

CONSERVATION COMMISSION MINUTES
Regular Meeting of November 14, 2016 at 7:00 pm
Meeting Room #3, Municipal Center, 3 Primrose Street, Newtown, CT

These Minutes are Subject to Approval by the Conservation Commission

Present: Jim Ryan, Tom Philbrick, Cindy Joyce, Mark Boland (arrived 7:10p and left 7:45),
Chris Smith

Absent: Karlyn Sturmer

Staff: Robert Sibley, Deputy Director of Planning & Land Use, Georgia Contois, Clerk

Also Present: Attorney Peter Scalzo, Gager, Emerson, Rickart, Bower & Scalzo, LLP; Jeremy Clark, Clark Forestry Services; Dottie Evans, Holly Kocet, and Mary Wilson of the High Meadow Study Group; Bob Eckenrode and Harvey Pessin of the Newtown Forest Association

Mr. Ryan opened the meeting at 7:00 pm.

UNFINISHED BUSINESS

The High Meadow Study Group presented a document titled “Goals and Tactics For 5 Acre Test Site at High Meadow” (Exhibit “A”). Ms. Wilson ran through the hot points of the document and it was well received by the Commission. Mr. Ryan asked the Commissioners to review the document and ask questions/make revisions so that in January, the CC and Study Group can discuss funds and create a plan.

Mr. Clark revisited the CC to update them on the progress for the Stone Bridge Project. He had emailed bid information to over 40 perspective companies and is excited to see what comes in. The CC will work with Mr. Clark, the Land Use Agency, and the Finance Department once they start receiving bids. A sign will be created for the project to provide general information and contact info for the CC.

ADMINISTRATIVE ITEMS

Planning and Zoning- Ms. Joyce reported that P+Z had referrals regarding neighboring towns, and no new applications.

Inland Wetlands- Mr. Philbrick said that IW has cancelled their last meeting due to lack of applications.

ACTION ITEMS

Declaration of Conservation Restrictions – Mr. Scalzo joined the CC for a second time with conditions for the Conservation Restriction to Ms. Wasserman’s property. These conditions included repairing existing fences and gates, the lean-to structure, allowing the use of equipment to maintain the property and removing dead trees. The CC agreed that the conditions were acceptable but not specific enough. Mr. Sibley suggested that all activities need to be approved by an Agent from the Land Use Department, and if changes were large enough, they would be referred to the CC. Mr. Scalzo will revise the document. No action was taken.

Meeting dates- A discussion was held about member preference for the Meeting Dates of 2017. Members were conflicted and decided it may be easier to keep the schedule the same. An official vote was not taken.

NEW BUSINESS

Mr. Eckenrode talked to the CC about what the Newtown Forest Association (NFA) aims to do through land acquisitions and community outreach. The NFA and CC will try to combine resources and work together in the future. Mr. Pessin gave the example of the project at the Blackman Preserve where members of the community have donated plants (by various mediums and species) to be planted, creating an arbitrary garden/meadow. Mr. Ryan suggested having a meeting simply to discuss how the two groups can move forward together.

Mr. Ryan distributed a resume of a member that he would like to phone interview and consider as a candidate to fill a 7th position on the CC. Members agreed that Mr. Ryan should interview and invite the gentleman to the next CC meeting.

Mr. Sibley showed the members a card and photos received from an Eagle Scout, and said that there are a few young men presenting their projects in the coming month. The members are very thankful for the work the Scouts do.

TRACKING TOPICS

Ms. Joyce asked for Strategic Plan to be placed on the list of Tracking Topics.

APPROVAL OF MINUTES FOR October 25, 2016

No action was taken.

ADJOURNMENT

Mr. Philbrick motioned to adjourn the CC meeting. Mr. Smith seconded. All in favor. Meeting adjourned at 9:03 pm.

