

**THESE MINUTES ARE SUBJECT TO APPROVAL AT THE NEXT CONSERVATION
COMMISSION MEETING**

**East Haddam
Conservation Commission**

June 4, 2013

1. Call to Order

The Regular Meeting of the East Haddam Conservation Commission was held on Tuesday, June 4, 2013, at 7:17 PM at the River House. The Interim Chairperson (Rob Smith) being in the Chair and the Secretary being Present.

a. Roll Call

Rob Smith, Sue Merrow, Todd Gelston, Charlotte Gelston, Claire Maeder, Peggy Carlson, Cynthia Matthew, TJ Tarbox. Others present: Cheryl Matthewson

2. Approval of Agenda

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

3. Approval of Minutes for 5/7/13

Forestry – Removed extra “to”, corrected the sentence around Town Beach and Shugrue. Corrected “wildshed” to “watershed”.

Motion by Ms. Gelston to approve the minutes as amended. Second by Ms. Maeder and unanimously approved.

4. Old Business

a. FFA/Nichols Property Update

Cheryl Matthewson attended and provided an overview of the work that the FFA students did this past year. She reviewed the background as to how the Nichols property was chosen, and all the work completed over the past 3 years that they have been involved. She noted a grant was applied for and received; with that grant, she attended training and provided information as to what the grant was being used for. There is a Facebook site for comments, “Nichols’ Trails” that people can visit and leave comments on. Given there are a number of Geocaches on the Nichols’ Trails for people to find; there is student interest in adding a permanent orienteering course, so that will need to be discussed at a future meeting. There is also interest in tapping maple trees as the students built a sugar shack; that possibility will need to be discussed at a future meeting. There is a survey that the grant providers require by June 24; Ms. Matthewson will provide the link to Ms. Goyette who will provide it to the CC. Ms. Matthewson noted that there are conversations around changing a number of things within the school system, like class hours (from 85 to 60 minutes), which may impact the amount of time that can be spent on the property.

Mr. Gelston suggested that the CC write a letter of appreciation and note that the potential change to a 60-minute period would limit the amount of time spend on field work for classes like Ms. Matthewson and Ms. Pease (FFA, Vo Ag, Culinary Arts, Wildlife, etc), hurting the potential future connection of kids to open space and preservation. Mr. Gelston also suggested

asking for a meeting with the leaders to discuss further. Ms. Matthew will craft the letter to Mr. Eric Spencer, the Principal, and copy the Superintendent and Mr. Walter as well. Ms. Merrow suggested a future activity may be to host an event to showcase the other things going on related to open space.

b. Budget update

Budget voted down, less people voted for budget than open space, but there was only 40 votes difference. Now there is work to be done to figure out what needs to change. There are a number of Town Meetings next week to provide the public with the opportunity to voice their opinion. Everything is on the table, but only \$300,000 of Education budget can be cut due to statutory requirements.

c. Subcommittee updates

Forestry – Nothing new to report.

Education, Outreach and Promotion – Ms. Gelston collected \$21; grand total is \$896. EHLT has opened a display area at the Town Tavern for local artists and Land Trust calendar, and has included trail guides which can be handed out. A donation box will be provided for those as well.

Stewardship – No activity to note, signs have not been posted yet, but Mr. Smith is working on getting them posted. Mr. Gelston will have the mill shop in town create what is needed, and then Mr. Smith will get the signs posted.

d. IWWC and P&Z updates

IWWC – Small items under discussion.

P&Z – Small items under discussion. Banner Lodge remains quiet and dormant.

e. Update on open space purchases

Pages has been closed on by the Town. Zeiller will be closed in a few months as boundaries are being reworked; closing depends on the boundaries and the demolition being completed.

f. Recruiting new members

With Mr. Tarbox's retirement, and Ms. Maeder and Ms. Matthew resigning, there is a need to recruit new members. Ms. Matthew officially thanked Mr. Tarbox for his years of service to the Town and CC. He has been a committed and loyal member, and he has made his mark over his time of service. Ms. Matthew also thanked Ms. Maeder and presented her a framed copy of the trail guide with many, many thanks for her sheparding of the Trail Guide as well as the signage work she did. Ms. Merrow noted that the camaraderie developed within and among the members is a direct result of Ms. Matthew's example and focus on developing a spirit of collaboration. Mr. Gelston noted that Ms. Matthew has spearheaded a resurgence in the CC that had been lacking. Given that Ms. Matthew is stepping down, a new Chairperson must be chosen.

