

WASHINGTON CONSERVATION COMMISSION

MINUTES May 3, 2023

MEMBERS PRESENT:	Ms. Frank, Mr. Conroy, Ms. Rawson, Ms. Stagen
MEMBERS ABSENT:	Ms. Payne
ALTERNATES ABSENT:	Mr. Horne
CLERK:	Mr. Buell
OTHERS:	Mr. Faison

Ms. Frank called the meeting to order at 5:18 p.m. and seated Ms. Frank, Mr. Conroy, Ms. Rawson, and Ms. Stagen.

Following this, Ms. Frank welcomed Mr. Faison to the Commission. She indicated that he would be formally accepted as an alternate member of the Conservation Commission at the Board of Selectman's next meeting.

Mr. Faison provided the Commission with a brief description of his professional qualifications. He indicated that he works as an ecologist for a non-profit named Highstead and explained that he conducts research on how forests grow and change over time. Mr. Faison indicated that he studies the spread of invasive species, and how tree cutting and deer browsing impact forests.

Approval of Minutes of April 5, 2023

Motion: To accept the April 5, 2023 meeting minutes as written by Ms. Stagen, seconded by Mr. Conroy. Passed 4-0.

Invasive Species Management– Linda Frank

Ms. Frank informed the Commission that there would be a table at the upcoming Gardenpalooza event for the Conservation Commission. She indicated that they would bring 3 examples of invasive plant species to show the public, and that they would also distribute a list of invasive plants with native alternatives. Ms. Stagen volunteered to help at this event in the morning, and Mr. Conroy stated that he could also help for a few hours in the afternoon.

Following this discussion, Ms. Frank indicated that the town would hire an intern to assist in mapping invasive plant species on town properties, and stated that she had been in contact with Ms. Youngblood, a teacher at Shepaug Valley High School, to discuss the possibility of having a

Shepaug student help with mapping invasive plant species. A brief discussion regarding invasive species mapping and management ensued.

New Preston Open Space Management-Phragmites, Ryan Conroy

Mr. Conroy stated that he had no update for this agenda item, but that he planned to visit the New Preston Open Space in the coming weeks to take new photographs of the phragmite's growth at this location.

Ms. Frank proposed purchasing a fishing camera which would enable the Commission to view the growth of the phragmites under the water to see if the recent cutting of these plants under the water level had slowed down or prevented future growth.

Tree Regs Progress

Ms. Frank informed the Commission that work on this agenda item had not yet been completed.

Conservation Easement Forms – Review

The Commission briefly discussed several revisions that Ms. Frank and Ms. Rawson had proposed for the Conservation Commission's Easement guidelines. A motion was then passed to accept these changes.

Motion: To accept the proposed changes to the easement guidelines
by Ms. Rawson, seconded by Ms. Stagen. Passed 4-0.

Trees, Loretta Skagen's article

Mr. Conroy stated that the rendering for this article had not been completed, but that he hoped to have it finished soon.

2023 POCD ongoing discussion of items to be included in 2023

The Commission reviewed a section from the 2014 P.O.C.D. - "2014 POCD Goals and Strategies - Natural Resources and Open Space."

One: Continue to maintain and protect natural resource areas.

"Continue soil-based zoning policies and encourage conservation design subdivisions."

Ms. Frank asked how many towns in the state still use soil-based zoning. Mr. Buell indicated that he was unsure about this, but that every private septic system in the state requires soil testing to determine whether or not the area is suitable for a septic.

"Continue to pursue 30% open space goal and coordinate efforts with town agencies."

Ms. Frank stated that the town is nearing this goal, and asked if the town should continue to prioritize this item. Ms. Frank went on to state that she was concerned about how open spaces may impact taxes for town residents who do not own protected land. Ms. Rawson suggested removing the 30% goal from this item, and proposed creating new qualitative descriptors in place of this number. She then stated that the additional tax burden from the existence of open spaces within towns is generally very small for land owners who do not

own protected land. After a brief discussion, Commission members agreed that this should item should be reworked.

“Acquire outside open space funding resources. Continue use of PA-490.”

Ms. Frank indicated that the town does have funding for the acquisition of open spaces. Ms. Stagen asked if she could find out how much of this funding is left.

Two: Protect water quality for the Town

“Conduct regular water testing for key surface water bodies and wells.”

Ms. Frank indicated that she did not believe that this water testing is being conducted. Mr. Buell stated that the public beaches are regularly tested, and that Aquarian water systems are also regularly tested. Ms. Frank explained that she did not believe that rivers in the town are tested. A brief discussion ensued.

“Highlight the dangers of runoff, septic failure, clear cutting and the importance of wetlands. Reduce non-point pollution through zoning and design regulations.

Ms. Frank asked if septic failures occur often. Mr. Buell indicated that the health department takes immediate action to address septic failures but that they do not occur frequently. The Commission then discussed clear cutting and Eversource’s effort to clear trees and plants near powerlines. Ms. Rawson described how power companies cut plants low and cover these areas with gravel, and explained how this practice impacts the native ecosystem. The Commission then discussed the use of chemicals on roadways and how these chemicals impact the environment. Ms. Rawson stated that she did not feel that “highlight” was an effective word for this section and suggested replacing this word with a more active one.

“Monitor increasing development at Lake Waramaug; consider stricter coverage requirements.”

Ms. Rawson asked if there had been updates to these regulations because a large amount of development had occurred around the lake. Ms. Frank indicated that many cottages had been demolished and larger homes had been built in their place. Mr. Buell indicated that the Land Use Department has closely monitored lot coverage for all applications, even for proposals as small as a generator. He went on to state that he did not believe that many towns are as stringent as Washington currently is regarding lot coverage restrictions. Ms. Frank explained that the Land Use Department closely monitors projects around the lake and conducts frequent inspections.

Three: Protect scenic assets, encourage scenic roads, and promote greenways.

“Include scenic resources in development reviews; restrict development on steep slopes exceeding 15%; enforce and improve outdoor lighting and fencing regulations.

Ms. Rawson asked if dark skies lighting regulations exist within the town’s Zoning Regulations. Mr. Buell confirmed that they do. A brief discussion ensued

Revisit guidance re Solar Panel placement

The Commission did not discuss this agenda item.

Recommendations for two Alternate Vacancies

Ms. Frank indicated that in addition to Mr. Faison, she had met another potential candidate for the Commission. A brief discussion ensued.

Other and/or Old Business

The Commission briefly discussed staffing at the Town of Washington.

Motion: To adjourn the meeting at 6:16 p.m. by Ms. Rawson, seconded by Ms. Stagen. Passed 4-0.

Respectfully Submitted,

Dennis Buell

Dennis Buell
Conservation Commission Clerk
Town of Washington
5-8-2023