



APPROVED MINUTES
Ridgefield Conservation Commission
Town Hall annex, 66 Prospect Street
Ridgefield, CT 06877
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November 30, 2020 at 7 P.M.

Present:	Carroll Brewster	Jim Coyle	Jack Kace	Erik Keller
	Jean Linville	Matt Sharp	Allan Welby	Dan Levine
	Dave Cronin	Kitsey Snow	Eric Beckenstein	

Guests speakers: Sophie Desmarais, Katie Bitner

Guest attendees: Macklin Reid, William Nowak

Mr. Coyle chaired the meeting. Ms. Campbell-Gibson took the minutes.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the November 16, 2020 meeting were approved.

UPON motion duly made (Welby), seconded (Brewster), (Kace was not yet present in this meeting to vote) and carried, it was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of November 16, 2020 be approved and ordered filed in the Town Hall.

2. OPEN SPACE

Eagle Scout Presentations

- Sophie Desmarais – Mar-Joy Pond Bridge and Trail maintenance project completion
Ms. Desmarais is a scout in Troop 19. Her project was to make Mar-Joy pond, waterfall and trail more accessible by clearing over grown sections of the trail and building a bridge. On July 3, 2020, with the help of volunteers, she built a bridge over the stream and brush was cleared from the overgrown section of the trail. Mr. Coyle thanked Sophie for her project and told her he wrote an article for the Ridgefield Press thanking all the scouts for their hard work this summer.
- Katie Bitner – Bear Mountain White Trail project completion
Ms. Bitner is a scout in Troop 19. For her Eagle Scout project, she designed, cleared and blazed a new trail on the newly acquired Bear Mountain open space. The work took place in a single day with two sessions comprising eight volunteers assisting in the first session and five volunteers in the second session, as well as her family who helped where needed. Ms. Bitner's project required little use of the budget allocated to her. The new White Trail is 1.25 miles in length. Challenges she faced during her project included finding registered volunteer adults to chaperone the work crew, trees falling onto the newly created trail after the storm and finding friends to help out when many of her initial work crew had to quarantine due to Covid exposure. Mr. Coyle thanked Katie for the new trail she blazed.

McKeon Farm

- Well enclosure maintenance
The well enclosure is a good-sized fenced area near the gate off Old Stagecoach Road. Mr. Cronin suggests planting a pollinator garden in the enclosure to make it look better. Whitney Freeman has beehives in the enclosure. Many overgrown invasive plants need to be removed. The restrictions imposed by the grant received to install the well point must be reviewed to make sure planting for a pollinator garden is permissible in the enclosure. Mr. Coyle asked Ms. Snow if she was in favor of another pollinator garden. Ms. Snow is not opposed. This project will be done in spring if it is permissible according to the grant restrictions.

- Pollinator Garden fencing

Mr. Cronin suggested fencing the garden area with split pole fencing. The original metal fence was recently removed. Ms. Campbell-Gibson received a quote for a split rail fence to be installed on the east and south side of the pollinator garden, totaling approximate 280 feet. The cost for installed fencing is approximately \$30 per foot. For 280 foot of fencing, that would cost \$9,000.00. Because this cost is not enough for a capital budget request, Mr. Cronin suggested an alternative to a fence is the use of shrubs to delineate the upper meadow from the garden. Mr. Keller suggested getting a price for the materials only and asking the scouts to take this on as a project. Mr. Sharp said that he didn't think there was enough planning involved for a scout project, but this could be volunteer hours for their conservation service hours. Mr. Sharp will speak to the troops in January to see if there is interest.

Mr. Coyle suggested revisiting this project next year.

- Relocation of parking area in deed restrictions

According to the Declaration of Restrictive Covenants at McKeon Farm, there is a gravel parking area for up to ten cars allowed in Lots 9 and 10. Because these lots are in the middle of the property, this is not desirable. The preferred location of the parking area is Lots 7 and 8. The deed restrictions need to be modified to allow this change. Mr. Coyle sent a draft amendment to the commissioners during the week and asks that the commissioners vote to accept the amendments. Mr. Brewster asked to include the reason for changing the location of the parking area, which is "to provide increased safety for entry and egress from Old Stagecoach Road". Mr. Cronin said he is not in favor of a parking area off Old Stagecoach Road because the parking in the cul-du-sac on Lauzen Lane gives easier access to the trail. Ms. Snow said she favors additional parking off Old Stagecoach road because it would be closer to the vegetable garden and the pollinator garden, and if the pollinator garden is used for educational purposes, access from Old Stagecoach Road would be easier. Another reason Ms. Snow cited favoring a parking area off Old Stagecoach Road is to provide parking to visitors that currently park there blocking the gate. A parking area would prevent visitors from parking in front of the gate Whitney uses access to the farm.

