Conservation Commission

MINUTES

April 1, 2015

5:00 p.m. Upper Level Meeting Room

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr. Bernard, Mrs. Frank, Mrs. Payne

MEMBERS ABSENT: Ms. Dupuis, Mr. Markert

ALTERNATES PRESENT: Mrs. Corrigan, Ms. Quackenbosw2, Mr. Sabin

STAFF PRESENT: Mrs. Hill

 Mrs. Payne called the meeting to order at 5:07 p.m. and seated Members Bernard, Frank, and Payne and Alternate Corrigan.

Consideration of the Minutes

MOTION: To accept the March 4, 2015 Regular Meeting minutes

 as written. By Mrs. Frank, seconded by Mr. Bernard,

 and passed 3-0-1.

 Mrs. Corrigan abstained because she had not attended

 the meeting.

Pending Business

 Alternate Quackenbos arrived and was seated at approximately 5:20 p.m.

Depot Cell Tower: Although the tower has been up for some time, it is still not in use.

Maintenance of Open Space: Mrs. Payne reported that funds have been put in the Building and Properties 2015-2016 budget for the maintenance of the walking path, continued work on the knotweed eradication project, maintenance of the New Preston Falls property, and mowing of the NP Open Space. She hoped the funds would not be cut during the budget process.

Plaza Improvements: There was no progress to date to report.

The Gunnery Soccer Fields/22 South Street: Work on the construction of the fields is in progress. Mrs. Payne noted that hundreds of trees had been cut. The commissioners were particularly concerned about the potential for erosion and sedimentation problems. She said she had emailed the First Selectman and Mr. Bedini, IWC Chairman, with her concerns about this project and was told they would photograph the site and monitor it on a regular basis. It was the consensus that a site inspection by the Conservation Commission was warranted. Mrs. Payne will schedule an inspection for May.

Monitoring of Easements Held by the Conservation Commission: Mrs. Payne noted that the Conservation Commission had been monitoring these easements, but she thought Town staff should be responsible for the yearly monitoring inspections. She and Mrs. Frank will meet sometime in April with the First Selectman, Assessor, Land Use Administrator, and Zoning Enforcement Officer to discuss how this transition can best be accomplished. She noted too, that the Town needs new software to better track which properties have these easements and whether they are in compliance with the terms of their easements.

Ridgeline Protection: Mrs. Frank reported that she had spoken with staff at the HVA who had designed Kent’s ridgeline protection maps and had learned it would cost $9000 to make a similar map for Washington. Therefore, she suggested an alternate way to address this issue. She thought that since the Plan of Conservation and Development suggests there should be no development on land with slopes exceeding 15%, that the Zoning Commission could amend Section 14 of its Regulations to ban development on these slopes. Mr. Bernard was concerned that doing this would not effectively deal with ridgelines. Mrs. Frank added language would be needed to control tree clearing not only on the steep slopes, but within 200 feet of steep slopes and/or outside a 100 foot perimeter around buildings. She thought tree cutting would not be banned in these areas, but would be regulated and supervised by an expert such as Mr. Sabin. The intent would be to leave some cover when viewed from a distance and to preserve the view of the rural landscape. However, she thought the Conservation Commission should stress the importance of preserving trees based on environmental reasons such as trees help to maintain water quality and to control excessive runoff and erosion. Alternate Sabin arrived at 5:20 p.m. He noted that all development could not be banned on slopes exceeding 15% because driveways often traverse these slopes to access building sites. He also noted there was a steep slopes map included in the Natural Resources Inventory Report and Recommendations. A preliminary map presented by Mrs. Frank, which indicated steep slopes and high elevations in Town, was compared to maps in the report; “Peaks and Prominences,” “Slopes,” and “Scenic Areas and Vistas” as the commissioners tried to find an effective way to map the areas where it would be crucial to control tree cutting in order to preserve ridgeline views. The importance of tying the regulations for ridgeline protection to a specific map was noted. It was noted that slopes could be measured by the Enforcement Officer and so he could monitor areas described in terms of slope with relative ease, while the opinion of what a vista is varies and so would be much more difficult to monitor, but that using a map showing only slopes exceeding 15% could not be used to define sensitive ridgeline areas because some of these steep slopes have nothing to do with ridgelines. After a lengthy discussion, Mrs. Payne asked Mr. Sabin to do an overlay of the “Scenic Areas and Views” map with the “Peaks and Prominences” map to help the Commission understand which areas need to be regulated. Mrs. Frank once again stressed that the map and proposed regulation should not be too complicated and that the foundation of the proposed regulation should be environmental protection if Conservation hopes to get the Zoning Commission to implement ridgeline protection regulations.

 Mrs. Frank left the meeting at 5:55 p.m.

Walker Brook Pollution: Mr. Bernard reported that he did some testing at several points along Walker Brook the week of March 8 through 15. Sodium chloride levels and conductivity were measured in the brook as well as in runoff from roads near the Hartwell and Carter farms and from the Chapin Road – Walker Brook Road intersection. Although he had not yet correlated all of the data, Mr. Bernard stated that the road runoff tested far exceeds the acute toxicity limits for aquatic life. Fortunately, he said, this runoff is diluted when it flows into Walker Brook. Mr. Bernard briefly explained that there are no effective treatments for chlorides. He said his tests will probably reveal a worst case scenario concerning the road runoff in this area because the water samples taken were from melting snow and were not diluted by any rainfall. He said he did not expect any fish kills in Walker Brook and that he would have a full report for the next meeting.

New Salt Treatment on Town Roads: Mr. Sabin stated the new salt treatment contains phero cyanides, which are mixed in for anti- caking. He said he had noticed that the conifers along the roadsides were getting burned since this new treatment was begun. Mr. Bernard noted some of the additives that are used in commercial products to treat winter road surfaces. Although it was thought the purpose of the new treatment was to cut down on the use of salt, he explained that now a brine solution is put down on the roads before it snows. He said the use of sand is cheapest and non-toxic, but does not melt the snow. Mr. Bernard suggested that someone from the road crew be invited to a future meeting to talk about current road treatments.

Planning Commission Sustainability Subcommittee: Mrs. Payne reported that the Planning Commission had asked for a volunteer from the Conservation Commission to serve on this subcommittee. The subcommittee is being organized to work on the implementation of the Sustainability chapter of the POCD. Mrs. Payne asked the commissioners to let her know if they were interested in working with this subcommittee.

New Preston Open Space/Control of Invasives: Mrs. Corrigan said she would soon mark the invasive shrubs to be eradicated in the New Preston open space.

New Preston Falls: Mrs. Payne said the New Preston Women’s Club would be a good place to hold a meeting with New Preston business owners and residents to make them aware of the New Preston open space and that the Town owns the Falls and will try to maintain that property. She thought if they were aware of this, some volunteers might come forward to help with the maintenance work. Mr. Sabin said he would like to have a trail established up to the Falls. Mrs. Payne wondered if a meeting with the Commission could be tied in with the New Preston Nights gatherings. Mr. Bernard will look into this.

Ordinance to Ban the Storage of Fracking Waste and Use of Materials Derived from Fracking Waste in Washington: Mrs. Payne reported this ordinance had been passed unanimously. Mr. Sabin noted that it is not only the liquid wastes from fracking that are a problem, but also the sands that result from fracking, which are also hazardous.

 As there was no further business to discuss, Mrs. Payne adjourned the meeting at 6:18 p.m.

FILED SUBJECT TO APPROVAL

Respectfully submitted,

Janet M. Hill

Land Use Administrator