



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

December 14, 2020 at 7 P.M.

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

Guests speakers: Caroline Vilinskis

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

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

The minutes of the November 30, 2020 meeting were approved.

UPON motion duly made (Brewster), seconded (Keller), and carried, it was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of November 30, 2020 be approved and ordered filed in the Town Hall.

2. OPEN SPACE

Eagle Scout Presentations

- Caroline Vilinskis – McKeon Invasive Species Removal – project completion
Ms. Vilinskis is a scout from Troop 19 and a junior at Ridgefield High School. She led a group of 7 adults and 12 scouts on a mission to clear invasive species from the stone wall at the McKeon garden area. This took 120 hours (her initial time calculation was 101 hours and 45 minutes). The species she removed included bittersweet, multi flora rose, barberry and garlic mustard. She also removed poison ivy from the wall.

Ms. Vilinskis has created a brochure about McKeon farm with the history, some information about stone walls, information regarding invasive species and information about the current use of the farmland at McKeon. Mr. Keller asked where this brochure would go. Ms. Vilinskis said she would like it displayed at the start of the trail at McKeon. Mr. Keller cautioned Ms. Vilinskis to use images that have no copyright. Mr. Brewster asked how the team of workers knew what to remove. Ms. Vilinskis said everything was removed except those plants tagged with an orange ribbon.

Mr. Cronin and Mr. Coyle praised Caroline for an excellent job and Mr. Coyle asked her to convey the thanks of the Commission to all those who worked with her on the project.

McKeon Farm

- Pollinator Garden project update
Ms. Snow could not attend the meeting to give an update in person. Mr. Coyle gave a brief update on her behalf. The task of desodding the garden area was not complete because the deep roots of the invasive plants in the area broke the machine. Some desodding had been done and those areas have been reseeded. This will continue in the spring. Ms. Snow will report in person in January. Mr. Cronin remarked that he had seen Ms. Snow at McKeon last week continuing the desodding process by hand, but that she had no help. He requested the commissioners consider lending a helping hand because the desodding process is labor intensive.

3. FY 2022 EXPENSE BUDGET

Mr. Coyle sent a breakdown of the current expense budget to the commissioners to review this past weekend. He brought to the attention of the commissioners the projected Q4 total for open space maintenance, which will be approximately \$3,000.00 over budget. If the projected expenses are realized, the shortfall between budget from the Town and actual expenses would need to be covered by using our discretionary account.

The FY2022 expense budget will be submitted to the finance department. The budget calculations are based on existing expenses, and requests made by the commissioners for additional funds. Mr. Coyle will also submit a capital budget request for new fencing at McKeon.

The commissioners discussed the financial requirements and the process of updating the NRI. Dr. Linville suggested visiting a few of the spots surveyed in 2012 to re-evaluate the fauna and flora, and if a significant difference is detected, then a larger NRI update project would be required. The commission is aiming for a completed update of the NRI by 2022 since this document was last updated in 2012 and should be done every 10 years.

The decision was agreed to give each commissioner a hard copy of the current NRI to review and make suggestions as to which sections they thought could benefit from being updated. Mr. Levine asked if the funding to update the NRI needed to come from the Conservation Commission budget or if the Town had another source of revenue that could be used for this initiative. Dr. Linville asked where the money had come from to create the 2012 NRI. Dr. Kace said the 2012 NRI was funded from grant money Planning and Zoning made available for conservation efforts.

Mr. Coyle postponed further discussion regarding updating the NRI until the end of January 2021, giving the commissioners time to review the 2012 NRI. Ms. Campbell-Gibson will make four copies of the 2012 NRI to distribute to those commissioners who do not have a hard copy.

4. COMMISSION MEMBERSHIP

Mr. Beckenstein handed in his resignation on December 7, 2020. Mr. Coyle thanked Mr. Beckenstein for his service to the Commission. Mr. Cronin has requested to become an alternate. Mr. Coyle proposes full membership be given to the two current alternates, Mr. Sharp and Dr. Linville. This leaves one vacancy for a new alternate member to join the commission.

