all or some on the website and share the link with commissioners. Commissioner Gage said the entire presentation is available on YouTube as well.

4. Report - Open Space Preservation Program

The town sent a letter of intent to purchase to the owners of the Brady property at 79 Kibbe Road. They are currently negotiating a purchase price. The Planning and Zoning Commission made a positive referral to the Board of Selectmen for the purchase of the

land pursuant to CGS 8-24 as purchasing the property would increase the town's open space.

Mr. Colonese indicated there is a special fund within the town's open space acquisition fund designated for the purchase of open space around Shenipsit Forest, from an agreement with DEEP. The fund was earmarked as part of a 2006 land purchase agreement and currently has over \$200,000. The state told Lisa Houlihan, Town Planner, that these funds can be used for the purchase of 79 Kibbe Road.

The Planning Department sent letters to the owners of some parcels at the end of Green Road in late 2022, and Ms. Houlihan followed up with some owners at the beginning of last year. Owners Grant and McVarish said they were going to respond with amounts to possibly purchase their properties, but she has not heard from them. She also spoke with John Derham who seemed interested, however he's part of a trust so he had to speak with others who were involved. Brady, who also owns 79 Kibbe Road, also expressed interest but the Planning Department has not heard back. Chairman Quarno said it would be good to reach out to the owners again. Mr. Colonese said he would contact them.

The Planning Department was recently contacted by Jeb Stevens, Trails Protection Coordinator of the Connecticut Forest & Park Association. Mr. Stevens inquired as to whether the commission wanted to purchase a 12.7-acre parcel at 178 Crystal Lake Road for open space preservation as the land came up for sale recently and was listed at \$99,000 on Zillow. The state's Shenipsit Trail passes through the parcel. Then the property recently transferred for \$45,000. Commissioner Gage stated the Northern CT Land Trust Land Acquisition Committee reviewed the property and agreed not to get involved in acquiring it since the land is overpriced and access is dangerous as it's on the shoulder of Route 140 and behind some guardrails. Vice Chairman Bidwell agreed that it was a dangerous spot, although he felt it was an important trail connection for Shenipsit Trail. Ms. Amsel indicated the property has wetlands, so it may be tough to build on. The CT DOT has a project to realign that section of Crystal Lake Road, but not for another couple of years. Commissioner Dwyer said it wouldn't hurt to see if the owners were interested in selling the property. Mr. Colonese said he would reach out to the owners.

BY CONSENSUS, THE COMMISSION AUTHORIZED STAFF TO CONTACT THE PROPERTY OWNER OF 178 CRYSTAL LAKE ROAD TO PURSUE A POSSIBLE OPEN SPACE PURCHASE OR TRAIL EASEMENT AGREEMENT.

IV. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS:

1. FY 23-24 Budget & Expenditure Update.

There is no update currently.

2. Approval of January 9, 2024, Regular Meeting Minutes.

MOVED (DWYER) SECONDED (BURSTEIN) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO APPROVE THE REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF JANUARY 9, 2024, AS WRITTEN.

3. Election of Officers.

- a. Chairman Position

MOVED (BIDWELL) TO NOMINATE COMMISSIONER REBECCA QUARNO FOR CHAIRMAN OF THE CONSERVATION COMMISSION FOR THE YEAR OF 2024.

**COMMISSIONER REBECCA QUARNO ACCEPTED THE NOMINATION.
HEARING NO FURTHER NOMINATIONS, THE NOMINATIONS CLOSED.**

**MOVED (BIDWELL) SECONDED (DWYER) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO
ELECT COMMISSIONER REBECCA QUARNO FOR CHAIRMAN OF THE
CONSERVATION COMMISSION FOR THE YEAR OF 2024.**

b. Vice-Chairman Position

**MOVED (DWYER) TO NOMINATE COMMISSIONER DAVID BIDWELL FOR VICE-
CHAIRMAN OF THE CONSERVATION COMMISSION FOR THE YEAR OF 2024.**

**COMMISSIONER DAVID BIDWELL ACCEPTED THE NOMINATION.
HEARING NO FURTHER NOMINATIONS, THE NOMINATIONS CLOSED.**

**MOVED (DWYER) SECONDED (GAGE) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ELECT
COMMISSIONER DAVID BIDWELL FOR VICE-CHAIRMAN OF THE
CONSERVATION COMMISSION FOR THE YEAR OF 2024.**

4. Correspondence/Discussion:

a. Hartford Courant Article on Oakridge Dairy

Mr. Colonese said the article details how the farm works. He noted that the farm is also running tours now, which can be set up through their website.

b. February 5, 2024, letter from the CT Siting Council for Petition 1589 for a 3MW solar facility at 360 Somers Road, vote to issue declaratory ruling failed.

The letter was to inform the commission that the project is no longer going forward due to the failed vote to issue a declaratory ruling. Mr. Colonese said the parachutists that utilize the property were not in favor of the project.

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

Ms. Amsel said the committee is getting ready to get on the trails this week. The emergency signs on the trails currently will be replaced, and the ambulance corps and fire department will be contacted to make sure they are on the same page. A purchase order for kiosks has been issued and she is hoping they will be delivered in the next two weeks. The committee is seeking the assistance of a local Boy Scout troop to help install the kiosks. A committee has sorted out the mowing schedule which was implemented to work around the planting of a wildflower field at the Batz Trails. Some bluebird houses will be installed at the Batz Trails as well. A local Eagle Scout candidate approached the committee about introducing some bees to the trails, however the committee voted it down because introducing a new species of bee can be harmful to indigenous ones in the area. On April 6, the Boy Scouts and the Green Earth Club will be holding a cleanup day at Crystal Ridge, and the Boy Scouts will be doing a hike there on June 1. The committee has a walk scheduled for Connecticut Trails Day which will be on June 1 and 2. On April 13, the Ellington Youth Services will be doing a Bring a Buddy Neighbor Walk. Ms. Amsel is hoping to have the Highlands bridge redone by the beginning of April.

d. North Central Conservation District 2024 Spring Plant & Seedling Sale.

Commissioners received a flyer for the Spring 2024 Plant & Seedling Sale.

Mr. Colonese said he and Lisa Houlihan, Town Planner, would not be able to attend next month's meeting and asked commissioners if they wanted to push agenda items to the May 2024 regular meeting. Commissioner Dwyer said the commission could hold a special meeting in April if necessary.

BY CONSENSUS, THE COMMISSION AGREED TO CANCEL THE APRIL 9, 2024, REGULAR MEETING.

BY CONSENSUS, THE COMMISSION AGREED TO RETURN TO A HYBRID (IN-PERSON AND REMOTE) FORMAT FOR FUTURE MEETINGS.

V. ADJOURNMENT:

MOVED (BIDWELL) SECONDED (BURSTEIN) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ADJOURN THE CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEETING AT 8:12 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Nathaniel Trask, Recording Clerk