

Town of Mansfield  
**CONSERVATION COMMISSION**  
Meeting of April 15, 2015  
Conference Room B, Audrey P. Beck Building  
**MINUTES**

*Members present:* Aline Booth (Alt.), Joan Buck (Alt), Grant Meitzler, Quentin Kessel, John Silander. *Members absent:* Robert Dahn, Neil Facchinetti, Scott Lehmann, Michael Soares.

1. The meeting was **called to order** at 7:40 P.M. by Kessel. Alternates Booth and Buck were designated voting members for this meeting.

2. **Minutes.** The draft minutes of the special meeting held on February 10, 2015 were approved (Motion by Buck and seconded by Silander), and the minutes of the regular meeting held on February 18, 2015 were approved (motion by Buck and seconded by Booth).

3. **Pre-application for potential development of a 36 acre lot belonging to Willard J. Stearns & Sons, Inc. at the corner of Brown and Coventry Roads:** Meitzler, Silander and Kessel reported on the April 12, 2015 field trip to this property. The April 14, joint meeting with the Open Space Preservation Committee on this proposed development was attended by Buck, Booth, Meitzler and Kessel. A letter written by Scott Lehmann (a member of the Commission who is recusing himself from this issue) of Browns Road was reviewed and is attached to these minutes. The Commission makes the following comments:

a) While there is a potential house lot along Browns Road, there did not appear to be a good access to the interior of this land from Browns Road for reasons that include the sight lines and drainage areas.

b) For development along Coventry Road it is recommended that activity be setback from the road to complement the preserved land on the other side of Coventry Road.

c) Any development on this property will be limited by two wetland areas. Not shown on the March 21, 2015 (draft) Site Assessment Map by John Alexopoulos, Land. Arch. is a watercourse that seems to connect the two wetlands.

d) Consideration should be given to utilization of the conservation subdivision regulations, with clustering being used to protect the wetlands, views, etc.

e) In particular, an effort should be made to protect view from a rise of ledge at the corner of Browns and Coventry Roads, either by easement, or deeding the land to the Town so that it might be enjoyed by the public.

f) To access the westerly portion of this property, a significant wetland will have to be crossed. Any house, or houses, here will be in close proximity to other residences. In the event the owners of these homes are interested in purchasing this corner, the developers might avoid the expense a driveway crossing these wetlands.

**4. Storrs Center Phase 3 Application Referral.** The Commission reviewed the drawings which four of the members had also done at the OSPC meeting on April 14. The following comments were made:

a) No trailhead, or trail, leading to the Whetten Woods is shown on the maps. It is thought that in early discussions, the developer had indicated to the PZC that he would facilitate such a trail connection. There is a need for careful planning here. Will the trailhead be used primarily for residents in the development to access Whetten Woods, and possibly from there to the Nipmuck Trail in the Fenton River Valley (Dog Lane to Holly Drive and through the Torrey Preserve) or to other trails? If so, departure from the clubhouse would be appropriate. On the other hand, is it appropriate to route non-resident hikers wishing to access Downtown Storrs or the University campus by the same route (by the clubhouse)?

b) The Commission recommends the portion of the property deeded to the Town as open space also be known as Whetten Woods. This will avoid the confusion that might be caused if a different name were utilized. Booth noted that Coney Rock is an analogous situation; a portion of that park is owned by Joshua's Trust and another part by the Town, but it is administered as a single unit.

c) The Commission urges the Town engineers to compare these plans with those presented to the PZC and this Commission during the planning stages of Downtown Storrs. It is important that the planned efforts to clean and insert the storm water runoff into the groundwater table be successful. The impervious surfaces of this development are extensive.

**5. Petition to Stop the Algonquin Pipeline Expansion.** Buck reviewed the efforts of some Mansfield residents to circulate a "Petition to Stop the Algonquin Pipeline Expansion." The discussion that ensued ranged from overpopulation of portions of Planet Earth (including a university and town that cannot grow without a new source of water), to global warming and climate change, to the damage caused by natural gas leaks (a greenhouse gas) and the burning of any carbon based fuel (carbon dioxide, another greenhouse gas.) These are important issues and the Commission urges the Town Council to give serious consideration to them.

