

Conservation Commission

Town of Willington

Minutes

Wednesday May 17, 2023 at 7:00 PM

[Remote Meeting via Zoom]

- I. **Call to Order:** Meeting was called to order @ 7:02 pm by Chairman Kathy Demers
- II. **Roll Call / Seating of Alternates:** Members present: Kathy Demers, Carol Jordan, Marilyn Schreiber, Patty Phillips and alternate Nora Jones. On a motion by CJ/MS: *"Nora Jones be seated for the vacant regular seat."* Motion carried unanimously. Members Jackie Kulig and Bob Shabot joined the meeting a few minutes later, after the "Approval of Minutes" item.
- III. **Approval of Minutes:** On a motion by CJ/MS: *"The minutes of April 19, 2023 be approved with one correction under 'New Split Rock Trail' item to add the word 'signage' at the end of the motion which read: 'The CC will expend funds necessary to purchase materials needed to complete the trail.'"* Ayes: KD, CJ, MS, & PP. Motion carried unanimously.
- IV. **Present to Speak:** Jason Albano, high school student from Windham Tech, stated he was observing the meeting to be able to do a report for his Civics' class. He is also a member of Willington's Boy Scout Troop and needs to write a paper on an environmental topic to earn a new badge. The commission was enthusiastic to have a young person join the meeting and welcomed him.
- V. **Treasurer's Report/Finances:** Treasurer C. Jordan reported after recent expenditures for trail building materials from Willards, the CC's remaining budget balance was \$629.90 and \$155 is encumbered for Taylor Pond Guides (Waiting for printer to secure ink). K. Demers noted that the CC still has \$3,500 in ARPA 27 funds that can be used for building materials related to park structure maintenance. Funds must be obligated by 12/31/2024 and spent by 3/31/2026.
- VI. **Old Business**
 - A. **Talmadge Estate Property: -**
 - DEEP OS Grant: Town has received the \$81,250 in funds. Conservation Easement between the Town and DEEP has been signed and recorded. Final Title Certificate has been issued to the Town and DEEP. No further actions required.
 - April 22 Work Day report: 4 CC members and 6 local volunteers blazed the new "Split Rock Trail", which is now open to the public. Side trails from the parking lot to Knowlton Spur Trail and from the Split Rock trailhead to Talmadge Spur Trail are blazed and open.
 - Signage/Maps: The new "Daniel W. and Eleanor L. Talmadge Conservation Tract" property signs acknowledging DEEP funding and the temporary trail map signs with QR code are in place. Discussed potential costs of permanent trail map signs and tabled decision until new fiscal year budget. C. Jordan finalized the trail system map & narrative brochure. Will print and place in map boxes at trailheads.
 - Kiosk: Posts are up and now support the trail register box. Back board and roof to be done.
 - B. **Properties Management**
 1. Fenton-Ruby Park / Drobney Sanctuary:
 - Taylor Pond Trail Guides are at the printers.
 - Steward's Report: Steward Connie Bedan noted several boards on a boardwalk need replacing on Taylor Pond Trail. CC will try to schedule a work day in June.
 - Water over a section of Taylor Pond Trail due to beaver activity and dam on Taylor Pond. KD and BS inspected dam and wet trail area and temporarily closed a portion of the trail. KD contacted CT DEEP Wildlife staff and met at site with Public Work's Director Troy Sposato for advice and support. CC discussed options to manage beavers, reopen trail as well as potential hazards to the wooden footbridge if beaver dam lets go due to prolonged rain event. Members noted that FRP is also a "wildlife sanctuary" so will first try to reroute trail and monitor water levels until next meeting on June 21st.

If water levels continue to rise and become a hazard to footbridge structure and/or public safety, may need to consider having the beavers removed. Would need a DEEP permit and have to contract with a licensed nuisance wildlife control operator to trap the beavers. Estimated cost \$600. Will also request to be placed on IWWC agenda to discuss if water can be released to lower the pond level by removing a portion of the beaver dam.

2. Knowlton Preserve / Talmadge Tract:

-No property or trail issues reported.

C. Town Development: No news reported.

D. Collaborative Organization News & Communication: No news reported.

E. Regional Pollinator Pathway Initiatives: Girl Scouts have added some annuals to Pollinator Garden at FRP and may be providing some maintenance.

F. Open Space Opportunities:

7 acre parcel with old camp and small pond on unmaintained portion of Burma Road.

-Out of state landowner offering Town an opportunity to purchase the property to add onto the adjacent Fenton-Ruby Park. She would like the Town to make an offer. She understands the Town has limited financial resources for the purchase and is willing to consider an offer under market value.

-CC members discussed associated costs related to evaluating and potentially purchasing the property, including dam inspection by town engineer (\$350), need for an independent market appraisal (\$1,700 - \$2,000) and estimated costs for Public Works to remove the existing structure and fill the well if purchased (\$4,650). Legal expenses estimated to be \$4,000. A survey done to A-2 level standards in 1998 by Gardner and Petersen was recorded when the property transferred to the current owner and should be adequate since the CC does not intend to apply for a DEEP grant. May be some small additional costs to install a commemorative plaque or bench.

-On a motion by CJ/BS: *"The CC will expend \$350 from current fiscal year budget to cover expense of Town Engineer Karl Acimovic to complete a dam inspection and report."*

-CC members reviewed responses from 5 appraisers solicited to provide a market appraisal proposal for the property: 3 declined; 2 offered a proposal with costs of \$1,700 and \$2,000. Members will wait to engage an appraiser until after the dam report is back and funding is secured. On a motion by BS/PP: *"The CC requests that the BOF recommend that the BOS call a town meeting to appropriate \$2,000 from the Open Space Fund for a market appraisal of a 7-acre parcel on Burma Road as a possible addition to Fenton-Ruby Park."* Motion approved unanimously.

-Because the Town of Ashford no longer maintains the section of Lustig Road that connects to the unmaintained stretch of Burma Road where the property is located, C. Jordan recommended that the Town determine if there is an existing right-of-way agreement with Ashford or a need to secure one to ensure that the Town could access the property if purchased. She will research this and report back.

G. Willington Wire: B. Shabot will work on submission due by June 16th, highlighting information about the Talmadge Tract and new Split Rock Trail.

H. Other: None suggested.

VII. New Business

A. Communications: None reported.

B. Other: Zoom vs In-person meetings: Members opted to continue with regular meetings via Zoom. C. Jordan offered to chair any needed special meetings using an in-person format if K. Demers is unavailable.

VIX. Next Scheduled Meeting: June 21, 2023

VIII. Adjournment: Meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:57 pm.

Minutes submitted by Kathy Demers, Chairman and secretary

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WILLINGTON, CT.

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TOWN CLERK