

Draft

WALLINGFORD CONSERVATION COMMISSION

SPECIAL MEETING

Thursday, August 12, 2021, 6:00 p.m.

Marcus Cooke Park

9 Old Rock Hill Road, Wallingford, CT

Note: The August 12, 2021 Regular Meeting in Town Hall for 7:00 p.m. was cancelled and a Special Meeting was set at Marcus Cooke Park, 9 Old Rock Hill Road, Wallingford, CT, at 6:00 p.m. due to the COVID-19 pandemic.

Present: Chair Mary Heffernon, Vice Chair John Lathrop, and Commissioners Jared McQueen, Brad Sammis, Jeffrey Borne, and Mike Miller, and Environmental Planner Erin O’Hare. Commissioner Dianne Saunders arrived as noted.

Absent: Commissioners Dianne Lendler and Carl Arsenault.

Chair Heffernon called the Meeting to order at 6:00 p.m.

1. APPROVAL OF MINUTES

A. Special Meeting, July 8, 2021

Motion by Vice Chair Lathrop to accept the Special Meeting Minutes of July 8, 2021; seconded by Commissioner Miller, and approved unanimously.

2. PROPERTY MANAGEMENT

Commissioner Saunders arrived at 6:07 p.m.

A. Tyler Mill Preserve

1. Stewards of Tyler Mill – report, D. Saunders & D. Lendler

Commissioners Saunders and Lendler walked here two weeks ago after the last storm. The Lilac Trail is used frequently. Parks and Recreation Director Kenny Michaels is working now on an ordinance that would not allow the creation of trails. The definition of a “trail” includes “making a path repeatedly, a traveled path.” The ordinance must describe an authorized trail versus an unauthorized, illegal trail. Chair Heffernon said the Commission has been trying to counter illegal trails for a long time. The police have been patrolling some. Someone cut the Pink Trail open so they could go in with a quad vehicle. Stewards have heard dirt bikes off-trail, and others have taken photos of off-trail bikers. Ms. O’Hare stressed the importance of people reporting off-trail activity to the police while it is occurring. Commissioner Miller said it is important that the police know about and document such activity.

2. Bat boxes – installation

Ms. O’Hare reported that the installer will put these up in November.

3. Green Trail repair – report

Commissioner Saunders recommended getting a vendor to rebuild the boardwalk. *Ms. O’Hare will get a quote from Eric Hansen to build a bog bridge/boardwalk on the Green Trail.*

4. Kiosk signage

Commissioner Saunders will obtain the needed signage edits for all the kiosks.

5. Mowing

Commissioner Saunders and Commissioner Arsenault will mow the trail sides where needed.

6. Route for Eversource Energy upgrade work

Ms. O’Hare said the traffic will be as usual on the roads while the Eversource pole and wire upgrades are being made. Work will be on the transmission corridor that runs from Wallingford into North Branford. Ms. O’Hare said that there is a meeting with the Mayor on the topic on August 17. Commissioner Saunders cautioned that the planned street direction of this project is an important factor in regard to controlling invasives. The equipment used—if not cleaned regularly and properly—could transfer the highly invasive new Mile-a-minute weeds from another area to Town land. *Ms. O’Hare will communicate these concerns to the Eversource managers who oversee the handling of invasives.* Commissioner Borne said that Eversource has worked responsibly in Town. He recommended that Ms. O’Hare should contact both the Eversource Distribution Manager and the Project Manager, now and again during the project. *Ms. O’Hare will follow through.*

7. Other reports

Ms. O’Hare hired a landscaper to bring water in for the tupelos. Commissioner Miller noted that July was a rainy month. The vendor reported that fill water in the gaiter bags has lasted five to nine hours per tree. *Ms. O’Hare will follow up to determine adequacy of the water work.*

B. Fresh Meadows

1. Peninsula by southern parking area entrance

Chair Heffernon noted this is the fifth month in a row that there has been no boulder placed at Fresh Meadows on the peninsula by Public Works.

2. Other

Ms. O’Hare was there last week and saw that Public Works had trimmed along the Fresh Meadows trails on schedule. Ms. O’Hare reported that the Phragmites there are much more spread out this year due to the recent wet weather, as reported previously by Commissioner Borne.

C. 205 Main Street open space property

1. Trespass notice

Ms. O’Hare had discussed the trespass notice for this property with Public Works Director Rob Baltramaitis and the Mayor authorized fence installation, but nothing has been done since March. The Town did take the neighbor to court seven years ago, and he lost the case. At that time, the neighbor did remove personal property from Town land and he stopped mowing it. He resumed trespassing and altering wetlands on Town land a few years later, which has been documented by the Commission.

2. Fencing - (See reported above.)

D. Beseck Meadows

1. Encroachment over southern property line

Ms. O'Hare will prepare a letter for Corporation Counsel Janis Small's consideration.

2. Bamboo - cutting & private encroachment by bamboo

Ms. O'Hare said Attorney Small's letter to the property owner will address bamboo in two areas.

3. Boundary line fencing

Ms. O'Hare said the private encroachment is a mowed area of 3 feet by 20 feet. She said that Mayor Dickinson is not in favor of fencing for such a small encroachment.

E. Cliffside Drive Trail – restrict ATVs

Chair Heffernon said she has been asking since April for Public Works Director Rob Baltramaitis to meet her there and discuss a method for blocking ATVs.

