

**East Haddam  
Conservation Commission**

April 1, 2014

Adopted May 13, 2014

1. Call to Order

The Regular Meeting of the East Haddam Conservation Commission was held on Tuesday, April 1, 2014, at 7:35 PM at the River House. The Chairperson being in the Chair and the Secretary being Present.

a. Roll Call

Todd Gelston, Charlotte Gelston, Marilyn Gleeson, Paul Sienna, Sue Merrow, Peggy Carlson, Rob Smith. Others in attendance: Peter Simmons

2. Approval of Agenda

Peter Simmons presented first.

Motion by Ms. Merrow to approve the agenda as amended. Second by Ms. Gelston and unanimously approved.

3. Approval of Conservation Commission Minutes for 3/4/14

Motion by Ms. Merrow to approve the minutes as presented. Second by Ms. Carlson and unanimously approved.

4. Old Business

a. Subcommittee updates

Forestry & Stewardship – Mr. Gelston provided a quick update on the sub-committee work. March 22 was the first work day of the season, and two properties were worked on. Rose Farm boundaries were addressed. Hatch Lot work consisted of a number of Cub Scouts who raked about ½ of the 1000 feet that needed to be raked. They had quite a good time and want to return this Saturday to finish the work. Mr. Smith is going to mark the connector trail to eliminate the need to walk along the road. Mr. Smith is working with the DEEP to get the concrete forms for the parking lot pole holders. Mr. Smith looked at the parking lot at Hatch. It is very wet right now, and so the water needs to dry out. Once it is dry, it needs to be leveled out and some gravel needs to be dropped. IWWC may need to look at it given the wet areas. Mr. Smith will work with Mr. Ventres to get the permitting underway for the parking lot. Ms. Merrow noted that an Eagle Scout has approached her with a project to create the camp site on the Hatch Lot. Ms. Merrow also spoke with Martha Tonucci about doing a flora inventory; she is going to start on the Nichols property. Carol Harrington also is interested in conducting a bird inventory. Regarding the Patrell property, Mr. Smith has marked the hazard area. The next sub-committee meeting is on April 9<sup>th</sup>. Regarding Nichols property, the neighbors love the property. There has been one issue around one of the property owners (Arthur Westover) who is using the open space for target practice and aiming in the direction of the hiking trail. Another neighbor called the police, and two state troopers came to the scene to put an end to that activity. Mr. Smith talked with Mr. Ventres and noted that the activity needs to cease and desist. Mr. Smith also noted that the boundaries along Mr. Westover's property must be very clearly marked. The trail had already been moved due to

some encroachment issues already in existence with that property. Mr. Smith will work with Mr. Ventres and the police as needed to get this issue resolved.

Volunteer Activism – Tabling until the next meeting.

Outreach and Promotions – Ms. Carlson provided \$43 to Ms. Gelston for deposit.

b. IWWC and P&Z updates

IWWC – Dutch Oil and Propane proposal to install two 30K gallon propane tanks was discussed. While there was no discussion related to where the tanks would be located, the pond behind the Brownell property, which is full of sediment, is going to be cleaned out. Initial engineering report indicates no heavy rainfall flooding issues.

P&Z – There are 2 2-story homes looking to be built past Cave Hill. Hillside Sweet Shop is moving to where the Fish Sisters used to be. Staehly Farm is looking to make wine and is building a new building to support that venture. There was much discussion around Moodus Center and Economic Development ideas.

c. Update on open space purchases

Mr. Smith noted the grant application has been submitted. Letters from the CC and the EHLT were provided as well.

d. Linear Trail update

Mr. Smith noted that on March 22, the EHLT completed the Wildlife Management Area trail.

e. Budget review

Mr. Smith noted that \$15,000 was cut from the bridge request, but everything else was approved, including the other \$15,000 for the bridge. Mr. Walter was supportive of the budget. The CC can solicit donations for the bridge, but Mr. Smith is unsure how that can be publicized. The operational costs were recognized; there is over \$8M in assets maintained by the CC on behalf of the Town.

