

Town of Mansfield
CONSERVATION COMMISSION
Meeting of 20 February 2013
Conference B, Audrey P. Beck Building
MINUTES

Members present: Aline Booth (Alt.), Joan Buck (Alt.), Peter Drzewiecki, Neil Facchinetti, Quentin Kessel, Scott Lehmann, John Silander. *Members absent:* Robert Dahn. *Others present:* Grant Meitzler (Wetlands Agent), Linda Painter (Town Planner), Jennifer Kaufman (Mansfield Tomorrow Project Manager), Michael Looney (Milone & MacBroom); Ken Feathers, Jim Morrow, Vicky Wetherell (Open Space Preservation Committee (OSPC)).

1. The meeting was **called to order** at 7:33p by Chair Quentin Kessel.

2. The **draft minutes** of the 16 January 2013 meeting were approved as written; consideration of the draft minutes of 19 December 2012 was inadvertently omitted from the agenda and will be deferred until the March meeting.

3. Mansfield Tomorrow project. Jennifer Kaufman introduced Michael Looney, who will be working on the zoning portion of the Mansfield Tomorrow project and came to this meeting for a conservation perspective on zoning and permitting in Mansfield. He asked how zoning regulations and process might be improved. Among the comments and suggestions made in the ensuing discussion were these:

- Silander expressed the Commission's disappointment that zoning regulations advertised as promoting conservation of landscapes through clustering had failed to deliver anything resembling clustered development. The chief effect of the "Open-Space Subdivision" option has been to allow developers to cut costs by substituting common driveways for town roads. Booth recalled that misgivings about the reliability of community septic systems had discouraged serious consideration of clustered housing in areas without water and sewer. She wondered whether the reliability of these systems is still an issue.
- Silander noted that review of proposed subdivisions often seems uninformed by larger conservation objectives, such as ensuring corridors for wildlife. Feathers observed that the new pre-review process, which invites comments on subdivision plans as they evolve, may help address this problem. He suggested that the process might be improved if the Town were clearer about what it expects from developers. Wetherell noted that pre-review is something OSPC and the Commission have wanted for a long time. In her view, the two subdivision plans that have gone through this process are much better than what would have emerged from the old procedure of commenting at a public hearing on the developer's application.
- Kessel observed that 2-acre zoning was implemented to protect water resources but that there may be better ways to achieve this objective. Places like Denmark and Germany have real clustering with prohibitions against developing farmland, though there are legal and cultural barriers to replicating such controls on land use here.
- Wetherell looked into the future of Mansfield and saw subdivisions on all currently undeveloped land that is not reserved for farming, open space, or parks. Preserving what's left of the town's rural character will require positive action; vision statements are not enough. She stressed the importance of preserving prime farmland in Pleasant Valley and elsewhere, if Mansfield's future is to include farming. Feathers added that as farmland disappears, it becomes more difficult for the remaining farms to make it

economically, as farmers often depend upon land they don't own for hay and silage. He also pointed out that preserving land for agriculture and open space is a better tax deal for the town than subdividing it; unlike town residents, land doesn't demand services.

- Silander pointed to objectives in the current Plan of Conservation and Development that should be retained in the new plan, such as preserving scenic views and large tracts of forest.
- Kaufman reported that the town's acquisition of open space has, with input from the Open Space Preservation Committee, become much more focused on promoting larger objectives, such as maintaining wildlife corridors and promoting trail systems.
- Lehmann wondered if logging could be regulated to protect wetlands. Erosion controls are routinely required in residential development, but there seems to be no oversight whatever of logging operations which potentially have a much greater impact on wetlands.

Mr. Looney left the meeting. Linda Painter reminded those present that the Mansfield Tomorrow project aims to reconsider, update, and bring together the Town's Strategic Plan and its Plan of Conservation and Development. Wetherell pointed out that the Strategic Plan lacks any strategy for protecting conservation lands. The Commission and the Committee agreed to discuss at their regular March meetings what needs to be done to address such deficiencies in existing planning documents, leaving open the possibility of a joint special meeting the following week to produce a joint resolution. Kaufman, Painter, and the OSPC contingent then left the meeting.

4. Alternates Aline Booth and Joan Buck were designated **voting members** for the rest of the meeting.

5. IWA referrals.

a. **W1511 (Homework Properties, 85 & 87 Old Turnpike Rd.)** A 2-lot subdivision is proposed for the north side of Old Turnpike Rd., shortly before it becomes unpaved going east. A tiny wetland lies west of the driveway shown on the plan for the western lot; the septic system on this lot is about 50 ft from wetland soils, although no wetland is designated in this area. After some discussion the Commission agreed unanimously (**motion:** Booth, Buck) that (1) the proposed development appears to have no significant wetlands impact and (2) the developer's design and placement of structures should respect the fact that the property is situated on a Scenic Road.

b. **W1513 (Bruder, 3 Boulder La.)** A 21 ft diameter above-ground swimming pool is proposed on a flat terrace behind the house, about 50 ft from a large wetland, to which land slopes fairly steeply from the edge of the terrace. Disturbance should be minimal; sod is to be removed and replaced with a gravel pad, on which the pool will sit. The Commission agreed unanimously (**motion:** Facchinetti, Lehmann) that this project appears to involve no significant wetlands impact, assuming that the pool is 21 ft in diameter and remains 50 ft from the wetland.

6. **UConn Agronomy Farm.** Rep. Greg Haddad has filed a bill in the General Assembly "to require groundwater and residential drinking water testing and the disclosure of pesticide, fungicide and herbicide use at state-owned agricultural research fields." The Commission agreed unanimously to the following **motion** (Drzewiecki, Kessel):

The Commission asks the Town Council to support Representative Haddad's Proposed Bill 5480 "to require groundwater and residential drinking water testing and the disclosure of pesticide, fungicide and herbicide use at state-owned agricultural research

fields.” The potential for groundwater contamination from chemical applications at the UConn Agronomy Farm has been of concern to the Commission for several years.

7. UConn Hazardous Waste Transfer Station. The Committee charged with recommending a site for UConn’s Hazardous Waste Transfer Station (currently located in a public water supply watershed behind Horsebarn Hill) has recommended moving it to the proposed Tech Park on the North Campus. The Committee’s 2nd-choice location is W-lot; the current location is its 3rd-choice.

8. Adjourned at 9:20p. Next meeting: 7:30p, Wednesday, 20 March 2013.

Scott Lehmann, Secretary, 22 February 2013; approved 20 March 2013.