

Conservation Commission
MINUTES
Regular Meeting – January 13, 2014 @ 7:00 pm
Newtown Municipal Center, 3 Primrose Street, Newtown, CT

Present: Ann Astarita, Marjorie Cramer, Bill Darrin, Steven Gogliettino, Joe Hovious, Karlyn Sturmer and Mary Gaudet-Wilson
Staff Present: Tammy Hazen, Clerk.

These Minutes are subject to the approval of the Conservation Commission

The Public Meeting was called to order at 7:04 pm.

CORRESPONDENCE – Ms. Wilson will forward a survey she received by the Fairfield County RPC. The commission received two responses for volunteers from the high school, she will follow up on these.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES – Mr. Darrin motioned to approve the minutes of November 4, 2013. Ms. Cramer seconded the motion. The changes are as follows: Under “Farmland Preservation”, the paragraph is changed to read: “Ms. Wilson noted that the First Selectman is interested in being involved with these discussions. Deeds and titles need to be researched, possibly by the State. The Department of Agriculture needs to be contacted in order to get a better sense and understanding. Mr. Peterson has a letter drafted and will review it with the First Selectman after which there would be a meeting with interested parties, then it would go to legislature. There will need to be a public act in order to grant easements on the parcels to the NFA. The group discussed protecting the pasture areas of the Horse Guard as well.”

Ms. Cramer motioned to approve the minutes of December 13, 2013. Mr. Darrin seconded the motion. Under Working Group, third sentence, please change sentence to read “Mr. Benson said it would be similar to a conservation easement. Any request to do activities on the property would come before the Conservation Commission.” Then second to last sentence, change “Mr. Benson will have check into getting” To “Mr. Benson will check into getting” Under “Preliminary Discussion of Budget Items, remove “to” from the first sentence. Under Trail Proposals at Pole Bridge Open Space, delete last sentence. All were in favor and the minutes were approved.

ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS

Welcome New Member: Ms. Wilson welcomed Karlyn Sturmer to the commission. Ms. Sturmer discussed her background, that she has been interested in the invasive plants issue and has recently become a master gardener.

Review of Other Commissions: The commissioners discussed items reviewed by other commissions.

Task List: Item tabled.

Slate of Candidates for 2014: Item tabled.

Budget: Ms. Wilson said Parks and Rec’s budget will not include funding for open space work this year but the request for funding should be continued. Mr. Gogliettino volunteered to serve as the Budget Coordinator/Treasurer for the commission.

OLD BUSINESS AND ACTION ITEMS

Fairfield Hills

Meadows Initiative / High Meadow (Bike Race) – The commissioners reviewed the latest Draft Declaration Document regarding the High and East Meadows (as amended 1/6/14). This will be presented to the Board of Selectman by George Benson. After a lengthy discussion, Mr. Hovious motioned to approve document with changes of the second to last paragraph which should state: “The current haying activity may continue pending review and re-evaluation to ensure best management practices for conservation.” After further discussion, Mr. Hovious amended the motion to state “The current haying activity may continue subject to review and re-evaluation to ensure best management practices for meadow conservation.” Mr. Darrin seconded the motion. After further discussion, the motion passed 5 to 2 (Yea: Cramer, Darrin, Gogliettino, Hovious and Wilson; and Nay: Astarita and Sturmer. Ms. Wilson said after the bike race there were some areas of mud and ruts in the meadow. Ms. Astarita saw there was some remediation work at the cul-de-sac. Ms. Wilson said there should be future evaluations and reviews by the commission for such events.

Revised FFH Master Plan – Ms. Hazen will send the latest .PDF of the revised Master Plan to the commission.

Corn Fields – Item tabled.

Conservation Easements: Mr. Hovious discussed the updated list of easements. He will meet with the new commissioners to explain the process.

Meadow on 38-9-34 Riverside Road – Ms. Wilson will follow up about the benches.

Farmland Preservation – No update.

Pole Bridge Preserve – Mr. Hovious is waiting for a map of the property and its trails for the brochure.

SUBCOMMITTEES

Open Space Inventory and Maintenance Subcommittee – The commissioners discussed different types of open space parcels. After discussion, Mr. Hovious motioned that the commission handle Town of Newtown properties, such as playing fields, parks, etc. as a separate category which will NOT be included in the open space inventory. Ms. Astarita seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

Mr. Hovious spoke with Mr. Benson about the commission wanting to combine different contiguous open space parcels in order to make larger parcels that could be named. Mr. Benson was in support of this effort but suggested that legal work should be done in order to check that the parcels being combined have the same easements and restrictions. Ms. Astarita will assist in this task.

Ms. Wilson said Platts Hill open space is surveyed and can be marked. There is a wetlands violation / encroachment from a neighboring property owner.

Education Subcommittee

1. Development of Website – This project will be out-sourced since the GIS Department is low staffed.

Invasives Subcommittee

1. Autumn Olive – Ms. Wilson discussed the interest in some organizations to use Autumn Olive berries to create a product. She found that the State would not approve this.
2. Bamboo – Ms. Wilson said 1 Jeremiah Road has bamboo near the curbing which may cause problems in the near future.

Al's Trail – Mr. Hovious reviewed a map showing an area of Al's Trail and abutting Gadbut property where a property swap is being discussed. After discussion, Mr. Darrin motioned to approve a real estate property exchange between Mr. and Mrs. Al Gadbut and the Town wherein property will be exchanged, as delineated on map #7989, in accordance with said exchange of the land, approximately 6,000 sq. ft. Ms. Cramer second the motion. After discussion, all were in favor and the motion was unanimously approved.

STAFF REPORT – Ms. Wilson said that Mr. Sibley has four or five Eagle Scouts interested in working on Al's Trail. He would like the commission to support the "Solarize Newtown" project.

NEW BUSINESS

Possible Bee/Butterfly Sanctuary – Ms. Cramer said members of the horticulture club is interested in having a talk on the plight of bees and butterflies, including information on creating habitats for them. Ms. Astarita said she would be happy to help. The commission is in supportive of this.

Reports from CACIWC and Rivers Alliance Meetings – No update.

Ms. Cramer motioned to go into Executive Session at 9:00 pm. Mr. Darrin seconded the motion and all were in favor.

Ms. Cramer motioned that for the 1/28/14 meeting and for the two meetings in February, Mr. Darrin will be Acting Chairman and Ms. Astarita will be Acting Secretary. For the two meetings in March and the first meeting in April, Ms. Astarita will be Acting Chairman and Mr. Darrin will be Acting Secretary. The motion was seconded by Mr. Hovious and passed unanimously.

Ms. Cramer motioned to adjourn the meeting, which was seconded by Mr. Darrin. The meeting adjourned at 10:40 pm.

Respectfully Submitted by Tammy Hazen