



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

June 7, 2021 at 7 P.M.
Via ZOOM

Present: Jim Coyle Allan Welby Dave Cronin
 Jean Linville Jim Liptack Matt Sharp
 Kitsey Snow Jack Kace

Absent: Erik Keller, Daniel Levine

Guests: Roberta Barbieri, Whitney Freeman, John Katz.

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

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

UPON motion duly made (Welby), seconded (Sharp), and carried, it was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of May 17, 2021 be approved and ordered filed in the Town Hall. Vote: YES – 6, NO – 0, Abs at time of vote: 2

2. BOY SCOUT PROJECT PRESENTATION – JOSEPH ISAAC

Joseph Isaac is a scout from Troop 431. His Eagle Scout Project was to produce and install educational signs for the Ridgebury Slopes Trail. He gave a presentation and showed a short video of the final product. His project presentation is on the RCC web Eagle Scout projects web page.

Mr. Welby asked who would maintain the areas around the installed signs along the trail. Joseph answered that Parks and Recreation would keep the phragmites cut back at the pond site, and his father had volunteered to keep all other signs clear of growth around them.

The commissioners thanked Joseph for the project. Mr. Coyle asked Joseph to send copies of all the signs to the conservation office so that the commission can use the signs on our web site.

3. ENFORCEMENT ACTION

Dr. Kace gave feedback on the status of the Tanglewood court enforcement action.

Mr. Zusel of 25 Tanglewood court will be meeting with the conservation enforcement agent and Dr. Kace to discuss the way forward. He will have his property boundary lines staked in time for the meeting. Dr. Kace summarized the issue to date and the suggested plan of action. Dr. Linville asked if the stakes would remain in the ground for future reference. Dr. Kace answered the stakes should remain to prevent the property owner having to stake the boundary lines again in future should a dispute arise.

The other property owner, Mr. Hobbs, has had his property staked and a meeting will be scheduled with him as soon as possible.

4. MCKEON

Haying at Lauzun field:

Mr. Welby said the decision not to hay Lauzun in 2020 was to attract ground nesting birds and pollinators. Mr. Welby spoke of bobolinks seen in Stagecoach 1 field and of a missed opportunity for these birds to nest in that field due to it being mowed on May 26th.

Mr. Katz spoke for the farmer who has hayed at McKeon for many years for free for the commission. He explained the need for Carlos to plan his mowing/haying schedule and asked the commission to respect Carlos's timing requirements if he is to do this for free.

Mr. Cronin said that the commission used Carlos's services for many years because he was prepared to hay for free if he could use the hay. Without this service, the commission would have to pay to have the field mowed since the RCC does not have the equipment to do such a big job.

Ms. Snow mentioned that Carlos mowed Lauzun in November 2020 for a fee (\$800) and suggested the commission continue with this arrangement. She added that in order to support pollinators and birds, mowing or haying should only be done in March and November.

Dr. Kace spoke about the protocol used in Vermont that supports haying as well as ground nesting bird brood periods. This protocol suggests haying in the first week of May and again on or near July 15. This information is available on the USDA NCRS website.

A resident living adjacent to Lauzun field asked to speak. Mr. and Mrs. Ardalan asked why the commission had not consulted the neighbors regarding the haying of the Lauzun field because in the past they used to have Carlos do their field at the same time as he did Lauzun.

They also complained about the condition of the fencing around the property. We explained that we do the best we can with the very limited town budget provided to us.

Dr. Linville suggested mowing once per year and informing the neighbors and public that this protocol was to support and attract pollinators and ground nesting birds, while keeping invasives from taking over. Ms. Snow added that the commission should define the goal with Lauzun field: to hay or to support pollinators.

This discussion will continue at the next meeting. Mr. Coyle will contact Carlos of Trigueros Family Farms tomorrow to find out his timeline and limitations.

Bobolinks at Stagecoach 1 field

Mr. Welby reiterated concern for Bobolinks, describing that he had witnessed three males and a female during May. When asked if he could locate nests so that they could be protected, he said that was not possible. He expressed disappointment that half of the field was mowed on May 26th.

