



STATE OF CONNECTICUT – COUNTY OF TOLLAND  
INCORPORATED 1786

# TOWN OF ELLINGTON

55 MAIN STREET – PO BOX 187  
ELLINGTON, CONNECTICUT 06029-0187  
[www.ellington-ct.gov](http://www.ellington-ct.gov)

TEL. (860) 870-3120 TOWN PLANNER'S OFFICE FAX (860) 870-3122

## CONSERVATION COMMISSION REGULAR MEETING MINUTES TUESDAY, MARCH 10, 2026, 7:00 PM

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

**PRESENT:** Chairman Rebecca Quarno, Vice Chairman Robert Zielfelder, Jr., Regular Members James Gage (via Zoom), Sean Dwyer, Kathy Caton, Kalagena Sullivan, and Alternate Matthew Shea

**ABSENT:** Regular Member Jamison Boucher and Alternate Ann Harford

**STAFF:** John Colonese, Assistant Town Planner and Ashley DuBois, Recording Clerk

### **OTHERS**

**PRESENT:** Valerie Amsel, Ad Hoc Ellington Trails Committee Representative (via Zoom), Mary Cardin, Board of Selectman Liaison (via Zoom)

**I. CALL TO ORDER:** Chairman Rebecca Quarno called the Conservation Commission meeting to order at 7:01 PM.

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

### **III. ACTIVE BUSINESS:**

1. Plan of Conservation & Development, Chapter 4-Conservation Strategies, Natural Resource Preservation: Historic Preservation – Historic Resources Inventory Update.

John Colonese, Assistant Town Planner, reported the E2 Project Management LLC consultant is working on the forms for the inventory per State Historic Preservation Office guidelines. A draft report is expected soon.

2. Report - Farmland Preservation Program.

John Colonese provided the commission with a list of large farmland owners with 20+ acres for the commission to review and noted he added a handful of properties to an existing list the commission previously used in outreach efforts. In the spirit of ranking preserved land in town, John noted a ranking is typically awarded to a property when the owner approaches the Town. John proposed ranking the current farmland on the list or re-sending letters to the list of owners in hopes of gathering more interest in the farmland preservation program. Letters were sent roughly a year ago, with little

interest returned, and included a basic explanation of the program, a brochure, and contact info, postmarked from the Conservation Commission. The commission chose to resend letters to farm owners before ranking farmland in hopes of gathering more interest.

Mary Cardin, Board of Selectman Liaison, joined the conversation and asked if the list was all working farms. John Colonese responded that a preliminary review is done and then the State will ask in its application. John noted discussion about large-scale solar interest among some farm owners, particularly with recently approved solar additions in East Windsor. John noted a specific project in the planning stages, but not yet proposed to the CT Siting Council, called Saltbox Solar. The commission reviewed their site plan online and the project includes farmland in both East Windsor and Ellington along Crane Rd and Frog Hollow Rd. Their website says the 100 megawatts project would provide power to approximately 15,000 homes. John added that the solar company has an option to lease agreement with the farm owner. Commissioner Caton noted her understanding that the power generated often doesn't support the surrounding area and often is sent across state lines. Chairman Quarno confirmed this based on her experience and that the landowner is often the only incentivized party. Commissioner Dwyer asked if there is additional tax revenue generated from these types of projects, and John confirmed they are taxed and may have a tax stabilization agreement with the Town. John also said the Town will receive notice when an application with the CT Siting Council is filed providing an opportunity for comment.

Mary Cardin noted the Board of Selectman passed a resolution on the matter at their meeting last night. Mary confirmed the understanding that there is no guarantee that any power generated from the farms stays in town and the developers are typically in contract with power companies to sell the power to them. Mary also confirmed that the Town will be notified when an application is filed with the CT Siting Council. Furthermore, Mary encouraged people to read the minutes or listen to the recording of the Board of Selectman meeting from yesterday to best understand the discussion.

In summary, Mary Cardin noted multiple farmers in town attended the meeting in opposition to the solar resolution. However, the intent for the town is to take a position on these types of developments and currently the town lacks a voice on the matter, thus relying solely on the CT Siting Council conclusions. It is important to note that the town can intervene, and individuals can intervene as well in applications. Mary added a lot of the work is done by the companies in the years leading to the filing of the application to the CT Siting Council. To this matter, Mary noted multiple concerned farmers expressing the challenge to continue farming in town and to make a living off their land, even more so in the State of Connecticut. This topic has put the Town at somewhat of a crossroads, with the combination of later generations not pursuing the farming lifestyle and solar companies' interest in farmland to develop solar farms.

