



APPROVED MINUTES
Ridgefield Conservation Commission
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September 21, 2020

A meeting of the Ridgefield Conservation Commission was held via Zoom on Monday, September 21, 2020 at 7:30 p.m.

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

Absent: Dan Levine Eric Beckenstein

Guests: Peter Picone, Daniel Donovan, Matthew Olkoski and Thomas Olkoski also attended via Zoom.

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

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the September 2, 2020 meeting were approved.

UPON motion duly made (Brewster), seconded (Keller), and carried, it was RESOLVED that the minutes of the meeting of September 2, 2020 be approved and ordered filed in the Town Hall.

2. OPEN SPACE

McKeon Farm

Prairie Management:

Peter Picone of DEEP attended the meeting to answer questions and give information on grassland conversions. He defined a prairie as being a naturally occurring treeless grassland. In Connecticut, there are no natural prairies left. The meadow or grassland that a project of this nature would create is a temporary artificial grassland with prairie-like conditions created by planting or seeding natural grasses and wild flowers in the area. This grassland would need to be mowed every other year to keep it herbaceous.

When Mr. Coyle asked about organic options, Mr. Picone suggested that the RCC look at what invasive species exist on the site and find someone who has successfully managed these species using organic methods. He added that the use of roundup to kill invasive species for a grassland project like this would be a one-time application at the right time, with mowing and no-till seeding protocols to encourage death of the invasives along with growth of the native species. Mr. Welby added that the application of roundup would be a downward spray application with little run-off.

Ms. Linville asked about the risk of erosion and run off with the heavy rain experienced in Ridgefield. Mr. Picone explained that the initial application of roundup would kill the living plant, leaving the rootlets dead in the soil but binding it, while the cover crop germinates, which is usually 5-6 days for an oat grass, giving shelter to the other natural species you want to grow long term in the field. Mr. Picone also reiterated the protocol to use - mow and preferably remove the thatch

in the fall, mow again in the spring or around May, apply herbicide in May, sow seed in June when it is drier.

Mr. Coyle asked about the conflict of this project and the preservation of the endangered bee living at McKeon farm. Mr. Picone said that the exact species of bee, its habits, life cycle and habitat need to be studied to determine if the grassland conversion would affect the bee. He suggests enlisting the help of entomologist Kim Stoner to determine what part the field plays in its life cycle, feeding habits and nesting habits. Mr. Picone also suggests studying the small burrowing mammal population in the field, because that would determine if the bee is possibly using a burrow for its hive. Ms. Snow said the bee is a *Fermadis* that lives in a 1 mile radius of the McKeon barn, it nests in small animal holes in fields and the queen emerges in May every year. Mr. Picone suggested mowing the field to 10" now to lower the height of the vegetation, while leaving enough for the bee's survival while more information is collected about this bee.

Mr. Kace asked what is better for the animals – a hayfield or a grassland. Mr. Picone said that there is more structural and biological diversity in a native grassland. He said that when you do a project like this, you need to answer a few questions. 1) What are your goals? 2) What structural diversity do you want? 3) What grass and wild flower mix do you want? The key is to place a diverse mix of grasses and wild flowers and to let the land dictate what it prefers to grow where depending on the aspect, drainage and soil condition of the field. This conversion is a 3-year process. Success depends on the initial eradication of the invasive species.

Mr. Brewster suggested formulating two plans – one with the use of roundup and one using organic methods. Mr. Coyle requested a subcommittee formulate these plans and asked Mr. Welby to take the lead. Mr. Keller offered his assistance as well as Ms. Linville. Ms. Snow offered to assist after the completion of the Pollinator Garden project.

Organic options for invasive control:

Ms. Linville reported back on information she received from Dina Brewster regarding organic options for invasive plant control. Ms. Brewster recommends developing the area in increments, dividing the area to be converted to a native meadow into plots to treat and manage. Another approach would be to manually remove invasive species around the perimeter, where they are most prevalent, and spot check the interior for invasive species. Using plugs to plant native species is more successful than seeding in her opinion. Ms. Snow added that Aspetuck Land Trust is doing a meadow using three different OMRI approved herbicides: Fedora, Avenger and Final-San-O. An organic option is more labor intensive looking at Highstead, Newtown, and Aspetuck.