Respectfully Submitted,
Georgia Contois, Clerk

November 2016

Goals and Tactics for 5-Acre Test Site at High Meadow

Goals:

- 1) Achieve increased diversity and/or quantity of natural wildlife including plant species, birds, pollinators, insects that provide food for birds and other important species, mammals, etc. (NOTE: The goal is general in nature, not targeting one species over another, but return of nesting Bob-o-links would be a bonus.)
- 2) To provide a pleasing meadow experience for Newtown residents for enhancement of aesthetic, educational, and cultural values.

Tactics:

- 1) Planting of warm season grasses and wildflower seeds in June of 2017 to increase diversity of plant species.
- 2) Feathering of trees/shrubs along the edges, particularly on the east side, using a state forester for guidance.
- 3) Planting of small shrubs along ecotone as necessary to create good habitat for birds and small mammals.
- 4) Removing invasive plants as they are seen and identified.
- 5) Establishing a mowing schedule for this test plot which will maximize the meadow plantings.
- 6) Installing blue bird houses along the perimeter as appropriate.
- 7) Signage as appropriate for public information.
- 8) Observations and documentation of plant and animal species during the three year period.

Background:

- 1) Peter Picone, Wildlife Biologist from DEEP, visited the site and offered several scenarios for meadow enhancement.
- 2) Members met with Leslie Kane from Audubon to discuss meadows management.
- 3) The group will be meeting with Patrick Comins, bird expert, at the site on December 2 to learn more about ground nesting birds as well as migrating birds that use meadow habitats for food and coverage.
- 4) Various books, articles, etc.

Proposed Plan:

- Planting of warm season grasses and wildflower seeds – per Peter Picone, DEEP.
- The site would be mowed in March (weather permitting) and mowed again in June, followed by overseeding using TruAx equipment as supplied by the State. The town would buy the seed and arrange and pay for the mowing. The reason for the March mowing is to discourage any birds from nesting on the site since the TruAx would be harmful to them. This would be a one-time seeding application not to be repeated during the remainder of the three-year test period

- An appropriate mowing schedule will be developed taking into consideration any nesting birds in the test plot, and eventually for the rest of the high meadow.
- Observations and their documentation would track plant and animal sightings during this three-year period.

Cost of the Plan

Mowing of the site: Ideally town resources, perhaps Parks and Rec, could be utilized. If not, a private contractor could be used. Cost unknown, but Peter said typically it is about \$100 per acre.

TruAx equipment: Equipment and manpower free from the State as long as proper timing of previous mowing can be arranged.

Seeds: Seeds obtained from Ernst Seed Company include a Mid-Atlantic Pollinator Mix and a Warm Season Grass Mix. Total for 5 acres is \$3450.80

Feathering of trees: State forester can be used for one-half day at no cost. Of course the actual tree work will require funding. Cost unknown.

Planting of small shrubs along tree line: Number and cost unknown until site inspection is complete.

Removal of invasives: Right now there are very few invasives in the site itself. These could be controlled by interested parties or maybe students. Continued monitoring and control will be necessary. Cost should be minimal.

Blue bird houses: Perhaps 6 boxes. Cost unknown. Possible donations?

Signage: As appropriate. Minimal cost. Maybe scouts or students could be involved.

NOTE: Publicity in the local newspapers and other outlets should be on-going in order to enhance public awareness of meadows and the services they provide. Encouraging student participation and learning should also be a goal.

Important Considerations for Success of the Pilot Study

1. Recommendation that an additional 5 acres be added to the 5 acre test plot and managed by the Conservation Commission. Meadow experts agree that 5 acres is insufficient for a good wildlife study. The additional 5 acres would be managed to enhance all wildlife populations. A yearly fall mowing schedule, leaving the cuttings in place, is recommended. This additional area would not require overseeding.

2. Recommendation that the town get a commitment from the farmer to continue the delay of haying the remaining 40 acres until after August 15 to protect ground-nesting baby birds during the 3-year study.

Mary Wilson
203-417-1109