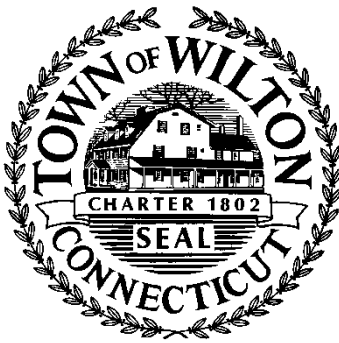


CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Telephone (203) 563-0180

Fax (203) 563-0284



TOWN HALL

238 Danbury Road

Wilton, Connecticut 06897

**WILTON CONSERVATION COMMISSION
SPECIAL MEETING MINUTES**

October 9, 2013 – 7:30 P.M.

TOWN HALL - MEETING ROOM "B"

Present: Dan Berg (Chair), Patrice Gillespie, Frank Simone, Susan DiLoreto, Kristen Begor, Donna Merrill

Also Present: Pat Sesto, Director, Environmental Affairs, Mike Conklin, Environmental Analyst, Liz Larkin, Recording Secretary

I. CALL TO ORDER – Ms. Begor called the meeting to order at 7:35 p.m. and suggested that the commission start with ongoing business while waiting for Chairman Berg to arrive.

II. ONGOING BUSINESS

Tree/Bench Committee – Ms. DiLoreto confirmed that she attended a committee meeting earlier in the evening. She reported that engraved bricks were purchased to mark each donor tree in place of the temporary metal stakes. These bricks will be installed by the committee members shortly.

Ms. DiLoreto stated that the Saraiva's, who reside at 1 Tito Lane, attended the meeting to discuss their removal of trees on town property. They were told they would be fined if they did not replant the area as the property was not theirs to remove. In addition, the Scenic Road designation does not allow for removal of healthy trees.

Deer Committee – Ms. Merrill reported that bow hunting season has started and there are more hunters than huntable properties signed up at this time. Mr. Mabley will be writing a piece in the paper to encourage private property owners to obtain hunters for their properties. Ms. DiLoreto stated that she knows someone on Briardale Place that would be interested and would get their information.

Energy Committee – Nothing to report.

Go Green – Ms. Begor confirmed there was a meeting today but she is no longer on the board. Ms. Sesto stated that the committee is encouraging home audits to be completed at this time and noted that \$25 in proceeds for each audit is being donated to the Norwalk River Valley Trail.

Land Trust – Ms. Merrill reported that the Land Trust is applying for a grant to remove invasives. They are hiring a forester to complete a report for the Harrison and Greg Preserves. The report will take approximately 3 years to complete as they have broken up the property into 15 – 20 acre chunks.

Ms. Merrill also reported that she is involved with the Fairfield County Regional Conservation Partnership which is a great organization that works to connect open space across borders.

III. INLAND WETLAND REFERRALS

A. WET#2221(S) NORWALK RIVER VALLEY TRAIL – Route 7 Right of Way – construct a 10 ft. wide soft surface and boardwalk trail in and adjacent to wetlands and a watercourse

Ms. Sesto presented on the Norwalk River Valley Trail. She stated that the routing study was completed in September of 2012, and included the five towns of Norwalk, Wilton, Redding, Ridgefield, and Danbury. They have since broken into subcommittees for each respective town. The Wilton group is currently concentrating on building the eastern loop of the trail which is mostly within the corridor of DOT's Super 7. She showed how the professional trail builders, Timber & Stone, created a foot by foot accounting of the 4 miles of trail.

Ms. Sesto confirmed that the DOT Encroachment Permit has been received, and the Army Corps of Engineers communicated there is no permit required for the boardwalks. She indicated that Beth Evans was hired to act as the Environmental expert. The goal of Timber & Stone is to minimize the areas of wetlands intrusion. They propose helical screws for the pilings to avoid unnecessary disturbance and excavation. The surface will be stone dust with a proper sub-base of riprap gravel with no curbing. This trail will cross 2 watercourses and will be ADA Compliant with a maximum grade of 8%.

Ms. Sesto confirmed that boardwalks will be built over the areas that cross the wetlands. They will include a learning atmosphere with platforms in key areas that include educational signs with QR Codes so that anyone with a smartphone can obtain information about a particular trail feature. A science teacher at Wilton High, Jim Lucey, is excited to bring his students to these important and educational areas during the school year.

