



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

May 3, 2021 at 7 P.M.
Via ZOOM

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

Absent: Dave Cronin

Guests: Judd Zusel, Robert Madeira, Tom Wroblewski

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

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

UPON motion duly made (Keller), seconded (Kace), and carried, it was **RESOLVED** that the minutes of the meeting of April 19, 2021 be approved and ordered filed in the Town Hall. Vote: 7 – Yes, 0 - No, 1 - Abstain (Snow), 1 - Absent (Levine)

2. Conservation Commission and Tree Committee Vacancies

In order for applicants to the commission to understand what the commission does, applicants were invited to attend prior to being interviewed. The three applicants for the alternate position on the Conservation Commission were invited to join this meeting. Only Robert Madeira attended. The one applicant for the position on the Tree committee was also invited to the meeting and Tom Wroblewski attended.

3. FINANCIAL UPDATE

As of the end of April 2021 our finances are projected to be \$2,000 over budget. Mr. Coyle will consult Kevin Redmond of the town Finance Department to ask his opinion of how to deal with the extent of the overage. Mr. Kace said the use of funds from the discretionary account should be a last resort.

4. ENFORCEMENT ACTION

An offer has been made to an Inland Wetland Agent/Conservation Enforcement Officer (CEO). If the offer is accepted the candidate will start in about a week.

- a. 25 Tanglewood Ct – a survey has been received. The next steps will be taken by the CEO when hired.
- b. 3 Tanglewood Ct – Action regarding dumping on open space will be handled by the new CEO.
- c. Marjoy Pond – no action has been taken.
- d. Rustic Road – the new CEO will investigate and determine if a violation has occurred at 30 Rustic Rd. A definite violation has occurred at 34 Rustic Road, to be handled by the new CEO.
- e. Round Lake – Mr. Welby walked trail at Round Lake and saw potential violation of open space. There is a rope swing from the rocks into the lake, cans and bottles littering the area. Mr. Cronin will measure the location of the rope in relation to the open space parcel to determine if it is on open space or not.

5. OPEN SPACE

- a. Donation – Mr. Coyle received a call from a journalist to comment on a donation of open space by a development on Turner Hill. The developer had plans to put eight units onto a 1.17-acre parcel of land but has decided to donate the land to the town instead. This goes before the BOS on Wednesday May 5, 2021.
- b. OSWA Grant for Bear Mountain Property Purchase – A metes and bounds description needs to be done by the attorney in order for the commission to get the grant money awarded to us, and possibly another title search is required if OSWA say they will not accept the title search done for the grant application. This will require a further investment over and above the already invested \$4,000 for appraisals when the commission applied for the grant.
- c. Boy Scouts – They are still busy with the title search. Though this is taking a long time, it appears they are still interested in selling the Pine Mountain Scout property to the commission.

6. OPEN SPACE MAINTENANCE

- a. Summer workers – Mr. Sharp, Mr. Cronin and Mr. Keller interviewed the applicants on Thursday and Friday last week. There were eight applicants. Two subsequently dropped out. Of the remaining six, Mr. Sharp would like to make offers to four of the applicants because there is a lot of invasives removal to be done at McKeon as well as all the other summer work on other open spaces. Mr. Coyle said he has concerns about having four summer workers because the last quarter of the FY2021 budget is not enough to cover this many workers. He suggested using money from the Discretionary Fund to cover the shortfall.

Ms. Snow thinks that invasives removal should come from the town budget and suggested talking to Mr. Marconi and the Highway Department about funding an Invasives Management Program. Ms. Snow also expressed concern over the lack of supervision for four workers. Mr. Sharp said he would do as he did last summer – hold a meeting every morning to set the work requirements for the day and deal with any issues as they crop up. Mr. Madeira, added that he would volunteer to work with Mr. Sharp and the summer workers.

UPON motion duly made (Keller), seconded (Sharp), and carried, it was RESOLVED that the commission hire four summer workers for the 2021 summer season and to pay the excess budget from the discretionary account. The vote: 6 – Yes, 2 – No (Snow, Kace), 1 - Abstain (Levine)

- b. McKeon Farm – There are maintenance issues at McKeon. The weed whacker equipment needs to be serviced. The ride on mower needs the front left tire repaired and needs a service. Mr. Sharp said he would mow the trail and the entrance at Stagecoach Road with the brush hog this week. Mr. Coyle brought up the issue of mowing vs haying of the Lauzen field. This decision needs to be made to be able to line up who mows and when at Lauzen.
- c. Other Properties –
 - i. Trail Maintenance – Mr. Sharp reported that the trails are in good shape at Hemlock Hills and Florida Hill Preserve. A number of downed trees have been taken care of by the commissioners. Mr. Levine asked that feedback be sent to him regarding the ranger reports so that he can forward to the rangers.
 - ii. West Mountain Green Boardwalk – The boardwalk needs maintenance on at least four sections. Some boards can be reused. Support structures need to be replaced. Mr. Keller said he thought the crossbeams should be moved. Dr. Kace mentioned a dead ash tree at the end of the boardwalk and suggests the commission take this tree down now to prevent it falling on the boardwalk. He also suggests doing maintenance each year to one of the sections of the boardwalk to make this maintenance task less burdensome. Mr. Levine added that a few years ago he mentioned a few

sections that could have used repair and notes that these sections are now significantly worse. Mr. Keller suggests replacing the supports that need repair during the dry season.

- d. Invasives, Japanese knotweed – This discussion is postponed. Ms. Snow said the commission should be responsive to requests regarding invasive control.
 - e. Open Space Posting – Mr. Keller will collect signs from the office on Thursday to begin posting the properties assigned to him next week. Mr. Coyle said the posting of signs could possibly be assigned to the summer workers or new CEO.
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7. NATURAL RESOURCE INVENTORY UPDATE

There are two documents related to Sustainable CT that affect the commission. One is the NRI, the other is the Open Space Plan.

