

Town of Willington
Planning and Zoning Commission
December 19, 2023
Meeting Minutes

A. Call to Order

W. Parsell called the meeting to order at 7:30pm

B. Roll Call/Seating of Alternates

Walter Parsell (via Zoom)
Bob Shabot
Andy Marco
Doug Roberts
Rebecca Sinosky
William Bunnell
Michael Johansen (Alternate)

Also Present:

M. D'Amato- Zoning Agent
E. Delaney- Asst. Zoning Agent (via Zoom)

C. Applications for Receipt

None

D. Public Hearing

None

E. New Business

1. Request from Hull Forest Products to perform selective Timber Harvest with Willford Farms Conservation Easement.

Austin Harmon was present to speak on behalf of Hull Forest Products. He began to discuss that they were proposing to conduct a Timber Harvest on the property and that the activity had been approved by the Inland Wetland's Commission the prior night. He stated that he had also conducted a walkthrough of the conservation easement area with Conservation Commission. They shared some of their thoughts and comments which were included in a letter that was provided to the Commission.

A. Harmon explained went on to explain the harvest in greater detail including how it would be conducted, and the purpose of the cut overall. He stated that they intend to harvest roughly 30-40% of the basil area. One of the major things that we outlined with the Conservation Commission was that the overall Conservation Easement can never be heavily cut. This is written in the easement deed itself. With that information we are going to cut mainly unhealthy, diseased, and poorly formed individuals. We will be trying to leave trees of shade tolerance and intermediate shade tolerance. A vast variety of trees within the Conservation Easement will be left. We do this to create a more unique biodiversity habitat as well as maintain proper wildlife habitats for as many species as possible. He brought up that there was a stream crossing done by his company about 10 years ago with the approval PZC. They will be using that same stream crossing that exists, it will be supported temporarily with Timer Bridge Mats of the stream so that nothing will get into the stream itself. We would just be spanning it with the bridge mats and at the end of the harvest they plan on using seed hay and/or water bars at the next feasible season or time to put such in after the harvest to help maintain soil stabilization and help prevent erosion into the stream and wetland areas. There is a Vernal pool to the far West that I have labeled as wetlands even though it is not. It is a very large pool and that was confirmed by the Conservation Commission, but we will be leaving a full 50' buffer around the Vernal Pool per the Town of Willington's forestry regulations. With that buffer we will not be cutting trees within it but after discussion with the Conservation Commission we agreed that it is okay to leave some of the slash. This includes treetops and other unmerchantable portions from the trees were cutting around that 50' buffer would be left there. This will help stop or prevent any sort of erosion into the Vernal Pool. A. Harmon mentioned that in his opinion they won't have that sort of issue as long as we target this harvest for the right time of year. For the rest of the Wetlands, which is the bigger portion to the South of the Conservation Easement, we will be leaving a 25-30' buffer around that stream and the Wetland. It was per the request of the Conservation Commission that we leave a bit of a buffer, their concern is that since there is invasive species present mostly around the Wetlands and the worry is that cutting too much could potentially help it spread. With that being said we will be leaving a 25-30'

buffer from the Wetland edge and the stream, besides the stream crossing area where we may cut a few trees just to make the stream crossing itself passable with heavy machinery.

A. Marco asked who will be doing the actual cutting if it will be Hull Forest or subcontracted out.

A. Harmon answered that we do subcontract out, that is correct. We subcontract out to a variety, as of right now we are using about 8 or so out of our direct operating area out of Pomfret. We do have one in mind for the project. The company has been working with him for 15 years and in my opinion, he is without a doubt the best one because he is very cautious about what he's doing in the woods. He is one of the few who will contact me about potential issues or even to put the bug in my ear about something before it becomes an issue, just to make sure he is playing it right, following the rules, and sticking to the game plan.

M. D'Amato explained that when this subdivision was originally approved, and the Conservation Easement was placed on the property. The details of the easement state that the Grantee acting through its planning Commission, or its successor shall upon written application of the Grantor permit removal of dead trees and dead brush from said premises. Because the PZC required the Conservation Easement initially, PZC has the authority to permit these activities. The Timber Harvest was approved by the IWWC last night, but that applies to the whole property. Without approval from the PZC though they cannot enter that portion of the property with the conservation easement.

A. Marco asked if they need this approval to be able to access the Conservation Easement area.

M. D'Amato confirmed that was the case.

W. Parsell asked if it was 30-40% of the volume of the trees withing the easement.

A. Harmon said that is correct. It was recommended by himself and the Conservation Commission.. There are some specific items written into the letter from the Conservation Commission.

