

Conservation Commission
Town of Willington
Minutes

Wednesday February 21, 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 and Kathy Demers. Regular members Patty Phillips and Marilyn Schreiber were excused. On a motion by C. Jordan/J. Kulig: ***"Alternate Nora Jones be seated for Marilyn Schreiber."*** Motion carried unanimously.
- III. **Approval of Minutes:** On a motion by C. Jordan/B. Shabot: ***"The minutes of January 17th, 2024 be approved as written."*** Motion carried unanimously.
- IV. **Present to Speak:** none
- V. **Treasurer's Report/Finances:** C. Jordan reported that she had presented the commission's FY 2024-2025 budget request to the BOF last week and noted to them that some of the funds might be used to collaborate with the library on conservation education programs as well as to confirm open space boundaries. She reported there were no new budget expenditures; current budget balance = \$905.16. ARPA 27 funds have a current balance of \$3,174.58; must obligate by end of 2024 and spend by end of March 2026.
- VI. **New Business**
 - A. Program Collaboration with Willington Public Library: Steve Osier, programmer at the library described some of the planned Summer Reading program events related to conservation education and suggested possible collaborative events with the commission. Member N. Jones agreed to work with Steve on a guided nature hike at Fenton-Ruby Park this summer. Discussion was also had about sharing the \$275 cost of an educational program offered by Horizon Wings related to threatened and endangered raptors. On a motion by B. Shabot/C. Jordan: ***"The Conservation Commission will appropriate \$150 to co-sponsor an endangered bird program at the library."*** Motion carried unanimously. C. Jordan noted it would be helpful to get the invoice by June so funds could come out of this fiscal year's budget. It was also noted that if the commission had some funds left over by June, that they could consider appropriating additional funding for the program.
 - B. Membership: Resident Laura Rodriguez discussed her interest in becoming a member of the commission and working on conservation issues. She shared that she has a PhD in Science Education from UConn, presently works at Eastern CT State University as a professor of science education and worked in the past as a science teacher at Hall School. She currently volunteers for the Scholarship Fund and was a previous member on the Town's Board of Education. Members welcomed Ms. Rodriguez's interest and felt she would be a valuable commission member. It was noted that the commission has one regular and two alternate seats available. N. Jones noted she preferred to continue as an alternate, rather than move up to fill the regular member vacancy. On a Motion by C. Jordan/ B. Shabot: ***"The Conservation Commission recommends to the BOS that they appoint Laura Rodriguez as a regular member of the Conservation Commission to fill a***

current vacancy that has a 3 year term from 12/02/2022 to 12/01/2025.” Motion carried unanimously.

VII. Old Business

- A. Willford Farms/Hull Forest Products/ Timber Harvest: K. Demers and J. Kulig met with Austin Harmon from Hull to review the trees that were marked for harvest on the conservation easement area. J. Kulig noted that the plan was to harvest about 30% of the trees, but it appeared Hull was being even more conservative in the CE and other harvest areas. K. Demers noted that Hull had agreed to put up placards provided by the commission to mark the identifiable boundaries of the CE area and the Town’s open space properties off Meadow Lane.
- B. Properties Management
 - 1. *Fenton-Ruby Park / Drobney Sanctuary*
 - *Stewards’ Reports / Maintenance*: No trail issues reported this month. A trail steward is still needed for the Ruby Trail and Langhammer Spur Trail. Members were encouraged to share info about trail steward responsibilities with potential volunteers.
 - 2. *Knowlton Preserve / Talmadge Conservation Tract*
 - *Stewards’ Reports/ Maintenance*: No trail issues reported this month.
- C. Town Development: (PZC; IWWC; ZBA) – B. Shabot shared that the Planning and Zoning Commission (PZC) is starting to discuss how they will work on updating the Plan of Conservation and Development (POCD), due by 2028, as well as updating regulations for home occupations. The Economic Development Commission (EDC) has hired a vendor to do a strategic development study to look at the types of businesses that are possible in Willington. It will also involve community input. This information can be used by PZC during the updates. K. Demers noted that the Conservation Commission should begin to consider a course of action to update the Town’s Natural Resource Inventory and Open Space Plan that are part of the POCD. Commission members will investigate whether staff resources from the Capital Region Council of Governments (CROG) and the North Central Conservation District (NCCD) can assist the commission with these projects.
- D. Collaborative Organization News & Communication:
 - 1. The CT Land Conservation Council (CLCC) will hold its annual conference on 3/24/2024 at Wesleyan University in Middletown. CC members are encouraged to attend and can be reimbursed for their registration fee.
 - 2. James Callaghan, Director of Park and Recreation will attend a CC meeting this spring to discuss an interest in co-sponsoring a guided hike this summer.
- E. Regional Pollinator Pathway Initiatives: No regional news. K. Demers will reach out to the Willington Girl Scout troop to see what level of support they can give to weeding and watering the pollinator garden at Fenton-Ruby Park this summer.
- F. Open Space Opportunities:
 - 1. *Burma Road property*: K. Demers continues to work with the First Selectman, Mike D’Amato and Town attorney regarding a possible ROW agreement with land owners abutting the discontinued portion of Lustig Road as well as the Town of Ashford, who may still have some legal control over the road.
 - 2. *Historic Parcel on Jared Sparks Road* – K. Demers received information from the Tax Assessor’s office regarding the landowner’s contact information and will work with B. Shabot on drafting a letter of interest from the commission. B. Shabot suggested that the

commission consider working toward permanently conserving the abutting 19 acre property owned by the Town. He also noted that Joshua's Trust holds a conservation easement on additional land that bounds the parcel of interest.

3. *Property adjacent to Town Transfer Station:* C. Jordan noted that in the past there was discussion that a conservation easement should be placed on a portion of the Town's property once earmarked for a salt shed, which was never built. She suggested the commission raise this issue with the BOS again.
- G. Willington Wire –Still looking for a member to write the next article due at the end of March.
- H. Communication – The CC received an email from resident Cari Donaldson who had a concern about a tree slated for removal on the corner of Kollar and Sharp's Mill Roads. She initially asked for the CC's help in delaying the removal. She recently sent a follow-up email stating that she had worked out a satisfactory compromise with the Tree Warden.

VIII. **Next Meeting:** February 21, 2024

IX. **Adjournment:** The meeting was unanimously adjourned at 8:15 pm on a motion by C. Jordan/ B. Shabot.

Minutes submitted by Kathy Demers, Chairman and secretary pro tem

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