Dr. Linville has prepared a list of proposed improvements to the 2010 NRI. Ms. Snow met with Ben Oko, who is leading the Sustainable CT initiative in Ridgefield. She reports that Dr. Oko is impressed with the list but that it is more detailed than required for Sustainable CT but is worth doing for the requirements of the Town Charter.

Dr. Linville said the commission should be looking at how much land has been lost as potential Open Space due to sale or development. She also suggests making the document more user friendly and more accessible to the public. Dr. Linville has contacted someone who does drone photography and who is willing to help with aerial photography. The vernal pools are only section of the NRI that cannot be updated until next spring, because the season has passed this year already.

Sustainability CT materials are filed twice per year – in August and in April. Mr. Coyle asked the commissioners to establish preliminary goals in time for the August filing. Dr. Linville asked that everyone give her feedback of the sections they wish to tackle. Ms. Snow suggests a meeting with Dr. Oko to discuss the update in more detail. Dr. Linville, Ms. Snow, and Mr. Coyle will meet with Dr. Oko. Commissioners are asked to save images of natural resources to the Conservation Commission Dropbox. Ms. Snow suggested reaching out to the volunteers who assisted last time if they would assist again. Dr. Linville suggested also reaching out to the NYBG person who is researching plants in Ridgefield for assistance. Mr. Coyle would like the new NRI to be loaded on the commission website.

8. OPEN SPACE PLAN

The other document for Sustainable CT is the Open Space Plan. This plan is divided into Open Space Inventory and an Open Space Preservation Plan.

Mr. Coyle said the 30 % goal is something to strive for but is not easily attainable without the town offering bonded funding. Therefore, the plan will go ahead with the 30% as a broad goal but not as an overarching single goal. Sustainable CT favor bonds for open space acquisition.

Mr. Coyle asked if the commission should make a push for the Town to set aside a bond of \$4-5 million for open space acquisition. Mr. Keller said that the commission needs a definite property with a conservation value to purchase, this could be used to push the town to set aside a bond. Dr. Kace mentioned that in the past finding a property before securing funding has left the commission with no bargaining power to negotiate with sellers. Dr. Linville suggested approaching new owners of properties the commission has missed out on buying to secure some of the land for open space. Dr. Linville mentioned the Basha property. Approaching the new owner for open space in return for a tax write off. Dr. Kace would prefer this be done before properties change hands. Mr. Coyle said that there are 30 towns in CT who have bonded open space purchases through their towns.

The new Open Space Inventory is on the website. There may need to be changes to the format of tables to suit the Sustainable CT requirements. The Open Space Preservation Plan: Mr. Keller has worked on potential open space properties. Mr. Coyle said we await feedback from attorney Linda Francois on the wording of deeds to secure Town open space as conservation open space in perpetuity.

9. POCD

Mr. Keller attended the POCD meeting. He told the POCD committee that the commission needs clarity on scope and funding in order to undertake the project. He told them the RCC was working on an open space plan. He mentioned that there was a discussion on educating the town on the use of pesticides near water, especially the Lake Mamasasco guide. Mr. Keller suggested certifying certain landscapers who are willing to use organic fertilizers and pesticides, but the group feels that nobody listens to any guidance when it comes to their property. Mr. Coyle mentioned that the upcoming BOS meeting has feedback from Bob Hebert regarding the POCD. Dr. Linville mentioned CT NOFA as a resource for information to educate the town. Ms. Snow said that this information is also available on the pollinator pathways website and on the conservation commission website. Mr. Keller said they meet again in July/August.

10. COMMUNITY OUTREACH

- a. Boy Scouts – Mr. Sharp is working with the scouts. They are going to look at McKeon Farm for projects – the well area and fencing around the current pollinator garden. Jean suggested a project which we will investigate. Ms. Snow is planning invasive species removal and Mr. Sharp.
- b. Volunteer requests – Mr. Coyle reports that the commission has received a number of requests for volunteer work and he asked if someone could manage volunteers. Mr. Sharp works with the scouts, Mr. Levine works with the rangers. Ms. Snow said she reached out to the NCL group today regarding their request to volunteer, Ms. Snow said she would manage volunteers at McKeon. Dr. Linville mentioned the NRV website who have a volunteer list with their interests, commissioners can click on the volunteer link and select volunteers per project. Dr. Linville will ask how this works for them and see how we can use something like this for the Conservation Commission.
- c. Other – Mr. Levine asked if anyone has reached out to Wooster School who have offered volunteers. There is a senior student who would like to dedicate the month of May to clearing invasives and blazing trails for the commission. In the past a student was done this for the commission and they were left to do the work. Mr. Coyle asked Mr. Levine to liaise with the school and to request Mr. Cronin's input. Ms. Snow's presentation at the library on the pollinator garden at McKeon, attracted 80 attendees. Dr. Linville asked when the next newsletter would go out. Mr. Levine said he could do it by the end of May. Mr. Coyle asked everyone to submit content to Mr. Levine.

11. MEETINGS FOR ATTENDANCE

No problems were reported

12. CHAIRMAN'S REMARKS

Mr. Coyle thanked commissioners for their hard work. He thanked guests for attending. No other business. The next RCC meeting will be held on **Monday**, May 17, 2021 at 7:00 P.M.

ADJOURNMENT

UPON motion duly made (Keller), seconded (Kace), and carried, it was **RESOLVED** that the meeting adjourn at 8:51 P.M.