



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

**April 19, 2021 at 7 P.M.**  
**Via ZOOM**

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

Absent:            Daniel Levine

Guests:            Jim Bruno, Craig Hobbs, Judd Zusel, Alan Pilch

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

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## **1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES**

**UPON** motion duly made (Cronin), seconded (Keller), and carried, it was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of April 5, 2021 be approved and ordered filed in the Town Hall.

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## **2. OPEN SPACE**

### Tanglewood Court – possible violation update

Mr. Coyle, Dr. Kace and Mr. Cronin visited the property at 25 Tanglewood Court (Mr. and Mrs. Zusel) to view the possible violation reported by Mr. Hobbs of 143 Wilton Road West and found a cleared portion of open space that was being mowed and fertilized by Mr. Zusel in order to keep invasive species from taking over the area. Mr. Zusel claims this area was in this cleared state when the Zusel's bought their property many years ago. Dr. Kace and Mr. Cronin visited 143 Wilton Road West (Mr. Hobbs) to see the possible violation from the other side of the open space parcel. What the commissioners found was that neither property owner is absolutely sure where their boundary lines are. Mr. Coyle requests boundary line surveys of each property owner. Mr. Zusel has agreed to stop fertilizing and reduce mowing if requested by the commission. Mr. Hobbs said he would like the area to be more densely wooded.

On visiting 143 Wilton Road West, they also found dumping taking place in the open space abutting 143 Wilton Road West and 3 Tanglewood Court (Mr. Smith), close to a gate leading into 3 Tanglewood Court. This possible violation will be handled by the new Conservation Enforcement Officer, once employed.

**UPON** motion duly made (Keller), seconded (Linville), and carried, it was **RESOLVED** that the Conservation Commission defer further decisions regarding the resolution of possible violation of open space rules at the open space on Tanglewood Ct, until each property has been surveyed to clearly define boundary lines (probably in the mid-May timeframe).

### Mar-Joy Pond/Casey Lane – new trail

Mr. Cronin has not followed up with the property owner yet regarding the illegal trail constructed partially on open space land.

### Attorney Retainer – deed language

Mr. Coyle proposes retaining attorney Linda Francois, who is a legal expert working for many Land Trusts, to provide us with the approaches they are using, particularly with regards to conservation easements The

fee quoted to do this is between \$900 and \$1,500, which Mr. Coyle suggests is paid out of the Open Space Fund. Mr. Coyle said that this endeavor is also part of the Sustainable CT initiative.

Dr. Kace added that the attorney's advice would help us learn what strategies we could use to meet (CTDEEP) requirements for open space. The cost of retaining Ms. Francois is a relatively small amount.

Mr. Cronin said he is opposed to this proposal. It is a waste of money because it costs a lot of money to change deeds. Mr. Cronin left the meeting at 7:20 P.M.

Dr. Kace added that he understands the Sustainable CT Open Space Plan, once adopted, would be acceptable to CTDEEP for the Town's open space commitment.

**UPON** motion duly made (Keller), seconded (Sharp), and carried, it was RESOLVED that the Conservation Commission use up to \$1,500 from the Open Space Fund to retain Ms. Linda Francois to look at the deed language of the 90 open space parcels in question and the use of conservation easements.

#### Commissioner Volunteer hours

The question of whether the commissioners need to accurately record the hours they spend on commission work came up. Mr. Coyle reports a ball park figure to the BOS occasionally to give them an idea of the work undertaken by the commission, but does not require detailed accuracy since the volunteer time data is not used for anything else. Ms. Snow said keeping record of what is done is more valuable than keeping record of time spent. Mr. Coyle said that reporting of projects undertaken should be done in the newsletter and in the press to keep the public informed.

#### Summer Workers

Mr. Sharp and Mr. Cronin were tasked with selecting summer workers from the applicant list, with Mr. Keller to assist as a backup if needed. Ms. Campbell-Gibson will forward all resumes and applications to Mr. Sharp so that the interview process can begin. Interviews will take place via Zoom or over the phone.