5. New Business

a. Peter Simmons – EDC staff person

Mr. Simmons has been with the Town of East Haddam for 2 years and has over 25 years in CT government related to Economic Development. He has been focused on helping businesses work through local business approval processes, navigating through permitting and financing needs. The Town is very proactive with tax incentive programs for large investment. He has been very active with the Harris property and food processing facility. Mr. Smith requested Mr. Simmons attend to discuss the CC's concerns about how important open space is for the town as well as quality of life in town to keep the taxes down. Mr. Gelston and Mr. Smith noted the concerns raised by the public and some of the Town's officials around the belief that open space is a losing financial proposition. There are 2 very real reasons for promoting open space: 1) it lowers taxation (no out of control growth) and 2) it attracts a wide base of people to town, i.e., tourism. The tourism aspect continues with a years-long trend of housing a number of resorts that attract people from all over. This isn't just about getting votes for open space, but real action. There is a system of trails that are being pulled together from one property, which is very valuable. There is real intrinsic value of hiking within East Haddam from surrounding areas. There is real opportunity to have not only Town residents enjoy the open space but out of towners who can enjoy it as well and

bring their purchasing dollars with them. There is nothing to support hikers coming in to stay overnight, or eat at different spots (there are a few). One can come by car and boat, but it is not a full service experience that allows people to have weekend get-a-ways in town. It is important to bring a balanced well-educated message to all town residence. Ms. Merrow noted that consistently towns that have the most permanently protected open space have the lowest effective tax rate (which eliminates all differences due to reval process). Open space has long term benefits. There is plenty of room for sustainable economic development within areas that already have the infrastructure in place to support it. The town has about 20% protected open space, with 20% already developed. That leaves quite a bit of land that could potentially be developed even when factoring in wetlands and ledge that cannot be built upon. Mr. Sienna asked if the EDC has a long-term plan. Mr. Simmons noted he is drafting a strategic plan for the EDC. The strategy is still in draft, but he looked at the lay of the land for East Haddam, with 5 categories for economic interests to keep it manageable. There has been some good success in attracting new businesses. One of the categories is tourism – which plays well with the CC’s desire to showcase the open space. Building on what East Haddam already has – tourism – with the Goodspeed, Gillette’s Castle, etc., Mr. Simmons’ mission is to attract people into town, and have them spend time and money within the town. With the trail system, the question is how to gain visibility? And then once they are here, the next question is to determine how to have them spend some money in one of the local businesses in town. Ms. Gleeson suggested pulling together packages with coupons to local businesses for hikers. Mr. Simmons noted that that was done for the swing bridge’s 100<sup>th</sup> anniversary. The other huge issue is that there is no lodging that can handle anything over a group of 8 people. Ms. Gleeson asked about the potential to have a hostel in town. Between the 2 bed and breakfasts in town, there are a total of 8 rooms and their cost is likely out of the range of hikers. Mr. Smith asked Mr. Simmons to articulate what the CC could do to support his work on developing the EDC strategy. Ms. Merrow noted that the townspeople have voted in support of open space year after year. Mr. Simmons noted that he coordinates his activities with the EDC, but works for the Selectmen. Mr. Simmons feels the CC’s goals work handsomely with the tourism portion of the EDC’s strategy. There has already been an investment made in the property and adding trails is low investment. Mr. Simmons would like to put together a white paper to capitalize on the open space and attract more economic development, and then discuss at the next CC meeting. One of the significant aspects of the Town’s Plan for Conservation and Development is the importance of agriculture. Ms. Merrow noted that any of the CC members would be happy to help Mr. Simmons in his research. Mr. Smith noted that there is another partner that could also help – the State of CT. There are 5 state parks in town that can be part of any plan.

b. New bill review

Mr. Smith presented the Shagbark bill for \$105.52, for stewardship work.

Motion by Mr. Gelston to pay the invoice as presented, second by Ms. Gelston, unanimously approved.

6. Next meeting – May 6, 2014, 7:30, at The River House

7. Announcements and other discussion

Ms. Gleeson looked at the Aquarian Water Company awards program and feels that it makes more sense for the CC to nominate something next year after the CC has completed more trail work. Mr. Smith does not see the CC participating in the Town-Wide clean up due to the stewardship work that is planned for the same day.

8. Adjournment

Motion by Mr. Gelston to adjourn at 9:32 pm, second by Ms. Gleeson, unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Shannon A. Goyette  
Recording Secretary

Attachments:

- East Haddam Planning and Zoning Commission Public Hearing announcement
- The Trust for Public Land's Guide to Facts & Figures on the Economic Benefits of Land Conservation
- Conservation: An Investment that Pays
- The Return on Investment in Parks and Open Space in Massachusetts
- Economic Benefits of Saving Stonington's Coogan Farm
- Economic Benefits of the Proposed Barre Town Forest, Barre Town, Vermont
- Connecticut Land Conservation Council Economic Benefits Studies
- American Farmland Trust Farmland Information Center Fact Sheet Cost of Community Services Studies
- Return on Environment: The Economic Value of Protected Open Space in Southeastern Pennsylvania