



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

MARCH 8, 2021 at 7 P.M.
Via ZOOM

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

Guests Speakers: Whitney Freeman

Guest Attendees: Peggy Thomas, Jessica Williams, Shayla Colon

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

ADD AGENDA ITEM

UPON motion duly made (Brewster), seconded (Kace), and carried, it was **RESOLVED** to add a discussion of the Thrift Shop Grant to the agenda as item 5.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

UPON motion duly made (Welby), seconded (Brewster), and carried, it was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of February 22, 2021 be approved and ordered filed in the Town Hall.

2. OPEN SPACE

McKeon – Cornerstone Home and Gardens License Renewal

This is the third license the commission will approve with CH&G. The 2021 license agreement terms will remain the same as they were for the 2020 license agreement.

UPON motion duly made (Cronin), seconded (Brewster), and approved, it was **RESOLVED** that the Conservation Commission recommend to the Board of Selectmen, the approval of the new license agreement for Cornerstone Home and Garden to continue their gardening operations at McKeon Farm.

McKeon – Henny Penny Farm, Whitney Freeman

This is the fourth year of a five-year lease agreement between the commission and Henny Penny Farm where each year changes can be made to the lease agreement by a one-year license agreement, if necessary. The new license agreement seeks to increase the number of animals grazing at McKeon, conditional on the results of the soil tests to be redone. Mr. Coyle asked the commissioners to weigh in on the wording of the new license agreement asking three questions: Is the soil testing condition satisfactory? Is the number of animals to be allowed acceptable? Has the Henny Penny Farm operation become too big for McKeon?

Mr. Welby put forward a motion to move to postpone consideration of this matter until such time that, in consultation with and input from the Board of Selectmen, it is determined if the license agreement represents a commercial farming operation on town land that is subject to a possible RPF (Request for Proposal) considerations or other considerations. Mr. Welby asked four questions: Are the BOS aware of the manner in which Henny Penny Farm operates now as opposed to the operations agreed upon in original lease? What is the town getting in return for allowing this commercial operation on town land? Is the commission exposed because this opportunity has not been opened to other operators? Is an RFP required?

Dr. Linville suggested that this would be a better discussion when the five-year lease is up for renewal as opposed to the renewal of the one-year license agreement required now. Mr. Coyle answered Mr. Welby's concern about what the BOS know about the Henny Penny Farm operation by saying that each year the renewal of the license agreement is approved by BOS before being adopted and that the original lease agreement was approved by them too.

Mr. Welby said he still suggests postponing the approval of a new license agreement until clarification is received from the BOS regarding commercial operations being allowed at McKeon. Ms. Snow answered by saying that when the commission decided to seek a tenant in 2016 the commission received only commercial operation proposals, and that before that there had been two previous commercial farming operations at McKeon, approved by the BOS. Dr. Kace agreed.

Dr. Kace suggested the commission vote down the motion put forward by Mr. Welby, and to approve the new license agreement with Henny Penny Farm for one year, and to do as Dr. Linville suggests and discuss the size, length and other details of a commercial farming operation at McKeon before a new lease is offered.

Mr. Brewster asked for clarity on the soil testing condition and how the commission would restrict the number of animals allowed to graze at the farm because the commission has already agreed that the number of animals would not be allowed to increase unless the soil test results support it. Mr. Coyle said that the license agreement states this condition clearly. Mr. Welby asked why not wait until the results are in before renewing the license to which Mr. Coyle answered that the license agreement renewal is due now and it is most efficient to renew with conditions than to delay Ms. Freeman's farming operations at the eleventh hour.

Motion that was duly made (Welby), seconded (Levine), failed: To postpone consideration of the renewal of the license agreement with Henny Penny Farm until the commission has received input from the Board of Selectmen determined if the license agreement represents a commercial farming operation on town land that is subject to a possible RPF (Request for Proposal) considerations or other considerations.
VOTE: 1 in favor (Welby), 7 vote against, 1 abstain (Levine). Motion FAILED.