Mr. Coyle reminded the commission that the field was under contract to Dr. Whitney Freeman, but she graciously agreed to stop activity in the field until further notice as soon as she was made aware of the Bobolink. Dr. Freeman added that this awareness came after she had mowed half of the Stagecoach 1 field on May 25 and she has not touched the field since then. Dr. Linville asked Mr. Welby if he thought two weeks was adequate for Dr. Freeman to stay out of the field since there is no female Bobolink activity seen of late. Dr. Linville added that accommodating the various birds and pollinators in the field was a learning curve and the commission was doing their best with the information as it becomes available.

Dr. Freeman is in the process of applying for another grant for McKeon. This grant supports conservation efforts in conjunction with livestock grazing. Part of the grant could be for trees and shrubs for birds. She suggested using these as windbreaks and shade. Dr. Freeman asked if she should include the application for trees and shrubs in the grant application. Mr. Welby said he is against more trees being planted at McKeon because he wants open grassland only. Mr. Coyle said Dr. Freeman should keep trees in the grant application for now since the commission is divided on the issue. Ms. Snow said that shrubs and small trees would be a good addition to replace the invasives along the stone walls.

5. COMMITTEE ASSIGNMENTS

Mr. Coyle has completed the committee assignments and distributed these to the commissioners. He asked if commissioners could start working on their assignments or suggest changes.

6. NRI - UPDATE

Mr. Coyle, Ms. Snow, Dr. Linville, and Ms. Campbell-Gibson met to discuss the NRI update. Dr. Linville has outlined the scope of the work and suggested assignments commissioners could fulfill. She has reached out to previous contributors for assistance and has spoken to Johnathan Thompson regarding drone photography. Dr. Linville said that besides updating the data, her vision was to make the NRI more user friendly and visually appealing. The question that needs to be answered is how many sites to survey and which sites to survey. She noted that McKeon was not in the NRI. As a flagship property, McKeon should be part of the NRI.

Mr. Coyle said the NRI was due by August 2022. There are two submissions to Sustainable CT per year – in April and in August. He said additional budget would be needed to cover the expenses.

7. OPEN SPACE PLAN

Mr. Coyle is working on an open space preservation plan for Sustainable CT. The draft document will be completed in the next several weeks. The document will flesh out the submission to Sustainable CT in April (that was made by others), which was basically a table with links to the POCD.

8. OSHA GRANT

Mr. Coyle reported that the surveyor who did the survey for the Lake property when the commission purchased Bear Mountain was not interested in updating the survey to the requirements by DEEP for the commission to actually receive the money awarded in the OSHA grant. He has reached out to four surveyors recommended by DEEP but has only heard from one who is not interested in the job. He explained what the OSHA grant is for the guests: the RCC applied to OSHA DEEP for a grant to assist with the purchase of the Bear Mountain property. \$42,000 was awarded. DEEP has listed criteria they now want completed in order for the commission to actually receive the money. The Bear Mountain property was purchased in August last year for \$140,000 with money from the Open Space Fund.

Mr. Coyle reports that the Boy Scouts have completed their title search. He hopes to apply for another OSHA grant to purchase this property. The Boy Scouts have 52 acres. 42 acres have to be turned over to the RCC if they no longer want to use it, per the deed restrictions on that property. 10 acres are left, some of which can be sold by the Scouts but some is already owned by the RCC according to our records.

9. COMMUNITY OUTREACH

No comments made.

10. MEETINGS FOR ATTENDANCE

No problems were reported.

10. CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

Roberta Barbieri's committee assignment meeting with the BOS is on Wednesday June 9, 2021. Mr. Coyle asked the commissioners to look out for the BOS agenda and to attend if possible. (Subsequent to this meeting the BOS meeting was moved to June 23).

Zoom meetings will still be used because of the desire for public meetings to accommodate Zoom viewers too. This poses a problem for the RCC since we do not have the equipment to video our meetings. The IT department will need to offer guidance.

The next RCC meeting will be held on **Monday**, June 21, 2021 at 7:00 P.M.

ADJOURNMENT

UPON motion duly made (Welby), seconded (Liptack), and unanimously carried, it was RESOLVED that the meeting adjourn at 8:57 P.M.