Eagle Scout Project Final Presentation - Daniel Donovan

Daniel Donovan is an Eagle Scout of Troop 116. He build a bridge on the Schlumberger Trail. He thanked the team who helped him for their willingness to get the job done. He explained that the cost of the project was more than the projected cost because he had made changes to his design to include a hand rail and a different side of wood for the deck as requested by the commission, as well as an increased cost of materials between his initial quote and him buying the materials for the project. Mr. Keller added that the cost of pressure treated wood had gone up by 100% during the Covid pandemic. Daniel mentioned that a day after his bridge was completed; someone took a photo and put it on Facebook, commenting how much they appreciated the addition of the bridge on the trail. Mr. Coyle commended Daniel on a job well done.

Eagle Scout Project Final Presentation - Matthew Olkoski

Matthew Olkoski is an Eagle Scout in Troop 116. He cleared a section in the Schlumberger open space called the Jug-handle trail, and erected a wooden bench at the site. Thomas Olkoski, Matthew's father, thanked the Conservation Commission for their willingness to allow the Eagle Scouts to work on their projects. Mr. Coyle thanked Matthew for a job well done and acknowledged to Mr. Thomas Olkoski that the willingness of the Eagle Scouts to take on the projects to improve open space land was greatly appreciated by the commission.

Gay Road - access way feed back

Mr. Cronin reports that there is evidence of dumping at the location. A tree fell from Town property into a neighbor's yard and when the tree removal company remove the tree from the residents property, they dumped branches and brush into the access way. He estimates that there is about 2 hours of work clearing the site and that clearing of the brush will take place in October.

Pine mountain Meditation Structure closure

A large tree has fallen on the structure. This will be cleared and then the removal of the structure must be completed by the end of November. Ms. Peyser will issue a letter to Mr. Ruiz, the builder of the structure, regarding the deadline for removal.

Lauzun Mowing Redux

Once more information has been received regarding the endangered bee living at McKeon farm, the decision can be taken as to whether to mow or not. At the October 5 meeting, more information regarding the endangered bee living at McKeon farm will be presented. Mowing is also something to be determined for the prairie conversion project timeline.

Ledges Dumping – feedback

This dumping was reported 6 months ago. Local residents took care of some invasive plant removal but there are the remains of some kind of building work lying around the area: a large cable spool, multiple large pipes, a rusted oil drum and a tire, that requires heavy lifting to remove. Ms. Campbell-Gibson reached out to Jake Muller, and the Highway Department regarding removal of these items. Mr. Muller will report back on the matter.

Port of Missing Men property –7.52 acres of land on Barrack Hill.

Mr. Coyle has reached out to the town attorney, Dave Grogins, regarding how the Commission can acquire this piece of land when the company that owns the land no longer exists. Ms. Campbell-Gibson reached to the Tax Assessor, Al Garzi, regarding the taxes owed and reported that Mr. Garzi had found taxes owing for 2017, 2018 and 2019 and had suggested reaching out to the Tax Collector for a total bill.

3. COMMUNITY OUTREACH

STEAM Backpack Update

Ms. Linville reported that the backpacks have been delivered to the library. A photo shoot of the finished product will take place next week and the library will publish an article about the project on their website.

Other Outreach Activities

Mr. Coyle sent a write up to the Ridgefield Press journalist Mack Reid about the Deer Hunt. The article was published in the Ridgefield Press last week.

Ms. Snow will write an article about the progress of the pollinator garden project at McKeon farm after the invasive removal project being done in October by Eagle Scout Ms. Valinski, is complete.

Mr. Coyle will write an article on the new Berar Mountain property and its new trail, when the trail is completed in October.

4. MEETING ATTENDANCE

P&Z	Sept 22 - Brewster	IWB	Sept 24 - Cronin
	Oct 6 - Cronin		Oct 8 - Kace
	Oct 13 - Kace		Oct 22 - Keller
	Oct 27 - Keller		

No issues were reported with any of the required meeting attendance.

5. CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

Mr. Coyle said he had no further remarks.

Mr. Keller asked which trails could be made handicap accessible. Ms. Snow said the Orange Trail in Hemlock Hills was flat and could be designated as a trail accessible to the handicapped; as well as the NRVt trail, which will be ready in 3-5 years' time. Ms. Linville mentioned that a section of John Soluri trail was also flat enough for handicapped access. Mr. Cronin mentioned the red trail from the carpark on Lakeshore Drive at Lake Windwing could be made handicap accessible. Mr. Kace added that where ever a trail was handicap accessible, a designated handicap parking sign should be put up.

Mr. Cronin said that a trail was going to be made in the newly acquired Bear Mountain property. This will be a ½-mile trail and will be completed by the end of October as an Eagle Scout project.

UPON motion duly made (Brewster), seconded (Kace), and carried, it was RESOLVED that the meeting adjourn at 9:36pm.