



TOWN OF ELLINGTON

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**CONSERVATION COMMISSION
REGULAR MEETING MINUTES
TUESDAY, JANUARY 7, 2020, 7:00 PM
TOWN HALL ANNEX, 57 MAIN STREET, ELLINGTON, CT**

PRESENT: Chairman Rebecca Quarno, Vice Chairman David Bidwell, Regular Members Robert Zielfelder, James Gage and George Nickerson

ABSENT: Regular Members Sean Dwyer and Laurie Burstein and Alternate Ann Harford

STAFF: Lisa Houlihan, Town Planner and Christine Post, Recording Clerk

I. CALL TO ORDER: Chairman Rebecca Quarno called the Conservation Commission meeting to order at 7:02 PM in the Ellington Town Hall Annex, 57 Main Street, Ellington, CT.

II. PUBLIC COMMENTS (On Non-Agenda Items): None

III. ACTIVE BUSINESS:

1. Sustainable Ellington Initiative

a. 2.5 Create a Natural Resource and Wildlife Inventory

Ms. Houlihan reported she has started working with a non-formatted document and is working on the wetlands section. Commissioner Gage and Nickerson's comments on geology with regard to water bodies is under review by Ms. Houlihan, she hasn't looked at the soils portion yet. Ms. Houlihan shared what she discovered during her research on wetland definitions in that Ellington has no fens which is characterized by low shrubby vegetation and is a fluid type of wetland, i.e.: a swamp or bog. Ms. Houlihan indicated she should have something for the committee to review by the end of the month in anticipation of the next meeting.

b. 2.7 Provide Education on Water Conservation

Ms. Houlihan explained the PFAS (polyfluoroalkyl substances) brochures are at the front counter in the Land Use Annex. It was decided to wait for spring to take the next steps concerning the farmer's market. Vice Chairman Bidwell indicated that the school project is done but that the new science teacher would most likely be interested in other ideas from the commission on ways to involve the students.

2. Update – Ellington Hockanum River Committee: Harford/Nickerson – Leads

Commissioner Nickerson reiterated that Alternate Ann Harford had reported at the last meeting that a railing had been installed on the boardwalk at #10 Nutmeg and explained that various complaints voiced by members of the Ad Hoc Trail Committee regarding said railing had been addressed.

Ms. Houlihan had a procedural question about the Ellington Hockanum River Committee (EHRC) billing procedures. A bill that came in for some of the wood for the boardwalk railing was charged to the conservation commission without prior knowledge. Ms. Houlihan indicated that her understanding was that the EHRC, a subcommittee of the conservation commission, should request money from the commission when expenses will not be paid from the subcommittee's account from annual donations given to them by the conservation commission at year end. Chairman Quarno agreed that was her recollection and the proper procedure. Ms. Houlihan confirmed via email with Alternate Harford that the bill was the subcommittees, Ms. Houlihan will discuss further with Alternate Harford. Commissioner Nickerson wanted to clarify if the fact that Alternate Harford and Tom Palshaw, EHRC volunteer, had purchased a weed whacker and another piece of equipment last fall for use in spring required permission from the conservation committee. Both Ms. Houlihan and Chairman Quarno indicated that the subcommittee trail group had proper approvals in this instance, but that in the case of a charge to the conservation commission, the commission should be consulted prior to the expenditure. It was discussed that Alternate Harford will be back in April.

a. Ad Hoc Ellington Trails Committee – Monthly agenda/minutes

Commissioner Zielfelder was pursuing a lead with the seller of the Arens' property, however, in the interim, the land sold. Ms. Houlihan reported Tim Schneider, an abutter to the Arens' parcel, signed a Purchase Agreement to buy the land and intends to add the parcel to his land for his own personal enjoyment. Commissioner Gage suggested the ad hoc trails committee talk to Mr. Schneider about setting up a trail through his property after the transfer occurs.

Vice Chairman Bidwell announced that he has been working on the Ellington Highlands open space with the ad hoc trails committee and is assigned as the steward. He reported that Ellington High School students helped clean up some of the property. Commissioner Gage asked about parking and Vice Chairman Bidwell reported there is parking for 2 or 3 cars on Stein Road and there's about 2 miles of trails. Chairman Quarno wanted to know how the high school students got involved in the project and Vice Chairman Bidwell indicated that since his daughter is a senior, she was able to supply names of students who needed to finish their volunteer hours to graduate. Vice Chairman Bidwell also shared they are planning to install bridges and that while the trails are not officially open yet, they are flagged and will be added to the town's trail map.