F. Grand Street Park – garden

The Commission is waiting for Public Works to remove the old soil and place new soil so that the planned pollinator garden can be planted.

G. Other properties – None.

3. FARMLAND LEASE PROPERTIES PROGRAM

A. Farmland Lease Committee – Monitoring Reports

Commissioner Saunders said that the Committee and Ms. O'Hare need to meet and go through the Monitoring Reports. *Ms. O'Hare will put Monitoring Reports as an action item on the September 9 meeting agenda. Each member of the Farmland Lease Committee should present his or her reports.*

B. Bid proposals: Fields 5A, 7A, & 8B

Ms. O'Hare had sent up the new bid proposals on these three fields to the Purchasing Department on July 16. Conservation management tasks, previously required, have been removed from the new bid proposals. *Ms. O'Hare requested that all Commissioners would state in their Monitoring Reports exactly what needs to be done now on each Farmland Lease property under their purview. Commissioners should give the location and dimensions for areas of concern.*

C. Field 7A, Northford Rd. – hunter parking proposal

The Commission has had this proposal on the agenda since March.

Commissioner Miller said he would like to go out there and meet with Public Works Director Rob Baltramaitis prior to the next Commission meeting on September 9th to review several items.

D. Fields 7B, 7C, 7D – gate

The Commission is waiting for one gate to be placed, which will serve all three fields. It has been an agenda item since March.

E. Field 7F – mow

This field needs to be mowed very soon. The abutting owner has effectively trespassed by mowing 7F in some prior years. The Town requires that anyone who works on Town property must have liability insurance. *Ms. O'Hare will look into the situation and request the neighbor not to mow 7F until he can comply. Ms. O'Hare or a Commissioner will instruct a future vendor about when and where to mow Field 7F. Commissioner Saunders agreed to write these specifications and provide a drawing.*

F. Field 18A – Eversource Transmission Upgrade

This location is included under Item 2.A.6. above.

G. Several fields:

1. Compliance with lease terms

Ms. O'Hare requested that the members of the Farmland Lease Committee would now review the contracts for all 35 leased fields in connection with their own Property Monitoring Reports. Each Commissioner needs to identify which lessees have not met which lease requirements and then write a report to Ms. O'Hare. The Town may then obtain vendors to perform the needed tasks.

2. Lessee conference

Ms. O'Hare, Commissioner Miller, and Commissioner Saunders will meet with the problem lessee and will explain the ramifications of noncompliance to the lessee. Ms. O'Hare will schedule it.

4. ELECTION – Chair

Motion was made by Vice Chair Lathrop to nominate and elect Commissioner Mike Miller to serve as Commission Chair; seconded by Commissioner Saunders, and approved unanimously.

Commissioner Miller was congratulated by the members.

5. EXECUTIVE SESSION

A. Executive Session pursuant to CT General Statutes Sect. 1-225(f) and Sect. 1-200(6) for the discussion of the selection of real estate for possible purchase.

Motion was made by Commissioner Miller to move into Executive Session for this purpose; seconded by Commissioner McQueen, and approved unanimously.

The Recording Secretary left the meeting area at 7:05 p.m.

At 7:20 p.m. the Recording Secretary was called back into the meeting.

Motion was made by Vice Chair Lathrop to exit Executive Session; seconded by Commissioner Miller, and approved unanimously.

6. REPORTS / CORRESPONDENCE

A. FOI complaint, received 7/22/21

Chair Heffernon told the Commissioners that there has been an FOI complaint filed by David Traichel that the Commission Minutes have not been posted on the Town website within seven days.

The Commission's Minutes are produced in draft form and usually are corrected at the next Regular Meeting. The prior staff person who posted documents on the Town website did not want to post a draft and then remove it to post the corrected Minutes. Janis Small, Corporation Counsel, recently wrote to all staff of commissions stating that the Minutes must be posted within seven days. Ms. O'Hare said that is the legal way to post, and she and the Recording Secretary will observe seven days. The new staff person will post the draft Minutes and then the approved Minutes that are voted on at the next meeting. One Commissioner suggested to use a "Draft" watermark on the Draft pages so the public will be informed that the particular set is not yet approved. It is noted that Chair Heffernon did not want the posting of draft Minutes continued because mountain bikers took incorrect information from unapproved Minutes and posted it on Facebook.

B. Eversource Energy – Notice re: commencement of "Colony to North Wallingford Upgrade Project" – replacement of wooden transmission towers with steel structures, replacement of conductor wire & shield wire & vegetation management, dated 7/21/21; received 7/23/21. This was received by the Commission.

C. Pollinator Pathways – status, M. Heffernon
Chair Heffernon said the Pollinator Pathways, which the Commission supported and encouraged, have been doing well.

D. CFPA – membership dues, received 7/28/21

Motion was made by Commissioner Borne to pay 2021-2022 membership dues to the Connecticut Forest and Parks Association; seconded by Vice Chair Lathrop, and approved unanimously.

7. NEXT MEETING – September 9, 2021

Commissioner Borne commended Chair Heffernon on her number of years in service to Wallingford, both as a Conservation Commissioner and as Chair. Commissioner Miller and the others agreed, and they thanked Chair Heffernon.

8. ADJOURNMENT

Motion was made by Commissioner McQueen to adjourn the meeting; seconded by Commissioner Saunders, and approved unanimously.

The meeting was adjourned at 7:32 p.m.

Respectfully submitted,

Kathleen L. Burns
Recording Secretary