The Eastern Loop implementation includes a demonstration trail for the first half mile, which will encourage people to donate for the completion the remainder of the trail. The cost for the first half mile is \$300,000, which has already been raised, with an additional \$200,000 goal which still needs to be met.

Ms. DiLoreto inquired about the liability coverage in the event that someone is injured on the trail. Ms. Sesto confirmed the town will add the trail to their existing policy at a cost of approximately \$2,000 and the individual property owners that grant an easement have an indemnification that the public can use the trail for passive use.

Ms. Sesto noted that Mike Lindberg, from the Wilton team, recently travelled

to Stowe, VT to see another trail being constructed by Timber & Stone. He had reported that everything was very clean and well run. Ms. Begor suggested that tree protection is put into place to avoid accidental nicks.

Mr. Simone asked how long this trail has been a discussion in Wilton. Ms. Sesto confirmed it started back in 1972 as indicated in a letter to the then Parks and Conservation Commission. She added that the effort has really taken off as a unified endeavor of the 5 towns in the past 3 years.

IV. KEISER LAND PURCHASE DISCUSSION

Ms. Sesto shared a presentation she gave at Kiwanis earlier in the day relating to the purchase of an easement in this open space owned by the Keisers. She noted that Alex VanKleydorf took the photos 10 years ago when this parcel was first teed up for protection.

Ms. Sesto confirmed that Wilton's Plan of Conservation and Development from 1996 includes the property in the Open Space Plan. At that time, the conservation members inventoried and prioritized open spaces that were desirable for the town to keep as open space. In 1994 there were 2,800 acres of open space in Wilton. This has been reduced to about half according to the 2010 Plan of Conservation and Development. Ms. Sesto confirmed two of the larger properties on the 1996 Open Space Plan have sold, and four more are on the cusp of development.

Ms. Sesto confirmed the Keiser property is 43 acres with 4 acres being retained by the Keiser family for house lots. There will be 36 acres of restricted land in this transaction. The property falls on both the eastern and western sides of Seeley Road and has curb appeal and connectivity to other open spaces. Ms. Sesto added that the property is ecologically important and culturally significant with its 1756 house that still stands on the parcel.

Ms. Sesto stated that the property would be vulnerable to development as there could be many building lots cut out of this parcel. The Keiser land also connects to 150 acres of existing open space. The property includes some good habitat and approximately 1,000 ft. of the Norwalk River passes through the site.

Ms. Sesto noted that the property has been on the market for more than a year and is still privately owned and maintained. There will be no subdivision of the easement area and the easement will run with the land in perpetuity. The easement will allow agricultural uses and will include fences, a barn, a re-established orchard and limited Christmas tree farming. The town has the right, but not the obligation to mow the property.

Ms. Sesto explained that the purchase is not a bargain sale, rather market value which gives the town the rights to protect the river and its tributary with a riparian corridor. It allows for public access like hiking and fishing, while ensuring the views are protected.

Ms. Sesto confirmed that the development potential without the easement would be thirteen new building lots which would be served by a town road with a bridge needed to cross over the river. This conservation easement

purchase allows for a net gain in taxes for the town. The purchase price is 2.5 million dollars and Land Trust will donate \$300,000 of this cost. The original asking price for a fee simple purchase was upwards of 9 million dollars. The town's portion of the 2.2 million will be bonded.

Ms. Sesto invited everyone to attend an Open House tour on October 19th or November 2nd and asked everyone to come out and vote on November 19th at 7:30pm in the Clune Center.

The commission discussed sending a letter to the editor for support, as well as contacting town groups such as realtors, Kiwanis, Rotary, and the League of Women Voters to ask for their support.

V. Horseshoe Pond Discussion

Mr. Conklin confirmed that he had drafted a letter to the Board of Selectmen which states the commission's position in support of the use of pesticides in the pond. When the draft letter was distributed to the commission for review, it started more email communications and he wanted to discuss the topic with the group. He stated that all communications must be made in a public meeting setting, not via group emails because that discussion would not be available to the public.

