

Conservation Commission

Town of Willington

Minutes

Wednesday June 21, 2023 at 7:00 PM

[Remote Meeting via Zoom]

- I. **Call to Order:** Meeting was called to order @ 7:03 pm by Chairman Kathy Demers
- II. **Roll Call / Seating of Alternates:** Members present: Kathy Demers, Carol Jordan, Marilyn Schreiber, Bob Shabot and Patty Phillips.
- III. **Approval of Minutes:** On a motion by MS/BS: *"The minutes of May 17, 2023 be approved with the following correction to the Open Space Opportunities item: 'C. Jordan noted that the Town's future access to the parcel on Burma Road could be an issue because that section of Burma Road can only be accessed through the unmaintained portion of Lustig Road in Ashford. She suggested that the CC recommend that the BOS develop a written agreement with the Town of Ashford related to the right-of-way and permission to improve Lustig Road as necessary for access.'"* Motion carried unanimously.
- IV. **Present to Speak:** None
- V. **Treasurer's Report/Finances:** C. Jordan reported a budget balance of \$124.90 after recent expenditure of \$155 for printing 100 Taylor Pond Guides and an encumbrance of \$350 for the dam inspection. K. Demers noted that the CC still has access to \$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:**
 - C. Jordan made 100 copies of the trail map/narrative brochure for the Mason Road open space properties; M. Schreiber volunteered to fold and place them in the trail map boxes.
 - Temporary trail maps are posted at all trail heads. Discussion of the proposals for permanent trail map signs was tabled until the next meeting when new FY budget begins.
 - Resident Ellie Lowell has volunteered to be Trail Steward for the new Split Rock Trail.
 - Properties Management**
 1. Fenton-Ruby Park / Drobney Sanctuary:
 - Taylor Pond Trail Guides have been printed and will be available at the TP trailhead.
 - Steward's Report/Maintenance: Several boards on Taylor Pond Trail still need replacing. B. Shabot and P. Phillips will work on replacing the boards this summer. On a motion by KD/MS: *"The CC will expend up to \$124 (remaining budget) by June 30th to purchase building materials related to properties management."* Motion carried unanimously.
 - Beaver Dam: P. Phillips has been monitoring the pond level and impacted trail section regularly. She reported the pond level and trail condition are about the same; trail reroute is working well. Commission discussed how to work long term with the beavers who provide important wildlife habitat and how a pond leveling device might be constructed to reduce the pond level and potential downstream risk to the foot bridge during a severe rain event. K. Demers has some information about pond leveling devices she received from Bob Rubino, Head Steward of Tolland Conservation Corps as well as online material from the Beaver Institute that she will send out to members. She also had email contact with Diane Honer from Beaver & Wildlife Solutions in Chester, CT who is available to do a site visit and pond leveling device feasibility study for a fee of \$275. Public Works Director Troy Sposato was also consulted and offered assistance with materials and device installation if the commission decides to use a pond leveler. KD will attend IWWC's June 26th meeting to discuss what kind of permitting would be needed if a leveler was proposed to be installed. She will also contact the Town Engineer about his availability to do an assessment of the foot bridge.

2. Knowlton Preserve / Talmadge Tract:

- *Stewards' Report*: No property or trail issues reported.
- *Kiosk*: Back board and roof to be done. *Rock pile* to be moved by public works.

C. **Town Development**: Nothing new reported.

D. **Collaborative Organization News & Communication**: Discussion was held about renewing annual membership with collaborative organizations. On a motion by CJ/BS: *"The CC will renew its membership with the CT Association of Conservation and Inland Wetlands Association and the CT Land Conservation Council using its '23-'24 FY budget."* Motion carried unanimously.

E. **Regional Pollinator Pathway Initiatives**: Girl Scouts have added some annuals to the pollinator garden at FRP. Jackie Kulig will be supplying some mulch from her farm for the garden.

F. **Open Space Opportunities**:

1) Petix property: 7 acre parcel with ponds on unmaintained portion of Burma Road.

-*Dam Assessment*: Members discussed the final report and recommendation from Town Engineer Karl Acimovic. He notes that the dams that impound the two ponds are currently in poor condition due largely to dense growth of trees and brush along both embankments, as well as seepage and a steep slope on the lower dam embankment. In the event of a dam failure, its downstream impact would be limited to damage of Amidon Road, currently an unimproved and unused road. He offered several management options and a final recommendation that would leave the area relatively intact but provide some improvements and potentially prolong the life of the dams. He advised cutting/removing the large trees that could topple into the ponds and/or cause an erosive failure of the embankments. Walking paths could be laid out across the dam embankments and sides of the ponds. Members discussed that the report was very comprehensive, easy to read and would be helpful. On a motion by CJ/PP: *"The engineering bill from Karl Acimovic for the dam inspection report of the Petix property on Burma Road be submitted for payment."* Motion carried unanimously.

K. Demers reported she visited the dam site with Troy Sposato after the engineering assessment and discussed the recommendation. Troy noted that if the property was acquired by the Town, Public Works could cut the trees and maintain the paths on a regular basis. C. Jordan recommended that the engineer be consulted further about how much of the tree roots should be cut to avoid erosion.

-*Appraisal Proposals*: K. Demers reported that at Town Meeting on 5/30/2023, residents approved expending up to \$2,000 in Open Space funds for the market appraisal of the Burma Road property for potential open space acquisition. The CC received 2 appraisal proposals out of 5 solicited: Silverstein Appraisal Services (\$1,700) and RF Hagearty and Associates (\$2,000). On a motion by CJ/PP: *"The CC recommends that the Board of Selectmen contract with Silverstein Appraisal Services for a market appraisal of the Petix property at 74 Burma Road using \$1,700 of Open Space Funds as approved at the 5/30/2023 Town meeting."*

Motion carried unanimously.

G. **Willington Wire**: B. Shabot submitted an article on behalf of the commission highlighting information about the new addition to the Talmadge Tract and opening of the Split Rock Trail.

H. **Other: Membership** - K. Demers noted that 1 regular and 2 alternate seats are still open on the CC and encouraged members to invite new people to attend our meetings/consider serving.

VII. **New Business**

A. **Communications**: None reported.

B. **Other**: P. Phillips reported that the Adirondack Mountain Club (AMC) held a hike on the new Split Rock Trail on June 20th which was attended by 10 people. Many were from outside the local area.

VIX. **Next Scheduled Meeting**: July 19, 2023

VIII. **Adjournment**: Meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:13 pm.