#### Wildlife Corridors

Mr. Sharp and Dr. Linville are working with a resident on mapping wildlife corridors through Ridgefield. The work has been delayed for a few months but will resume again. There is a large map in the office which will be used to map an overlay of the corridor.

#### CT Trails

Mr. Liptack reported that the creators of CT Trails have been collecting maps and trail descriptions to create a 'one-stop-shopping' site for all outdoor trails in the state. The commission will supply maps or links to maps, of Ridgefield open spaces for inclusion on the website.

#### Open Space Posting

Dr. Linville has completed posting on the properties assigned to her. Mr. Sharp said he would be posting the properties assigned to him in the next few weeks. Mr. Keller said he would do the properties assigned to him in the next month. Ms. Snow suggested getting summer workers to post open space signs.

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### **3. COMMISSION MEMBERSHIP – Alternate Member Vacancy**

There have been three applicants to the vacancy for an alternate member of the commission. Before a candidate is chosen, these applicants will be invited to attend the next meeting to understand what the commission does. The commission will interview the three candidates at the following meeting.

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### **4. TREE COMMITTEE VACANCY**

There has been one applicant for the vacancy for the commission on the Tree Committee. Before a candidate is chosen, this applicant will be invited to attend at least two meetings.

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## 5. & 6. NATURAL RESOURCE INVENTORY and DEVELOPMENT OF OPEN SPACE PLAN

Mr. Coyle sent out two documents to explain the scope of these projects. Commissioners are requested to read them. Request for comment remains open to all commissioners. Ms. Snow will reach out to Dr. Ben Oke, who is heading the Sustainable CT project regarding Upgrading the Natural Resource Inventory. Mr. Coyle has prepared a working draft of the Open Space Plan. Mr. Keller volunteered to assist Mr. Coyle.

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## 7. PUBLIC OUTREACH

Mr. Sharp has been in touch with the scout and cub troops in Ridgefield regarding projects they can undertake this summer. He asked the commissioners to submit additional project ideas to him. So far Mr. Sharp has lead a group of cubs to clear invasive plants from a section of stone wall at McKeon, and has received requests for a number of projects the scouts want to undertake this summer, including planting an additional pollinator garden in the fenced area around the well at McKeon, building a small bridge and stone walkway through wet areas at McKeon, and installing bird nesting boxes at Round Pond. Dr. Linville suggested a trail and bench at the pond off Haviland Rd.

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## 8. MEETINGS FOR ATTENDANCE

No issues specifically affecting conservation were reported from the recent P&Z and IWB meetings. Dr. Linville asked for someone to swap dates with her in September. No other issues were reported with meeting attendance.

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## 9. CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

The license agreements for both Cornerstone Garden (Vote: 5:0) and Henny Penny Farm (Vote: 4:1) were approved at the BOS meeting on Wednesday, April 7, 2021. Soil sample testing will be done at McKeon by Henny Penny Farm and is expected to be received this month.

A resident, Jim Bruno, thanked the commission for the installation of the purple martin housing at McKeon farm. Mr. Welby said he is monitoring the housing to keep sparrows out and asked if Mr. Bruno would like to assist with the monitoring. Mr. Bruno agreed to assist.

Mr. Coyle distributed a summary of points raised at the recent UCONN Land Use Seminar and about FOIA requirements. He noted that the point about avoiding ex parte communication was of particular interest:

**“Ex Parte communications must be avoided:** We should not be talking outside of public meetings among ourselves or with others outside the commission about an issue that is before us. Everything needs to be in a public forum. Issues debated within our commission need to remain where they are debated”

Ms. Campbell-Gibson will distribute a copy of “Highlights of the Connecticut Freedom of Information Act 1975-2017” to all commissioners.

The next RCC meeting will be held on **Monday**, May 3, 2021 at 7:00 P.M.

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## ADJOURNMENT

**UPON** motion duly made (Keller), seconded (Kace), and carried, it was **RESOLVED** that the meeting adjourn at 8:30 P.M.