

Conservation Commission
Town of Willington
Minutes

Wednesday March 20, 2024 at 7:00 PM
[Remote Meeting via Zoom]

- I. **Call to Order:** Meeting was called to order @ 7:03 pm by Chairperson Kathy Demers
- II. **Roll Call / Seating of Alternates:** Members present: Carol Jordan, Bob Shabot, Jackie Kulig, Nora Jones, Laura Rodriguez and Kathy Demers. Absent members: Marilyn Schreiber and Patty Phillips. On a motion by C. Jordan/B. Shabot: ***"Alternate Nora Jones to be seated for Marilyn Schreiber."*** Motion carried unanimously.
- III. **Approval of Minutes:** On a motion by B. Shabot/N. Jones: ***"The minutes of February 21, 2024 be approved as written."*** Ayes: C. Jordan, B. Shabot, J. Kulig, N. Jones and K. Demers. *Abstention:* L. Rodriguez.
- IV. **Present to Speak:** none
- V. **Treasurer's Report/Finances:** C. Jordan reported that the current budget balance after encumbrance of \$150 for library collaboration was \$755.16. ARPA 27 funds have a current balance of \$3,174.58; must obligate by end of December 31, 2024 and spend by March 31, 2026.
- VI. **New Business**
 - A. Support for Farmland Protection: Members discussed that State statutes require towns to give farm property tax exemption on tractors and other machinery, but it is optional for towns to give a tax exemption for farm buildings. J. Kulig stated that helping farmers reduce tax expenses is a potential way to attract new farmers to the area and also support existing farmers so they don't have to sell their land to developers. It was noted that Ashford and other towns have adopted ordinances exempting taxes on farm buildings. General consensus was to support farmland protection by moving forward to draft a potential ordinance based on the State statutes and Ashford's model that the commission could recommend to the Board of Selectmen for consideration. C. Jordan will research this and send out a potential draft for discussion at a future meeting.
 - B. Town-Owned Open Space – Potential Uses: Members discussed a need to review the Town's open spaces (protected and unprotected) to consider recommendations about potential future use. The goal will be to incorporate recommendations into the next Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD; due 2028). K. Demers will send out the current Open Space and Natural Resource Maps for members to review before upcoming meetings.
- VII. **Old Business**
 - A. Membership: On 3/4/2024, the Board of Selectmen approved Laura Rodriguez's appointment to the commission, with a term that will end 12/1/2025.
 - B. Properties Management
 1. *Fenton-Ruby Park / Drobney Sanctuary*

**Stewards' Reports / Maintenance:* A large tree fell across Julia's Trail last week; volunteer Chris Demers cut out a section of the tree to open up the trail.

- Resident and licensed professional engineer Ralph Tulis volunteered to review the bridge on Taylor Pond Trail which was built around 1999 by the Boy Scout troop. He noted that the frame was in good condition; recommended replacing the decking and railing within the next year. K. Demers contacted the Boy Scout troop leader to see if the scouts would like to help with the project this year.
- Resident Chris McLean has volunteered to be a trail steward for the Ruby and Ashford Link Trails.
- The Commission will schedule a Park Work Day in late April or early May.
- N. Jones noted that the stock of Taylor Pond Guides is running low. C. Jordan noted last purchase of 100 Guides was in June 2023 at a price of \$1.65/booklet. On a motion by K. Demers/N. Jones: ***"The commission will purchase 100 Taylor Pond Guides."*** Discussion was held on how many should be ordered. Members decided to limit purchase to 100 booklets since the Guide should be reviewed and possibly updated within the next year. Consider using QR codes on station signs. ***Motion was approved unanimously.***

2. *Knowlton Preserve / Talmadge Conservation Tract*

- *Stewards' Reports/ Maintenance:* The commission may need to schedule a work day to install a boardwalk over a wet area on the Split Rock Trail.

C. Town Development: (PZC; IWWC; ZBA) –B. Shabot noted the Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) is working on home business regulations and the Economic Development Commission (EDC) will be studying potential business development. Members briefly discussed solar farms and that the Town does not appear to have any specific regulations about them.

D. Collaborative Organization News & Communication:

1. Library: N. Jones is working with programmer Steve Osier. She noted that a date for the collaborative hike at Fenton-Ruby Park has not been set yet.
2. Park and Recreation Dept: The commission will invite Director James Callaghan to a future meeting to discuss a collaborative hike on one of the Mason Road properties.

E. Regional Pollinator Pathway Initiatives: Girl Scouts will help once a month with weeding the pollinator garden at Fenton-Ruby Park this summer and are available to install new plants if the commission purchases them. C. Jordan noted that Tri-Country Greenhouse has been good to work with in the past. J. Kulig can provide mulch as needed.

F. Open Space Opportunities:

1. *Burma Road property:* Still working on getting a right-of-way agreement (ROW) with the landowners who abut the discontinued section of Lustig Road in Ashford. Our Town attorney recommended that the Town of Ashford should also be invited to be part of the ROW agreement. K. Demers and Mike D'Amato met with Ashford's 1st Selectwoman who was open to Ashford's participation in the agreement.

2. *Historic Parcel on Jared Sparks Road* – K. Demers spoke with town historian Mark Palmer regarding the history of the 20-acre town-owned property that abuts the 30-acre parcel of interest. Both were part of the original Joseph Sparks Farm. The old foundations and wells remain on the property. Historic figure Jared Sparks lived on the farm during his younger years, but did not own the property. The boundaries between the Town's 20-acre parcel and the 30-acre parcel of interest are not clear (no survey or verifiable deed landmarks). The landowners of the 30-acre parcel thought they also owned the 20-acre parcel, but the assessor and historian reviewed old records and determined this was not possible. The commission's consensus was to contact the landowners to determine their potential interest in selling the 30-acre parcel to the Town so it could be permanently preserved as open space for its historical and natural resource value (forest and stream). K. Demers and B. Shabot will work with the Town historian to draft a letter for the commission's review. The commission will wait to seek permanent protection of the Town's adjacent 20-acres until the future disposition of the 30-acre parcel of interest is known.
3. *Town Property adjacent to Transfer Station*: K. Demers spoke with the Public Works Director Troy Sposato who noted that the salt shed planned for the property has not yet been approved in the CIP plan. It would be difficult to determine which portion of the property should be conserved until funding is approved and the plans for the salt shed are finalized. The commission will monitor for any progress on the salt shed funding and location plan.

G. Willington Wire – K. Demers submitted an article about the Town's hiking trails for the Spring issue. L. Rodriguez volunteered to write the next article; due end of June for the summer issue.

H. Communications – None reported.

VIII. **Next Meeting:** April 17, 2024 will be in person at the Town Office Building.

IX. **Adjournment:** The meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:50 pm on a motion by B. Shabot/C. Jordan.

Minutes submitted by Kathy Demers, Chair and secretary pro tem

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TOWN CLERK