Motion by Ms. Matthew that Mr. Smith assume the official Chairperson position of the CC to replace her. Second by Ms. Merrow and unanimously approved.

Mr. Sienna has submitted an application. Mr. Smith will post a letter to the Selectmen regarding the recommendation of Mr. Sienna for the CC.

Motion by Ms. Merrow to recommend Mr. Sienna to the Board of Selectmen to be approved as a member of the CC. Second by Ms. Gelston and unanimously approved.

5. New Business

a. CC Vision/Strategy

Given the discussion at the last meeting around the need for vision and strategy, the CC needs to determine its 2 year vision for itself. There is a distinct lack of manpower to accomplish the work of the CC. The public must be more informed and knowledgeable about what the CC does and why it's important. Mr. Gelston noted that it will take money to maintain the properties that are Town-owned open space. Below is a listing of brainstorm ideas as to where people see the CC within 5 years.

- Each preserve has a constituency of volunteers who maintain and “love” them.
- The trail guide, a sell out, has been updated with new trails and they are hard to get as they are so popular.
- There is a backlog of qualified people who are/want to be on the commission.
- There are running trails available for those in town who run regularly; at least one is a 2-3 mile loop.
- Linear trail is complete including the bridge.
- Volunteer coordinator who coordinates and provides structure to address the different projects that are needed.
- Double the acreage in town under conservation easement.
- Increase trails in use by 25%.
- Organize support teams to help with maintenance of the properties.
- More active CC members and workers.
- More stewards for each property.
- Monthly trail clearings for the public to help.
- Regular column in Events magazine that all town residents can read and regular updates are provided on work.
- Additional trails within the trail guide.
- A full CC with 9 members with 10 steady volunteers outside the CC.
- Committed partnership with the East Haddam administration and local and state-wide conservation (i.e., CT Forest and Park Association) agencies.
- Twenty trails blazed and marked across 4 or more properties.
- Every two weeks there is a work party addressing stewardship issues, like clearing trails.
- When Open Space grant is applied for, there needs to be monies included for maintenance, like an endowment.
- Many meetings have civic presentations from different groups in town who present the work they have done.
- A marketing and PR campaign and sub-committee that would communicate the CC's work and accomplishments.
- Much more trail clearing and organized hikes to keep the trail clear.
- More management plans in place for the properties. Once there's a base for this, then it guides the work of the CC and volunteers.

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- Increase stewardship base and publicize the work of the CC. Work has already been done but there is more work to be done around this.
- Talk up the need for money and what a little bit of money buys the public.

All CC members can send Ms. Goyette their further ideas. Ms. Goyette will provide the list to Ms. Merrow who will cluster them and provide to the CC. This will be discussed at the next meeting.

6. Next meeting – July 9, 2013 at The River House

7. Announcements and other discussion

Mr. Smith and Mr. Ventres received notes of thanks from the 6th graders who helped mark trails on the Harris property as well described what the Town Planner does as well as what the CC does. The notes and pictures were provided.

IWWC noted the Rt. 82 bridge replacements that are planned for 2014.

In two weeks, there is a centennial of the bridge on June 15 from 9-10:30 with activities in town.

Mr. Gelston suggested that everyone attend the public hearings about the budget to voice the concerns about the capital funding for the CC. Every night next week is a public hearing.

8. Adjournment

Motion by Ms. Maeder to adjourn at 9:01 pm, second by Ms. Carlson, unanimously approved.

Respectfully submitted,

Shannon A. Goyette
Recording Secretary

Attachments:
Paul Sienna's application