



APPROVED MINUTES
Ridgefield Conservation Commission
Town Hall annex, 66 Prospect Street
Ridgefield, CT 06877
(203) 431-2713 • conservation@ridgefieldct.org

January 04, 2021 at 7 P.M.

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

Absent: Daniel C. Levine

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

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the December 14, 2020 meeting were approved.

UPON motion duly made (Cronin), seconded (Brewster), (Snow abstained) and carried, it was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of December 14, 2020 be approved and ordered filed in the Town Hall.

2. OPEN SPACE

Town Owned Land Parcels potential designation as open space

Mr. Keller updated the document listing the five areas of town owned land where there is potential for open space designation through a conservation easement or a deed restriction. There are 93 acres to be gained as open space for conservation. Mr. Keller asked for comments from the commissioners to include in the final document before talking to Mr. Marconi.

Mr. Sharp asked what costs are associated with this endeavor. Dr. Kace said that no lawyer had been retained to do anything yet. However, after a brief discussion with Mr. Grogins, the town attorney, it seems that a conservation easement is the simplest vehicle to achieve additional conservation open space. Mr. Keller added that the commission would first seek agreement in concept from the Board of Selectmen before incurring costs and that costs anticipated would be for survey and legal fees.

Ms. Snow recommends removing the statement regarding no hiking at the golf course because there is already a parcel of land bordering New York State where there is a trail used by horse riders. She recommends not adding new trails to the potential new parcel at the golf course. Mr. Coyle answered that no additional trails were planned because the additional parcel tagged for conservation open space designation is waterlogged and not likely to be viewed as a potential space to hike.

Ms. Snow asked about the parcel tagged for conservation open space at the high school where the cross country trail currently runs. Mr. Coyle answered that the Conservation Commission wants to preserve the land as conservation open space to prevent development, but that the maintenance of the open space is not something the commission would take over. That would still be up to the high school through Parks and Recreation. Ms. Snow said that summer workers had removed invasives there during the summer with Dennis DiPinto's permission. Mr. Coyle said the commission would ensure that maintenance remains with Parks and Recreation.

McKeon Farm

- Pollinator Garden project update - Ms. Snow said that the pollinator garden should be finished before spring. She said most of the seeding has been done, with the exception of the upper meadow. The

desodder didn't work because of the deep roots of the invasive plants in the field. Her plan is to mulch the area and seed in the spring.

Mr. Coyle asked if a back hoe could be used. Ms. Snow said no, mulch would work. She gets free mulch from the recycling center. Mr. Coyle asked how the commissioners could help with the remainder of the work. Mr. Cronin suggested using the tractor when it is working again. Mr. Keller suggested using the truck to transport mulch from the recycling center to McKeon. Mr. Cronin cautioned that no cars may drive on McKeon, only farm equipment. Mr. Sharp offered to help whenever help is needed. Ms. Snow suggested a work day for all in February if the weather allows.

Mr. Coyle summed up the financial side of the project stating that \$3,500 in funds had been approved and that so far \$2,800 had been spent.

NRVT

- Ms. Snow asked to postpone this discussion to the next meeting.

3. 319 GRANT DISCUSSION

Ms. Snow sent information to the commissioners regarding the NRWA application for a 319 Grant from DEEP to get the Norwalk River delisted from nutrient loading. The northern part of the river between Ligi's Way and Farmingville Road has the highest levels of phosphorous, nitrogen and e-coli and the lowest levels of dissolved oxygen in the river, indicating that something is going on in Ridgefield Brook or Great Swamp that is causing this to happen. A 319 Grant supports a wide variety of activities including technical assistance, financial assistance, education, training, technology transfer, demonstration projects and monitoring to assess the success of specific non-point source implementation projects to curb run off or non-point source pollution. The hope is that the grant money will cover Harbor Watch's testing of the river since they lost their grant money to test this year. The second part of the plan is to come up with better storm water management and a rain garden to reduce high nutrient levels. Testing will be done in Ridgefield Brook, Steep Brook, Cooper's Brook, and the Great Swamp.

Dr. Kace asked about the method of testing to be used given that testing on the same day at various points up stream from the problem would be the best method to determine a source. Ms. Snow said that method would be employed and as many as 12 points upstream would be tested. She added the thought is that animals are contributing to the e-coli and fertilizer run-off is contributing to the phosphorus and nitrogen levels. The hope is testing will confirm this.

There are two things NRWA would like from the Conservation Commission: one is a letter of support and the other is a letter or memorandum of understanding that the commission agrees with the efforts that may be required to mitigate the problem. The commission has some conservation land along Ligi's Way and work may be required on the land to mitigate the pollution. Mr. Coyle confirmed that the Conservation Commission would support this grant application.

UPON motion duly made (Kace), seconded (Brewster), and carried, it was **RESOLVED** that the Conservation Commission issue a letter of support and a memorandum of understanding for inclusion in the NRWA 319 Grant application to DEEP for the study of the non-point source pollution on the northern section of the Norwalk River between Ligi's Way and Farmingville Road.

Mr. Coyle will send the signed letters to Ms. Snow tomorrow.

