

Town of Stonington Conservation Commission
Minutes of a Special Meeting held on May 14, 2012
Mystic Middle School, 204 Mistuxet Avenue, Mystic, CT

1. Call to order: Call to order: Chairman Stanton Simm called the meeting to order at 6:35 pm. In attendance were Stuart Cole, Jim Friedlander, Ben Baldwin, Tim Bell, Sheila Lyons, Walter Grant, and Town Planner Keith Brynes. Member Bob Dewire was absent.

2. Executive Session - *Discussion of Properties for Possible Open Space Preservation*

MOTION: To enter into executive session (Bell, Grant). Passed unanimously.

MOTION: To exit from executive session (Cole, Bell). Passed unanimously. The Commission exited from executive session at 7:05 pm and a 5 minute break was taken. Stanton Simm called the meeting to order again at 7:10 pm. There were about 25 members of the public present.

MOTION: To move to item 5e. Old Business - Discussion of Coogan Farm Open Space (Grant, Bell). Passed unanimously. Ben Baldwin recused himself from the discussion due to his profession as a real estate appraiser. Sheila Lyons took over recording the minutes.

5e. Old Business - *Discussion of Coogan Farm Open Space*

Stuart Cole, the commission approved spokesperson, discussed the rating sheet for the 34 acre Coogan Farm, the primary, secondary and tertiary sections. The sheet rated the property 23 out of a possible 43 points. Cole pointed out that in the current proposal the Denison Pequotsepos Nature Center is to be the recognized entity under which the property would be held but there is a question as to whether DPNC can be so regarded legally. In addition much of the land which is owned by the Denison Society, in trust, is not permanently preserved open space. It is perceived open space only, including the land on which the Nature Center itself sits; it is rented from the Society.

Cole pointed out that the Town of Stonington has never passed an open space bond issue. Simm added that it is well known that the Conservation Commission is certainly in favor of acquiring open space but our recommendations, which are advisory only, not legislative, must be financially prudent, in keeping with the feelings of the community.

Commissioner Grant emphasized that the voters had turned down the proposed budget for the year 2012-2013. Simm talked about the Commission's concern with the price per acre of the Coogan Farm and explained that there are numerous properties that owners wish to turn over to the town in one of three ways - gift, bargain sale, and market rate sale. Simm stated that the town was in discussion about one specific property which has 1/2 mile of coastal frontage and a history going back thousands of years. He also emphasized that the town does not have deep stratified drift aquifers so any land over an existing aquifer is extremely important to preserve.

Cole opened the floor for discussion from the public. A number spoke in favor - Stephen Dodd, Ruth Waller, Mary Hendrickson, Rowland Stebbins, Harry White, and the Director of the Nature Center, Maggie Jones, whose copy of the parcel rating sheet rated the Coogan Farm a 37 out of a possible 43. She read a letter from a Pawcatuck resident in support of the application and lamenting the fact that there was little open space in her section of town.

Cole proposed that the Commission write a letter to the State of Connecticut supporting the land acquisition grant but pointing out that the connecting land was not fully protected open space and that the price was too high. Bell seconded. A vote was taken ending in a 3-3 tie. Bell, Cole, and Simm voted in favor. Lyons, Friedlander, Grant voted against. A procedural discussion was held with Ruth Waller, retired town clerk, assisting and it was determined that the proposal had failed.

Lyons proposed that the Commission write a letter to the State supporting the land acquisition grant, emphasizing the positive aspects of the acquisition, and another letter to the Selectmen's Office with copies to the Finance Board members outlining our reservations. These would be that the asking price was too high for the number of acres involved and that two of the largest properties in the proposed corridor, the Morgan Farm, and the Nature Center property itself, do not have deeded conservation/preservation restrictions. Friedlander seconded. The vote was unanimous for the proposal.

A 5-minute break was taken. Most members of the public departed. Ben Baldwin returned to the Commission and resumed taking minutes. It was noted that the regular 5/21/2012 meeting of the Commission should be cancelled. Town Planner Keith Brynes departed at 8:40 pm.

3. Review of Town Developments and Proposals

3a. *Any pending applications and new preliminary proposals.* None received.

4. Open Space Parcels

4a. *Discussion of parcels for preservation.* None discussed.

5. Old Business

5a. *Mystic River Dam Committee.* Alewives not seen at Vargas or Whitford/Hyde Ponds.

5b. *Discussion of Stonington's 200 Greatest Roadside Trees.* Baldwin suggested that Simm inspect the plaque on the Elm at the intersection of Willow Street, Broadway Avenue and School Street. Concern was expressed that the tree was over-mulched.

5c. *Discussion of Progress on Plan of Conservation and Development's Open Space Plan.* Stuart Cole suggested changes to the Parcel Rating Sheet to change a score of 3 to be an area greater than 30 acres instead of 25 in the primary criteria, add aquifer protection to watershed protection in primary criteria, and change unfragmented tree cover to timber stand in secondary criteria.

5d. *Discussion of Open Space and Conservation Easement Transfers for Ongoing and Past Subdivisions.* None discussed.

5f. *Any Other Old Business.* Sheila Lyons asked for a letterhead to write the letters and the number of acres of adjacent dedicated open space.

6. New Business

A newsletter was received from Wood-Pawcatuck Watershed Association.
Stuart Cole departed at 9:20 pm.

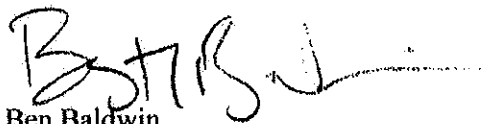
It was noted that the Commission has not yet encumbered funds for all of its expenses for the current year and it must do so by some date in June. MOTION: To have a special meeting on 6/11/2012 instead of the regular meeting scheduled for 6/25/2012 (Friedlander, Bell). Passed unanimously.

7. Review of 4/23/12 & 4/25/12 minutes

MOTION: That the minutes be accepted as distributed (Bell, Grant). Passed unanimously.

8. Adjournment. Jim Friedlander made a motion to adjourn at 9:25 pm.

Minutes submitted by



Ben Baldwin
Secretary, Town of Stonington Conservation Commission

Approved at a regular meeting of the Commission on 8/27/2012