Conservation Commission

MINUTES November 1, 2017

5:00 p.m. Upper Level Meeting Room

MEMBERS PRESENT: Mr. Bernard, Mrs. Frank, Mr. O’Hazo,

Mrs. Payne, Mr. Sabin

ALTERNATE PRESENT: Ms. Quackenbos

ALSO PRESENT: Mrs. Arturi, Mr. Dobson

STAFF PRESENT: Mrs. Hill

Mrs. Payne called the meeting to order at 5:12 p.m. and seated the regular members and Alternate Quackenbos.

Consideration of the Minutes: The 9/6/17 minutes were corrected to note that Ms. Rowe was present.

MOTION: To accept the 9/6/17 Meeting minutes as corrected.

By Mrs. Frank, seconded by Mr. Bernard, passed

5-0.

It was noted there was an informational memo rather than minutes for the 10/4/17 meeting because there had been no quorum.

Phragmites Removal at the New Preston Open Space: Mr. Bernard reported that although the results were not yet visible, these invasives had been sprayed by All Habitat and that he had requested a map that shows exactly the 4 acre area that was sprayed. When the ground is frozen the next step will be to cut and mulch the dead canes. Mr. Bernard recommended that as the project proceeds the Commission contact a consultant biologist to monitor what grows back on the site and to report back to the Commission. It was noted the contractor had been paid for the work already done, but there would be another bill when the upcoming work is completed.

New Preston Open Space:

1. Mrs. Payne noted that in June there were 34 species of birds here and the Ct. Audubon was asked to include the New Preston Open Space in its inventory of important bird areas. A response should be received in January.
2. It was noted that someone had cut down the tall plants and shrubs located between the wetlands and the pond. It was thought this might have been done by All Habitat to access the phragmites that was sprayed.

Eagle Scout Project: Mrs. Payne reported that this fall The Gunnery Green Club had replanted the area near the river walk along the Shepaug where an Eagle Scout had previously put in plants to stabilize the section where knotweed had been removed. These plants failed due to dry weather. Due to dry weather again this year, it was not known whether the latest plantings would survive.

Meads Open Space Proposal: Mrs. Payne noted the 10/26/17 letter from Atty. Kelly proposed an open space donation either to Steep Rock or to the Town from the Meads. The property to be donated is an approximate 3+ acre lot at 77 Baldwin Hill Road. Noting that this land was located near, but not adjacent to, other Steep Rock holdings, it was the consensus that the Commission should accept it if Steep Rock doesn’t take it. The Steep Rock land preservation committee will meet next on November 4, and so the Commission should know by its next meeting what Steep Rock has decided. Mr. O’Hazo will email information about this property to all commissioners.

MOTION: To accept the Meads’ open space donation of the property located at 77 Baldwin Hill Road if Steep Rock chooses not to take it. By Mrs. Frank, seconded by Mr. Bernard, and passed 5-0.

Mr. Sabin arrived.

Dobson Open Space at Popple Swamp and Church Hill Roads: Mr. Sabin submitted the base line study for the open space on this property and briefly reviewed it. The study included an aerial photo, a copy of the Arthur Howland and Assoc. site plan delineating the open space areas, a series of 13 photos taken throughout the site to specifically document the existing conditions, and management recommendations. He recommended letting the wooded areas alone and mowing most of the meadows once a year. He noted that the meadows currently being hayed would probably be mowed more than once a year. Mrs. Frank asked if the dead ash trees in one section of the open space would be a liability if they fell on the road. This was briefly discussed and Mr. Sabin noted the trees would fall toward the interior of the property. Mr. Sabin noted the owner and future owners were to be given a copy of the document and confirm receipt so the Commission would be assured they understood their responsibilities and would carry them out. Mrs. Frank noted that Mr. Ajello, the Town’s enforcement officer, would monitor the open space. Mrs. Payne noted the open space documents are now on file and the Conservation Commission awaits the final open space easement set aside document to be reviewed in December. These documents may be reviewed by the Conservation commissioners in the land use office.

MOTION: Given that the Conservation Commission had previously voted to accept the Dobson open space located on Church Hill and Popple Swamp Roads with the condition that a baseline study be submitted, the receipt of the baseline study by Mr. Sabin is now acknowledged, the Commission finds that it meets all requirements and includes a management plan and so is prepared to sign the easement papers when they are ready for signature. By Mrs. Payne, seconded by Mr. O’Hazo, and passed 5-0.

Mr. Dobson thanked Mr. Sabin and the Commission.