Mary Cardin referenced legislative work by State Representative Jaime Foster proposing to allow municipalities to have a seat and voice on the CT Siting Council if the application is filed for said town. Mary added that a law passed recently which set a taxation per acreage on solar farms with a mandated amount that the solar farm

must pay to the Town in taxes. Mary expressed the importance of continued conversation on the topic within the Conservation Commission, Board of Selectman, and among town residents to identify a path forward that works best for all parties involved.

Commissioner Caton asked Mary Cardin if there is discussion regarding the type of solar being developed and referenced other solar farms in Europe and other areas of the United States that have developed elevated panels to allow farming activity to still occur underneath the panels. Mary responded she recently learned this type of farming is called agrivoltaics but does not have extensive knowledge on the topic as of now. Vice Chairman Zielfelder Jr. asked Mary if the developers are building onto existing soil or if the soil is removed. Mary's understanding and observations noted the panels are installed on existing soils. Vice Chairman Zielfelder Jr. theorized then the soils could return to farming conditions in the future if desired and John Colonese noted the CT Department of Agriculture comments on Siting Council solar applications. Mary added the agreements typically include that the solar company is required to remove all materials from the site upon completion, however an individual at a past Board of Selectman meeting offered the concern, asking would a solar company uphold their commitments to the agreement if they fold or go under.

John Colonese noted that he sent the commission the draft resolution in front of the Board of Selectman. Mary Cardin added that the draft resolution was modified at the meeting, no longer stating that the town opposes the siting and installation of additional commercial solar energy facilities but instead would evaluate and if appropriate take action. John reiterated the minutes for yesterday's Board of Selectman meeting regarding this topic should be posted shortly.

### 3. Report - Open Space Preservation Program.

John Colonese spoke with Matt Starr at DEEP regarding the state's acceptance of the future acquisition of the Somers Road 20-acre parcel that abuts state forest. However, the parcel is low on their acquisition list. Matt noted it would be helpful and could accelerate the pace if the Town were to have the land appraised. Approval for this would be required from the Commission and Board of Selectman. Funding would come out of open space fund, but the price for an appraisal is unknown. John noted the state will eventually complete the acquisition in full when able including the appraisal. More information will be provided at the next meeting, including the potential price of appraisal, the owner's plans, etc. Commissioner Gage added the Land Trust last paid \$4k-\$5k for an appraisal. The Commission chose to also send open space preservation program letters to owners to potentially gather more interest.

### 4. Priority Rankings for Open Space & Farmland Preservation.

In continuation of last month's meeting the commission used their Open Space Ranking System chart to rank four parcels on the List of Priority Parcels for Open Space Preservation which did not have a ranking. The parcel 237 Green Rd and parcel APN 159-001-000 on Green Rd are owned by same owner and were ranked together as 9. Two other parcels, APN 159-002-0000 and APN 158-003-000, on Green Road are owned

by the same family and were ranked as 9. The current list of priority parcels is now fully ranked.

## II. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS:

### 1. FY 25-26 Budget & Expenditure Update:

Nothing new to report.

### 2. Approval of February 10, 2026, Regular Meeting Minutes.

**MOVED (SULLIVAN) SECONDED (CATON) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO APPROVE THE REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF FEBRUARY 10, 2026, AS WRITTEN.**

### 3. Correspondence/Discussion:

#### a. Ad Hoc Ellington Trails Committee – Update.

Valerie Amsel, Ad Hoc Ellington Trails Committee Representative, reported the University of Connecticut has a grant called the Connecticut Trails Finder and are planning to put all the trails in town into the program. Amsel noted businesses can input their location as well so the app also can promote businesses in relation to hiking activity. Valerie shared that Public Works is re-evaluating plowing the Batz property parking lot to allow winter activities there. Lastly, Valerie noted multiple upcoming events including an Audubon Talk on Hummingbirds on March 25<sup>th</sup> at the library, a geologist talk on April 9<sup>th</sup> at the Senior Center, Earth Day on the town green on April 25<sup>th</sup>, a bird walk on May 2<sup>nd</sup>, a big cleanup day at the Crystal Lake property coming up, and Connecticut Trails Day June 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> happenings with the Vernon Greenways along the Hockanum River.

#### b. North Central Conservation District Plant & Seeding Sale – Spring 2026

## IV. ADJOURNMENT:

**MOVED (ZIELFELDER JR.) SECONDED (DWYER) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ADJOURN THE CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEETING AT 8:04 PM.**

Respectfully submitted,

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Ashley DuBois, Recording Clerk