



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

Meeting
August 23, 2021 at 7 P.M.
Via Zoom

Present: Roberta Barbieri James Coyle Daniel C. Levine Jean Linville
 Jim Liptack Jack Kace Erik Keller Kitsey Snow
 Matt Sharp Allan Welby

Absent: Dave Cronin

Guests: Ian Nolan

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

1. HENNY PENNY LEASE DISCUSSION

The purpose of this meeting is to discuss the three comments made by Commissioner Allan Welby regarding the lease approved by a vote of 8:1 by the Conservation Commission at the meeting on August 9, 2021. This is a courtesy extended to Mr. Welby, who is the only commissioner to vote no to approve the new Henny Penny Lease. The approval by the Conservation Commission was to make a recommendation to the Board of Selectmen (BOS) for them to approve and adopt the lease. The town charter requires a BOS public hearing and a subsequent town meeting to discuss the lease and hear public opinion. After the public hearing, the BOS votes whether to send the lease to the town meeting.

Mr. Welby made three comments. These were discussed to ascertain if there was any new information from Mr. Welby.

- A. "Reduce the length of the lease, five years leaves little room to respond to alternate land use opportunities."
- Mr. Welby said that he was at the BOS on August 11 when the lease was on the agenda. He does not think the BOS will approve the lease.
 - Mr. Keller and Mr. Coyle were at the same meeting and said they disagreed with Mr. Welby's assessment. Both agree that one selectman was against it being approved at that meeting because she feels a public hearing is prudent; one selectman wanted more information; and one selectman was very enthusiastic about Henny Penny's farming methods. All the selectmen agreed that a public hearing was necessary.
 - Mr. Coyle asked about the "alternate land use" to which Mr. Welby referred. There is no alternate land use planned for the pastures set aside for farming at McKeon.
 - Mr. Coyle added that the 5-year term is requested because it is a requirement for the NRCS grant of \$20,000 to be awarded to Henny Penny to use at McKeon.
- B. "Reduce the number of sheep", neighbors expressed concerns at the BOS meeting and in letters to the BOS and RCC regarding increased numbers, activity, odors, etc. Constant activity disruptive to wildlife and bucolic nature of the open space. ..."
- Mr. Coyle explained that the original lease allowed for 30 sheep, three llamas, and some goats, along with another lease another farmer had at the same time allowing him to graze seven cows. Seven cows is equivalent to 42 sheep by body mass and grazing capacity. Just six months ago, the BOS approved 70 sheep, and given that the number requested in the

new lease is still half of the total capacity the pastures could support, there is no need to decrease the number of sheep requested in the new lease. Mr. Coyle said 85 is the maximum number of sheep that will be allowed to graze at McKeon; there will be no further increase in number of sheep. Mr. Coyle asked Mr. Welby if he had new information that would warrant adjusting the number of sheep. Mr. Welby had no new information

- Mr. Welby said it is his opinion that there is too much activity at McKeon. Dr. Linville mentioned that the commission had been working on increasing the activity at McKeon to attract residents to the property and there are a lot of projects going on at McKeon to improve the experience for visitors.
- Mr. Levine asked where the number of 85 comes from. Dr. Freeman answered that she will have 28-30 breeding ewes in any year. If the pregnant ewes have multiple births, she would have more lambs than in a year when there are single births. A maximum head count of 85 gives her wiggle room in case of multiple births. There is no intention of going above that number. Dr. Freeman said if she could not breed with 28-30 ewes at McKeon she would lease elsewhere.
- Regarding the odor complaint, Mr. Coyle said it is a subjective issue that cannot be addressed. Dr. Freeman added that none of the visitors to the farm say they smell odor. Mr. Coyle informed Mr. Welby that the McKeon was purchased to preserve the land as a farm. Neighbors have lived next to a working farm long before the town bought the land.
- Mr. Coyle said there were three misinformation items spread around town 1) the fencing lacks repair – this is not a Henny Penny issue. The RCC has been granted capital budget over the next five years to repair the broken sections of the fence. 2) There is odor – two neighbors mentioned this, one living at the end of Lauzen land, far away from any of the fields used by Henny Penny, yet residents who live across from the fields have not said odor is a problem. 3) Residents believe that Henny Penny are responsible for ruining the bobolink nesting. This is not accurate. What actually transpired is documented in minutes from June 7, 2021.

- C. Mr. Welby asked for certain wording to change: 'species' to be used instead of 'birds'. The commissioners agreed to this request. Mr. Welby accused the commission of abdicating their fiduciary responsibility as stewards of the land. Mr. Welby was reminded that McKeon was purchased to preserve the last remaining working farm in Ridgefield. Preserving the farm is exactly what the commission intends to do. The lease does not abdicate any responsibility. The commission will still direct activity on the farm in line with good stewardship practices. Mr. Welby requests additional wording to ensure the commission is kept in the loop should there be communication between Henny Penny and the USDA, NRCS or DEEP regarding species of concern spotted at McKeon.

The commission will request a site visit by the Board of Selectmen. Mr. Coyle will speak to Mr. Marconi to arrange this.

UPON motion duly made (Kace), seconded (Snow), and carried, it was **RESOLVED** that the Henny Penny lease be amended. The wording of section 5(h) of the lease to change the word 'bird' to 'species', and add a sentence that requires Dr. Freeman to share correspondence she has with the USDA NRCS with the commission. Vote: 9:0.

ADJOURNMENT

UPON motion duly made (Keller), seconded (Liptack), and carried, it was **RESOLVED** that the meeting adjourn at 8:07 P.M. Vote: 9:0.