4. COMMISSION MEMBERSHIP

One application has been received for the alternate position available on the commission as advertised from Jim Liptack. He is an excellent candidate. Mr. Liptack will be invited to the next commission meeting on January 20. Applications close on January 15.

Mr. Coyle said that the Conservation Commission can appoint two seats to the Tree Committee. Mr. Marconi asked if the commission would like to appoint anybody. Ms. Campbell-Gibson will check with Ms. Escribano as to who is on record for the Conservation Commission and if they have expressed interest in being reinstated; if not, Ms. Campbell-Gibson will contact them to follow up.

Ms. Snow suggested sending requests for participation to the rangers. Ms. Campbell-Gibson will create an advertisement for available positions if we need to recruit more participants.

Mr. Carroll suggested inviting the chairman of the Tree Committee to the next meeting to find out what they do and how it ties in to the Conservation Commission. He added that in the past this had been a once per year invitation. Ms. Campbell-Gibson will send the invitation.

5. THRIFT SHOP GRANT APPLICATION

Mr. Coyle asked for ideas for projects to include in the Thrift Shop Grant application. Mr. Welby said that the grant does not have to be for a single project, it can be split across a few projects.

Mr. Welby sent information and pictures of nesting gourds for Purple Martins. He estimates the cost of procurement and installation would come to \$1,000 and the location he suggests is McKeon Farm near the barn. Details of his proposal are in the documents he sent to the commissioners. Mr. Keller asked if the maintenance requirements were more or less than the Victorian houses used. Mr. Welby said it would be easier and added that the opening was a shape disliked by other birds which eliminates the possibility of the gourds being taken over by other species. Mr. Coyle asked if the commission should do two of these installations. Mr. Cronin suggested Lake Windwing as another location.

Mr. Coyle suggested including other projects with the application. Dr. Linville suggested the project her and Mr. Keller are working on for educational signage at McKeon. Ms. Snow asked about the fencing at McKeon. Mr. Cronin said the fencing at the pollinator garden should be included. Ms. Snow asked if the seed for the pollinator garden could be included with all the projects at McKeon and included as a single application for the grant. Mr. Coyle agreed.

This item will be voted on at the next meeting after commissioners have read and seen the footage Mr. Welby sent regarding the nesting gourds and after the other commissioners have written up their requirements as discussed tonight, for inclusion in a single grant application.

In summary Mr. Coyle outlined the required input from the commissioners:

- Purple martin gourd houses – one each for McKeon Farm and Lake Windwing – Mr. Welby
- Pollinator Garden seeding – Ms. Snow
- Pollinator Garden fencing – Mr. Cronin
- McKeon education signing – Dr. Linville and Mr. Keller

A brief write-up on each project explaining what/why we are doing this along with a cost estimate is required.

Ms. Campbell-Gibson will receive all input and populate the Thrift Shop Grant Application form with the information provided for the various projects. The Thrift Shop Grant application is required to be in by January 31 to be considered.

6. PUBLIC OUTREACH

Mr. Coyle used the Aspetuk Land Trust newsletter as an example of the kind of newsletter the Conservation Commission should produce. Ms. Campbell-Gibson sent a copy to the commissioners, with a list of suggested input from each commissioner and a suggested timeframe. Mr. Coyle suggests half a page with images per topic and approximately 8 topics giving approximately 4 pages. There was

discussion about structure, content, method and target audience but with Mr. Levine being tasked with taking the lead on the newsletter, and he being absent from tonight's meeting, the discussion was tabled for another time.

Mr. Sharp asked about the database of emails to use to send the newsletter. There is a list of rangers and a list of people who have donated to the commission with email addresses. Mr. Sharp will reach out to Aspetuk Land Trust to find out how they increased their list of recipients.

7. MEETING ATTENDANCE

No issues were reported with the required meeting attendance.

8. CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

Mr. Coyle reported that the commission projects to be approximately \$2000 over budget at the end of the year.

Mr. Cronin reported that there had been a report made to Mr. Sharp of trees down in the Whitbeck Preserve. When looking into how to enter this preserve, Mr. Cronin saw that there are state parcels adjacent to Whitbeck that should be acquired as conservation land to allow better access to the preserve. Mr. Coyle said he has previously spoken to the Senator Haskell about acquiring left over state parcels for open space land. While there are a total of 44 acres in 31 parcels, it is probably worth pursuing only about 33 acres for open space. Mr. Coyle will reach out to the senator again.

Mr. Cronin sent a list of 116 significant parcels requiring posting and allocated a number of parcels to each commissioner. Dr. Kace asked if maps could be sent for easier location. Mr. Cronin will send out maps as required but suggested commissioners take a flash drive to the office and Ms. Campbell-Gibson can download all the commission maps to their flash drive. Mr. Cronin said he would like the spaces posted by May 1st.

The next RCC meeting will be held on **Wednesday** January 20, 2021 at 7:00 P.M.

ADJOURNMENT

UPON motion duly made (Brewster), seconded (Welby), and carried, it was RESOLVED that the meeting adjourn at 8:17 P.M.