UPON motion duly made (Kace), seconded (Keller), and approved, it was RESOLVED that the Conservation Commission recommend to the Board of Selectmen, the approval of the new license agreement for Henny Penny Farm to continue operations at McKeon Farm with the number of animals allowed to graze pending the results of the soil samples to be retaken as soon as the ground thaws sufficiently.
VOTE: 7 in favor, 1 against (Welby), 1 abstain (Levine). Motion APPROVED.

Open Space Purchase

Mr. Coyle reported that discussion was continuing with the Boy Scouts regarding the purchase of property for open space. The commission has requested that the Boy Scouts do a title search on the property because there are a number of discrepancies that we have found with regards to ownership of the parcels concerned.

Other

Ms. Snow reported that there were snowboard ramps on the field near the Lauzen Lane entrance to McKeon that need to be removed from the property. Mr. Liptack suggested the commission post a sign stating that

this activity is not approved and request the ramps be removed by a certain date or they will be disposed of, thus giving the owners of the ramp time to remove them and learn from the sign about the nature of this activity. Ms. Campbell-Gibson will create and post a sign on Lauzen Lane.

3. PUBLIC OUTREACH

The Spring 2021 Newsletter has been produced by Mr. Levine with input from some commissioners and is ready to go out to the public. There has been a delay in sending the newsletter out by email because of the volume and size of the newsletter. Ms. Campbell-Gibson is investigating the use of a paid mail service to send the newsletter. Mr. Levine has posted the newsletter on Facebook and Hamlet Hub. He has also sent it via Gmail to the list of rangers he maintains. Mr. Levine asked that commissioners send him articles continuously, to put into the next newsletters. The decision was taken to send out newsletters four times per year and to standardize content. Mr. Levine said he would aim to have the next newsletter ready to go out by the third week of May.

Mr. Sharp said he has been in contact with the scout masters of Ridgefield and will be addressing the various troops at their meetings over the next month to promote the Conservation Commission and to inform the scouts of volunteer work they could undertake for the commission in order to earn badges. He asked for suggestions of work the scouts could do and asked that commissioners wishing to join him at the scout meetings email him to make arrangements.

4. PLANNING AND ZONING APPLICATION – Ligi’s Way Boardwalk

Ms. Snow and Dr. Kace drafted a letter of comment regarding this application, which will be submitted to the Planning and Zoning Commission before their next meeting if everyone agrees. Mr. Coyle asked if there were any further comments the commissioners wished to add. There were none.

UPON a motion duly made (Keller), seconded (Linville), and carried it was **RESOLVED** that the Conservation Commission approve the letter commenting on the proposed boardwalk along Ligi’s Way, be submitted to the Planning and Zoning Commission as written.

5. THRIFT SHOP GRANT

Mr. Welby reported that the grant application to the Ridgefield Thrift Shop was approved for the sum of \$5,000. This money will be used for McKeon Farm to purchase purple martin gourds and mounting pole, educational signs, and seeding of the meadow at the pollinator garden.

Mr. Sharp asked when the purple martin housing would be installed. Mr. Welby said the money from the Thrift Shop grant would only be received by the commission in mid-March and that he would arrange installation by the end of March or as soon thereafter as possible. Mr. Welby will be in contact with Laurie Doss of the Purple Martin Conservation Association in Kent for information and possible assistance.

6. MEETING ATTENDANCE

No issues were reported with the required meeting attendance.

7. CHAIRMAN’S REMARKS

The FY2021 budget is projected to be roughly \$4,500 over budget. In order to bring this amount down the commission sent a check for \$3,000 to the finance department. These funds are being paid out of the Discretionary (Old Sib) account from the money that was originally in the McKeon Fund account before

the commission bank accounts were consolidated into just two accounts. These funds cover the pollinator garden project expenses.

The Board of Selectmen approved the Conservation Commission FY2022 budget request of \$45,000. This will now go to the Board of Finance for approval at the upcoming budget approval meeting.

The next RCC meeting will be held on **Monday** March 22, 2021 at 7:00 P.M.

ADJOURNMENT

UPON motion duly made (Brewster), seconded (Keller), and carried, it was RESOLVED that the meeting adjourn at 8:03 P.M.