UPON motion duly made (Keller), seconded (Kace), and carried, it was **RESOLVED** to move Mr. Cronin to an alternate member seat and move Mr. Sharp and Dr. Linville to full member seats on the Conservation Commission.

An advertisement for a new member will be submitted to the First Selectman's office to be advertised to town residents via their media channels. Mr. Levine will place the advertisement on the RCC Facebook page. Ms. Campbell-Gibson will add it to the RCC web page. Mr. Coyle has set January 15, 2021 as the response date for applications.

Mr. Coyle will seek approval from the BOS for the motion to change membership assignments unanimously passed by the motion above, and the appointment of a new alternate member.

5. RCC OFFICER ELECTION

UPON motion duly made (Cronin), seconded (Keller), and carried, it was **RESOLVED** to elect the following officials: Chairman – James Coyle, Vice Chairman – Jack Kace, Treasurer – Carroll Brewster, Assistant Treasurer – Jack Kace.

6. PUBLIC OUTREACH

Mr. Levine thanked the commissioners for submitting ideas for the public outreach efforts. Mr. Coyle thanked Mr. Levine for the success of the public outreach to date. Mr. Welby asked what the reach of the Facebook posts is. Mr. Levine will report back on these numbers. Mr. Welby said he had posted a photo of a bird to the Town Facebook page and had received 1,200 hits. He suggested the commission posts also go on the Town Facebook page with a link back to the Commission web page and Facebook page. Dr. Kace reiterated the usefulness of a teaser to drive Facebook traffic to the Conservation Commission Facebook page in an effort to share our media with a wider audience. Ms. Campbell-Gibson will also create an Instagram account for the Conservation Commission, posting screen shots of the Facebook posts with a link back to the Facebook page and the website.

7. MEETING ATTENDANCE

Mr. Sharp will attend the IWB meeting on January 14, 2021 instead of Mr. Beckenstein, who has resigned. No other issues were reported with the required meeting attendance.

Mr. Welby attended the IWB meeting on December 10 and will circulate his report, commenting that Ms. Sesto asked for a biological evaluation on development proposed at 4 Black Pine Ridge because wetlands were potentially affected by the development. Mr. Brewster will attend the Planning and Zoning meeting on December 22 and will report any additional information pertaining to this development.

8. CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

Mr. Coyle asked the commissioners to approve a revised 2021 meeting schedule.

UPON motion duly made (Kace), seconded (Cronin), and carried, it was **RESOLVED** to approve the revised 2021 RCC meeting schedule.

Dr. Linville informed the commissioners that she and Mr. Sharp were meeting with Mr. Nowack on Tuesday December 15 to discuss the Greenway initiative he has proposed.

Dr. Linville asked about the division of properties among the commissioners for sign posting. Mr. Cronin said he was still busy with this and would inform the commissioners of their allocated properties soon. Mr. Coyle added that he had distracted Mr. Cronin from the task of divvying out the properties for posting because Mr. Cronin was required to assist with another project at this time.

Mr. Cronin is assisting with sourcing documentation regarding easements on one of the five Town properties that Mr. Keller has earmarked for additional open space allocations. Additional documentation was found regarding the old Schlumberger property and another 5 acres of conservation easement was discovered when these additional documents were found. Mr. Coyle added that he has been in contact with the town attorney, Dave Grogins, to discuss how best to protect the parcels of land earmarked by Mr. Keller as conservation open space. Mr. Grogins suggests creating conservation easements in perpetuity on the parcels.

Mr. Coyle thanked the commissioners for their service during 2020 and remarked that it has been a tough year. He wished everyone a happy holiday season.

The next RCC meeting will be held on Monday January 4, 2020 at 7:00 P.M.

ADJOURNMENT

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