M. Johansen asked if that part of the Conservation Easement was part of the logging that happened 10 years ago as well.

B. Shabot confirmed this.

B. Shabot stated that a group from the Commission had gone back out and confirmed the forest was regenerating well. He said Hull Forest Products have been very good with coming to terms for what the Conservation Commission wanted and agreeing that it will work for them as well.

A. Harmon mentioned that they are trying to work with everybody on this. Therefore, we wanted to go through the proper channels, the Conservation Commission and the PZC. Going forward we are willing to work with everyone.

W. Parsell asked if anyone had any further questions or comments.

B. Shabot mentioned his only comment is that Austin has worked hand in hand with the Conservation Commission. Meaning what we see and is presented tonight is all good. There are no red flags being raised.

W. Parsell commented on the appreciation of A. Harmon going through the proper channels and following the process as well.

B. Shabot motioned to approve. R. Sinosky seconded. All in favor.

2. Election of Officers

R.Sinosky made a motion to elect W.Parsell as Chair, B.Shabot as Vice Chair and A.Marco as Secretary. Second by W.Bunnell. All in favor.

3. Adoption of Bylaws

M. D'Amato provided a clarification from the last meeting regarding the removal of members for lack of attendance and that this was not possible for full members of the Commission without an amendment to the Town's Ordinances. Alternates are appointed by the BOS therefore can be unappointed by the BOS.

W. Parsell asked if that applies to a regular member if they were appointed due to someone resigning or in between election cycles.

M. D'Amato said it will apply to that. The only thing it doesn't apply to is alternates. So, any member that has either been appointed or elected can't be removed for lack of participation.

M. D'Amato mentioned that the bylaws do not change anything, they just codify what we are already doing and the process that his already followed. What this does is put on paper the standards that you use to conduct these meetings.

W. Bunnell asked to look at 3.5. "A full seven regular member board must be present before election of offices can take place." He asked if it should be amended.

M. D'Amato mentioned that this is basically saying all full members to be present. We can tweak or modify this. We can have it be a certain substantial number or we can take it out altogether.

R. Sinosky mentioned we should add in to include the full seven members can include any seated alternates. This could help clarify it a bit better.

M. D'Amato suggested that we modify it to say seven members. This would cover seated, elected, and alternates. Which would change the wording to "Seven members of the board shall be seated before election of the offices can take place." He then asked if there should be a reference the training requirements in the statutes.

The Commission agreed this should also be included and table adoption of the bylaws until this language had been incorporated.

F. Unfinished Business

None

G. Approval of Minutes

Tabled until the next meeting.

H. Correspondence

1. CRCOG Referral Comments

M. D'Amato mentioned these are provided by CRCOG so members can see what neighboring Towns are doing.

I. Public Participation (items not listed on the agenda)

None

J. Staff Report/Discussion

1. River Rd LOTCIP Update

M. D'Amato stated that the Town was currently at about 95-98% plan set. We are working through some of the last comments made from the DOT and then it will go into final review with CRCOG and then it will go out to bid. There are some minor comments related to some of the islands and moving one of the islands in front of the school a bit further south so that vehicles or larger trucks that might be coming out of Pinney Hill Ext can make a left and head south. The plan is to bid this winter and then hopefully construct this upcoming season. This means we will have to get the easement or acquisition process started for a couple properties.

2. 2024 Commission Goals

M. D'Amato stated that he included this on the agenda as it has been a bit of a whirlwind over the last 12 months with some applications between the warehouse and the SDZ and accessory dwelling units. We have sort of run through a lot of different things. Now we are in the process of codification and will hopefully be seeing feedback from that in the next couple months as far as any issues that they may see with the regs. He asked if the Commission had anything specific they would like to target for 2024.

B. Shabot asked if it would be worthwhile to touch base with the Economic Development folks just to get a sense of what they are up to with their studies or things they may be working on behind the scenes.

W. Parsell agreed.

M. D'Amato stated that the BOS did award a contract for EDC's Strategic Plan earlier this month so now we are working with EDC to get a meeting together in January to figure out what the schedule looks like and how everything is going to unfold. Once that is taken care of it would make sense. He knows that they are hoping that boards and commissions would be involved with the process. He can mention it at the January meeting with EDC to figure out how to bring both groups together.

M. D'Amato mentioned that he believes the Plan will evaluate some potential developments rather than just broad statements about if the commission should allow retail or something along those lines. The hope is that if they show real projects on paper and how that equates to jobs and revenue then it will be easier for people to support or not.

K. Adjournment

W. Parsell adjourned the meeting at 8:23pm

Respectfully submitted by

Evelyn Delaney – Asst. Zoning Agent