UPON motion duly made (Kace), seconded (Snow), and carried (Cronin abstained), it was **RESOLVED** to submit an Amended Declaration of Restrictive Covenants authorizing the relocation of the gravel parking area to Lots 7 and 8 to improve the safety of access/egress to/from Old Stagecoach Road to First Selectman, Mr. Rudy Marconi, for signature.

Mr. Coyle will add the mention of increased safety to the document and get town counsel to check the language before sending to Mr. Marconi for signature.

- Lauzen Grassland

Mr. Welby has a circulated a project proposal. He made a motion for further discussion:

Motion made by Mr. Welby that the Ridgefield Conservation Commission adopt the proposal titled "Native Grassland Project, Lauzen Field" with two provisions 1) Funding for the burn to come from USFWS, 2) All required permits to proceed are secured. Motion seconded by Ms. Snow.

Mr. Welby asked the commission to vote so that funding can be sourced and the project can move forward. Mr. Coyle highlighted deed restrictions affecting that area of the property: Whitney Freeman has a license agreement on the three-acre parcel called Ridgebury 2, and an equestrian easement on Lot 1 allows up to three horses to be grazed and the area to be fenced by Mr. Kuebler and Ms. Touscany. Ms. Snow suggests having a discussion with Mr. Kuebler and Ms. Touscany because she does not think the creation of a prairie prevents the grazing of horses there. Mr. Coyle said we would need to retain Town Counsel in this effort.

Mr. Cronin asked that the commission first vote on whether to proceed with this project at all before discussion. He does not see the benefit of a prairie over a hay field. Mr. Welby said he would like to promote and preserve natural resources. He feels a prairie is preferable to a hay field. Mr. Coyle said his concerns are the initial cost of the project, the cost of maintenance and the availability of a volunteer workforce to maintain a prairie long term.

Dr. Kace asked if anyone had a chance to watch the webinar Dr. Linville sent to everyone after the last meeting, adding that he had learned a lot from this webinar. The most concerning issue he feels is the cost of installing a meadow. In the webinar, Pennington Gray speaks about meadows on a number of properties in Fairfield and Westchester Counties that they have installed. Their cost for installation and six years of maintenance of a meadow is 55 cents per square foot. This works out to \$24,000 per acre. With the proposed 13 acres, this would represent potential costs in the hundreds of thousands of dollars. (Note: meadow costs are not the same as grassland costs) Dr. Kace suggests that the commission get solid estimates for the entire project, before starting the project. Dr. Linville said that a professional service and a tailor made seed mix increases the cost but with the cost of the burn potentially covered by USFW and generic seed mix, the cost at McKeon would be lower. Mr. Welby said his best estimate of the cost was lower, at \$9,000. Ms. Snow agreed the cost would be lower and suggested a vote to approve \$9,000 for the project and cutting down the area to be converted to approximately five acres rather than the entire acreage proposed. Mr. Cronin asked where the \$9,000 would come from. Mr. Welby explained the cost breakdown of the project document. (This document refers). Ms. Snow suggested using the money in the Old Sib fund. Mr. Cronin does not think this is appropriate.

Mr. Brewster added that Ridgefield has always had agricultural fields, never prairies and before the arrival of people the area was forested and as a Conservation Commission we should be concentrating our resources and our efforts on preserving and restoring the marks of Ridgefield's historic landscape, forests, watercourses and agriculture land devoted to pasture, hay and the cultivation of food. The encouragement in small gardens and in pathways for indigenous flowers and insects, are part of that effort, but not the creation of a multi-acre meadow of wild flowers, and, as a consequence, what would be by far our largest financial investment in our landscape. Mr. Welby said he wants to return the field to what it was up to two thousand years ago. Mr. Beckenstein asked what component of the project involved removing invasives. Mr. Welby answered that the burn and timing of reseeded was designed to combat invasives. Ms. Snow added that creating a meadow would provide habitat for creatures driven out human activity. Dr. Kace asked if the commission would consider a demonstration project of one acre. Ms. Snow cautioned that this might be too small to be effective as native grassland. Mr. Welby added that 10 acres was a minimum for bird habitat.

Mr. Coyle ended the discussion and moved the question. Mr. Welby asked for a roll call vote.
Coyle, Beckenstein, Keller, Brewster, Cronin, Kace vote NO (6 No votes)
Snow, Levine, Welby vote YES (3 Yes votes). The motion does NOT pass.