3. Report - Working Farmland Preservation Program: Gage/Staff – Leads

Nothing to report from Department of Agriculture. Commissioner Gage discussed a newspaper article regarding a donation of a conservation easement on the Wraight property on the east side of Webster Road with the goal to sell it as farmland. He reported that the Connecticut Farmland Trust is working with Department of Agriculture on some of the Bahler properties, trying to get federal money involved to preserving the same. Ms. Houlihan questioned if the Department of Agriculture is not planning on including the Town of Ellington as a funding partner, but will reach out with a phone call. Discussion ensued that the committee's goal is to create public awareness about the town's efforts with farmland preservation and seek interest from other farm owners to participate in the program. Chairman Quarno suggested sending a letter to specific farmers. Ms. Houlihan would like to get an update from the State of Connecticut about Oakridge Dairy before sending a letter.

4. Report - Open Space Preservation Program: Gage – Lead

Commissioner Gage received notice that the Northern Connecticut Land Trust is getting a grant of \$132,500.00 from the Department of Energy and Environmental Protection (DEEP) for the John Wraight property and passed out a map showing the property on Webster Road. He also reported the land trust received another \$25,000.00 grant towards the same purchase from the Bafflin Foundation. Commissioner Gage indicated the land trust still needs a significant contribution from the Town of Ellington of approximately \$80,000.00 or \$90,000.00. Ms. Houlihan asked if they will do any further fund raising and Commissioner Gage indicated they are applying for another grant in the range of \$10,000.00 or \$15,000.00. Ms. Houlihan mentioned the library seminar for the Hartford Foundation for Public Giving and asked Commissioner Gage if he thought the foundation would donate toward the project. Commissioner Gage explained the land trust had received 3 large grants over the last 10 to 15 years, but nothing in recent years. Ms. Houlihan suggested Commissioner Gage wait until after the budget is approved before approaching the town.

IV. ADMINISTRATIVE BUSINESS:

1. FY 19-20 Budget Expenditure Update:

Nothing to report.

2. Approval of the November 5, 2019 regular meeting minutes

MOVED (BIDWELL) SECONDED (ZIELFELDER) AND PASSED (NICKERSON ABSTAINED) TO APPROVE THE REGULAR MEETING MINUTES OF NOVEMBER 5, 2019 AS WRITTEN.

3. Election of Officers for 2020

A. CHAIRMAN POSITION

MOVED (BIDWELL) SECONDED (GAGE) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO NOMINATE COMMISSIONER QUARNO FOR CHAIRMAN OF THE CONSERVATION COMMISSION FOR 2020.

**COMMISSIONER QUARNO ACCEPTED THE NOMINATION.
HEARING NO FURTHER NOMINATIONS, NOMINATIONS WERE CLOSED.**

MOVED (BIDWELL) SECONDED (GAGE) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ELECT COMMISSIONER QUARNO FOR CHAIRMAN OF THE CONSERVATION COMMISSION FOR 2020.

B. VICE-CHAIRMAN POSITION

MOVED (QUARNO) SECONDED (ZIELFELDER) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO NOMINATE COMMISSIONER BIDWELL FOR VICE-CHAIRMAN OF THE CONSERVATION COMMISSION FOR 2020.

**COMMISSIONER BIDWELL ACCEPTED THE NOMINATION.
HEARING NO FURTHER NOMINATIONS, NOMINATIONS WERE CLOSED.**

MOVED (QUARNO) SECONDED (ZIELFELDER) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ELECT COMMISSIONER BIDWELL FOR VICE-CHAIRMAN OF THE CONSERVATION COMMISSION FOR 2020.

4. Correspondence:

- a. The Northern Connecticut Agriculture Summit, "Farming for Your Future", Asnuntuck Community College, Saturday, February 29, 2020, 8:30 am – 1:00 pm.

Ms. Houlihan will help present at this function and said that it is free to attend.

- b. Charters Brook Bridge – Bridge replacement project.

The Department of Transportation (DOT) will replace a bridge on Route 140 near Webster Road.

- c. Connecticut DEEP Notice of Tentative Decision, Intent to Renew a State Permit for Country Pure Foods located at 58 West Road.

This satisfies the statutory informational notice requirement.

- d. Northern Connecticut Land Trust, Inc. Annual Report 2018-2019.

Nothing to report.

- e. 2019 Plan of Conservation & Development (POCD), Adopted as amended October 28, 2019, Effective November 30, 2019.

Ms. Houlihan addressed the section regarding agro-tourism regulations and creating an official "Ag Commission". She suggested going through the formal process to amend the charter to officially recognize the Conservation Commission as the Ag Commission and seek farmers to actively participate. She explained having the ERHC subcommittee report to the ad hoc trails committee will allow the commission to focus on conservation and agricultural goals. Charter changes can be costly and time consuming, this proposal will take some time.

Commissioner Gage said page 51 of the POCD states "the conservation commission's plan and its recommendations are formally adopted as part of the POCD and included as Appendix C".

In response to Chairman Quarno, Ms. Houlihan replied the POCD is valid for 10 years.

V. ADJOURNMENT:

MOVED (BIDWELL) SECONDED (ZIELFELDER) AND PASSED UNANIMOUSLY TO ADJOURN THE CONSERVATION COMMISSION MEETING AT 7:52 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Christine Post, Recording Clerk