New Preston Falls: Mr. Sabin reported the Inland Wetlands Commission approved a 5 year permit for the proposed work. Mrs. Payne read the motion of approval. Mr. Sabin noted he had referred the plans to the DEEP Fisheries Division as the IWC had requested and had told the IWC that the Conservation Commission would follow all recommendations from the Fisheries department. Using his plan, “Historic New Preston Falls,” dated 10/4/17, Mr. Sabin detailed the work to be done on site. This included: 1) repair of the pedestrian bridge and the installation of boulder rip rap next to its concrete abutments, 2) installation of an easy to maintain mowed lawn path, 3) installation of a boardwalk constructed of steel pipes driven into the ground and wooden planks, 4) maintenance of the old access road and secondary trails, installation of an anti tracking pad, planting of native species, and removal of the remaining dead ash trees, and 5) construction of a fieldstone riverside terrace and natural granite slab stairs with hand rail next to the existing patio. He noted that in the future the old foundations and historic sites would be assessed. Mrs. Payne noted the previous state archeologist, Mr. Bellantoni, had inspected the site, but Mr. Jones, his replacement, had not yet done so. Mr. Sabin noted the existing brush and invasives along Rt. 202 would not be cleared and also an informational sign, possibly with photos of the old area mills and a safety warning not to go beyond the sign, would be installed. Fundraising was briefly discussed. Mrs. Frank suggested a photo and article be placed in the Washington newsletter and Mrs. Payne said she had already submitted this info for the next issue. Mrs. Payne said the Commission should propose funding for this project in the next Town budget. The commissioners thanked Mr. Sabin and his son, Sam, for their work on this project.

Viewscape Guidelines: Mrs. Payne had sent a packet of materials, some dating as far back as 2005, to all commissioners. The packet included viewscape guidelines with attachments drafted by Mr. Sabin in 2013 and the ridgeline protection recommendations from 2005. She asked the members to review these documents so that work on these issues can resume at the December meeting.

Updates:

1. Johnson Farm Project: It was noted that Steep Rock Assoc. has been notified that it will receive a USDA Agricultural Easement Grant to preserve over 50 acres of active farmland on West Mountain Road. The Commission is waiting for a decision from the state open space committee. Mrs. Payne pointed out the location of this land on the open space map and noted it would be available for passive recreation and could connect with trails on other nearby protected lands.
2. Revision of Section 17 of the Zoning Regulations: Mrs. Payne recommended that the commissioners read the adopted revisions. Mrs. Hill reported that the Zoning Commission will soon address the reconstruction of nonconforming structures within 0 to 50 feet of Lake Waramaug as had been recommended when the initial revisions to this section were considered.
3. Land Use Minutes: Mrs. Payne urged the commissioners to routinely read all land use commission minutes.
4. Romford Road Bridge: It was noted that even though there is no work now being done on this bridge, it is closed because it is not safe.
5. Walker Brook Road Culvert: It was noted that work on this culvert is now in progress.
6. CACIWC Annual Meeting: The commissioners were reminded this meeting will be held on November 18, that educational workshops are included, and that the Town will cover the cost of registration for any Conservation commissioner who would like to attend.
7. Spring Hill Road Bridge Work: Mr. Bernard thought Steep Rock should be notified of the upcoming work to repair the bridge over Kirby Brook. Mrs. Arturi volunteered to get this information to Steep Rock.

Other Business

Limited Impact Development Regulations: Mr. Sabin reported that the recently drafted LID regulations by the Northwest Conservation District have been approved and were now available in hard copy. Ms. Nelson will provide the Conservation Commission with a hard copy.

Bazos/Tinker Hill and West Shore Roads Open Space Baseline and Management Plan: Mr. Sabin summarized his narrative, which cited the existing site conditions, noted the history of the property, and provided a management plan for the open space. He stated that the site plan by Arthur H. Howland and Assoc. indicated the location of large trees and the edge of the canopy. The report included a series of photographs. He reviewed the three corridors of open space and the management plan for each. The first would be left to grow as natural woodland, the second would allow selective thinning upon Conservation Commission approval if warranted to preserve views, and the third, which was the central corridor with a view, would be mowed or cut every other year. Mr. Sabin recommended a qualified individual, someone who can identify plant species in the field, make routine inspections for 5 years to check for invasive species and at the end of the 5 year period, submit a report to the Commission. He said this annual review to be paid for by the property owner was an important part of the management plan. It was noted the Commission had previously voted to endorse this open space subject to the receipt of the baseline report and management plan. Mrs. Payne asked the commissioners to review these documents and suggested another site inspection be conducted. Again, Mr. Sabin said the current and future owners must acknowledge they have read and understood the conservation easement and management plan and agree abide by them. Mrs. Payne noted there was no actual easement agreement yet and that this matter would be considered again at the December meeting.

MOTION: To adjourn the meeting. By Mrs. Frank.

The meeting was adjourned at 6:25 p.m.

FILED SUBJECT TO APPROVAL

Respectfully submitted,

Janet M. Hill, Land Use Administrator