Dr. Linville asked if the size of the parcel would change the no votes. Mr. Coyle said his issues with this proposal are not just the size of the parcel, but the cost of installation, the maintenance costs and requirements, and the long-term availability of volunteers, he the project is too much to take on. Ms. Snow asked if the project could be considered in the future. Mr. Coyle said that was a possibility.

Posting on Open Spaces

Mr. Cronin reported a large number of open spaces are not posted. People dump on open spaces because they are not aware that the land is open space. Mr. Cronin will give each commissioner a number of open spaces to visit and post if necessary.

Ridgefield Greenway Potential

Mr. Coyle said commission had received an email from William Nowak regarding greenway potential. He asked commissioners to volunteer to work with Mr. Nowak. Dr. Linville said she would help and thinks it is great that someone wants to take a look at doing this. Ms. Sharp will also help.

3. ZONING REGULATIONS AMENDMENT TO SECTION 6.2 - PUBLIC WATER SUPPLY

Dr. Kace has proposed comments from the commission to Planning and Zoning regarding the amendment. The main purpose behind the amendment is to call areas that were previously called "local aquifer protection areas" by a new name, viz. "public water supply protection area". The porous soils above the town aquifers must be regulated if the aquifer provides drinking water. If an aquifer supports more than a 1,000 people with drinking water, it is regulated by the state and the aquifer protection agency. If it supports less than a 1,000 people then it is regulated locally. A polluted aquifer has never successfully been restored

to meet primary drinking water standards in the US. The strategy to adopt is to prevent contamination in the first place. The revision to the regulations proposed by Planning and Zoning does not sufficiently say how this should be done. This is what Dr. Kace commented on in his memorandum to Planning and Zoning. Dr. Kace asks in his comments to Planning and Zoning that the DEEP best management practices regarding aquifer protection are incorporated in the zoning regulations and that this is discussed at their upcoming meeting. Mr. Levine asked for clarification on Planning and Zoning's control over aquifers. Dr. Kace said that there were nine aquifers in Ridgefield that are locally regulated by Planning and Zoning.

UPON motion duly made (Beckenstein), seconded (Keller), and carried, it was **RESOLVED** to accept the comments made via memorandum to the Director of Planning and Zoning regarding this amendment.

4. PUBLIC OUTREACH

Mr. Coyle thanked everyone for assisting in getting information out to the public. Mr. Levine posts the ideas provided by the commissioners on social media and these posts are also loaded onto the commission web page. Mr. Brewster suggested a quarterly newsletter is sent to donors. Mr. Levine asked if the newsletter would be similar to the content of the annual appeal letter. Mr. Welby suggested asking for a dedicated column in the Ridgefield Press. Mr. Coyle suggested sending news via email as well as paper letter. Mr. Levine and Ms. Campbell-Gibson will work on the newsletter. Mr. Sharp suggested a newsletter is the spring and the fall. Mr. Brewster suggested sending email blasts when something big happens, not just at particular times of the year. Ms. Snow works on the NRWA and Pollinator Pathway newsletters and described these to the commission. Ms. Snow suggests the newsletter inform for educational value as well as news, with commissioners submitting written articles for inclusion, and web links to interesting conservation issues. The commission will consider doing two to three issues per year.

5. MEETING ATTENDANCE

Dr. Kace will attend the December 1, 2020 P&Z meeting, He is filling in for Mr. Levine, who is unable to attend. No other issues were reported with the required meeting attendance.

6. CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

- Mr. Coyle consolidated the bank accounts from four down to two. There is a Discretionary fund for all things not acquisition related, and the Open Space fund for acquisitions. Ms. Snow asked why this was done and where the Old Sib fund went. Mr. Coyle said the Old Sib fund was renamed the Discretionary fund but the purpose of the fund remains the same: for open space improvements. Ms. Snow does not agree with the change in the name of the Old Sib fund.
- \$18,000 was paid to the RCC in lieu of open space for a sub division at 167-173 High Ridge Avenue.
- Mr. Welby requested a regular budget discussion. Mr. Coyle suggests the first meeting of the month.
- Enforcement discussions will occur at the first meeting of the month, with feedback from Beth Peyser.
- Mr. Coyle said he would submit the budget to the town on December 14.
- Mr. Keller confirmed the proposed meeting at McKeon on Thursday at 12 P.M. to place the stakes.
- Mr. Welby asked about the upcoming commission election. He asked for clarity on the length of appointments and how a commissioner becomes an elected official. Mr. Coyle explained the officers are the chairman, vice chairman and treasurer. The Town Charter defines commission appointments.

The next RCC meeting will be held on Monday December 14, 2020 at 7:00 P.M.

ADJOURNMENT

UPON motion duly made (Cronin), seconded (Brewster), and carried, it was **RESOLVED** that the meeting adjourn at 9:11 P.M.