Ms. Merrill suggested breaking the group into sub-committees of 3 people so that the discussions wouldn't constitute a meeting. Ms. Sesto confirmed that these sub groups could be formed to explore particular topic. Ms. Merrill would like a subcommittee to prepare a comprehensive, long-range plan for Horseshoe Pond. With regards to the current question of lily pad control, the commission voted positively at the last meeting and in order to overturn the vote, they would need a super majority. Ms. Begor stated that she did not feel comfortable speaking freely in front of the Horseshoe Pond group. Ms. Sesto stated that everything the board does needs to be kept public as per the municipal process and the Freedom of Information Act. Mr. Berg asked when an executive session would be appropriate. Ms. Sesto confirmed this would be for legal or personnel matters.

Ms. Merrill stated that the pesticide approach must be strategic over a 10 year period and she wants to have a part of doing something larger. Ms. Sesto stated that we just had some vine management completed and a "window" cleared so that residents can view the pond from the bench in the park.

Mr. Conklin stated that Greg Bugbee from the Agricultural Experiment Station owns a home on a lake with a 12 foot depth, and he still uses chemicals to treat his lilies. He recommended killing the lilies when they leaf out in July which makes them sink to the bottom. They do not need to be removed as previously discussed, as they would normally die and decompose in the lake in the cold winter months.

Ms. Begor stated that she wanted it to be clear in the letter to the Board of Selectman that this recommendation of chemical means was not an easy decision of

this commission. Ms. Merrill added that the Aspetuck Land Trust recently received approval to remove Phragmites with the phrasing stated as “scientific methods”.

Ms. Sesto stated that the Spring Newsletter will include an article on this topic which will include sharing historical background whereas mechanical means did not prove successful for the past decade, so something else needs to be explored. Mr. Conklin stated that while there is some bad press relating to using chemicals on crops at the moment, we are not approving any food source contamination. He added that this is a controlled process. Ms. Sesto also added that there will be some casualties and the commission needs to weigh the deficits against the gain.

Ms. Merrill stated that the pond is dying now so something needs to be done. Ms. Begor asked if we are prolonging the inevitable by removing the lilies. Ms. Sesto stated her expectation that invasive herbaceous material will eventually take hold and she suggests a plan to deal with this inevitability. Mr. Berg noted removing the lilies is the same situation as was with Schencks Island where we turned the forest into the meadow and that trees were removed to keep the area open. Mr. Conklin stated that Schencks has a \$5,000 budget for mowing each year. Ms. Sesto stated she could only see this commission spending \$1,000 for the pond per year and the ability of the commission to contribute to the project would be determined in the spring.

VI. PLANNING AND ZONING REFERRALS

A. Lighting Regulation Change

There was a referral to the Conservation Commission regarding the proposed stadium type lighting at the Middlebrook School Field. Expressing concern for dark skies, the Conservation Commission asked that all light are on timers and the timeframe that they are turned on should be minimized whenever possible.

VII. INLAND WETLAND REFERRALS

A. **WET#2222(S) LUDWIG – 350 Sturges Ridge Road** – “corrective action” to remove wood chips deposited in a regulated area and to renovate a single-family residence

Ms. Sesto stated that the wood chips have been removed, which was an important issue for this commission. Restorative planting are included with the application, as well.

VIII. NEW BUSINESS

Household Hazardous Waste – Mr. Conklin stated that he sent out an email asking for volunteers for the collection date. Ms. Gillespie let Mr. Conklin know that she would be available to assist at the site.

Fall 2013 Newsletter – Ms. Larkin noted that some of the articles were held back for the Spring 2014 newsletter. The Fall issue will be sent to the printer shortly.

IX. LIAISON REPORT

Mr. Berg confirmed that he did not have to attend any meetings in September as there was nothing Conservation related.

Ms. Begor is the liaison for October. Mr. Berg offered to cover the October 10th Inland Wetlands Meeting for Ms. Begor as she will be away.

X. APPROVAL OF MINUTES – 9/4/13 –

Ms. Begor MOVED to APPROVE the meeting minutes as drafted, SECONDED by Ms. DiLoreto, and CARRIED 6-o-o.

XI. ADJOURN – Mr. Berg MOVED to adjourn at 9:37pm, SECONDED by Ms. DiLoreto, and CARRIED 6-o-o.

Next meeting will be November 6, 2013.

Respectfully submitted,
Liz Larkin
Secretary, Environmental Affairs