**6. Email from Neil Facchinetti dated March 27, 2015** (attached). This email notes that he will present more information about pesticide use at the UConn farm adjacent to Storrs Heights at our May meeting.

## **7. The meeting adjourned at 8:58 P.M.**

Respectfully submitted,

Quentin Kessel, Secretary *pro tem*.

Approved: May 20, 2015

### **Attachment 1.**

To: Jennifer Kaufman

From: Scott Lehmann (532 Browns Rd, Storrs, 06268)

Re: Stearns parcel

Date: 06 April 15

I regret that I will be out of town and unable to tag along on the PZC/IWA 12 April Field Trip to the Stearns parcel on Browns & Coventry Rds. The parcel surrounds ours on three sides, so I could not participate in the Field Trip as I normally do as a representative of the Conservation Commission.

However, I would like to comment briefly as a private citizen on the Site Analysis, dated 23 March 2015. I am not sure exactly what is required of such a document, but this one seems – in some respects that appear relevant to planning – inaccurate or incomplete.

Some background:

Most of this parcel (maybe all of it) was part of the Brown brothers dairy farm (the rest of the farm lay across Browns Rd). The original part of our house at 532 Browns Rd was built in 1936 by Floyd Atkins for Harry Brown; we bought it in 1976 from his daughter Pauline B. Schroll after the death of her mother Florence. The similar house at 522 Browns Rd. had been Robert Brown's until he moved away to Australia. At the time we bought our house, Charles Brown and his sister Ruth still lived in the old family home (now, alas, a shambles) at 542 Browns Rd. They told us that they could not maintain the dairy operation after Harry's death and Robert's departure, and that they'd sold to Mountain Dairy rather than to a developer because they did not want to see the land developed.

In 1976, the surrounding land was open pasture, as shown on the map “1983 Pasture/Woods extent” on p.7 of the Site Analysis. Charles Brown worked to maintain these pastures, on which Mountain Dairy pastured cows for a number of years after we moved here. It was really a bigger job than he could do at his advanced age. After his death, essentially no maintenance was done, and this area is now a jungle of shrub and saplings. Nonetheless, we fondly remember the days when we could easily walk out over the pastures behind our house to the low rock outcrop shown on the Site Analysis map (and depicted in the righthand photo on the cover), a favorite place to visit with our daughter Phoebe (b. 1979) when she was little.

### Comments on the Site Analysis:

1. The Site Assessment Map on p.3 (hereafter “map”) suggests that the stone wall along Browns Rd between our property and Shirley Graves' at 542 Browns Rd does not extend all the way to our SW property line; this is incorrect.
2. Runoff down the narrow strip between 532 and 542 flows under Browns Rd in a culvert. The stone wall tends to act as a dam, so that the nearby upslope area is often pretty soggy (also true of some ground farther up in this swale). I suspect that soil analysis in this area would confirm that some of it is sufficiently poorly drained to qualify as wetland.
3. The map does not show a stone wall that extends NW from near the NW corner of our property to the narrow strip of wetland shown on the map. This wall is not just a “rubble” (unlike, say, the leftovers from a wall that, until mined for stones, ran a bit W of N from the end of the wall shown right below “WOODED/THINNED” to Coventry Rd).
4. The narrow strip of wetland mentioned in comment 3 is actually a watercourse that drains the wetland on Coventry Rd (which receives water from wetlands across Coventry Rd to the N). Water from spring runoff and heavy rain flows down to the large N-S wetland shown on the map, and thence underneath Browns Rd. It is not accurate to omit this watercourse. I believe that it follows a dug channel along the back boundary of 542.
5. The Site Analysis (p.4) mentions “Large trees along Coventry Road and on the western boundary” and “larger oak trees” associated with the “Rock outcrop adjacent [to] reverting field” [shown below boxed “REVERTING” on the map], but does not locate any on the map on p.3. The largest tree I know on the property is a massive red oak, at least 48 inches DBH, one in a line of large trees growing along the stone wall noted in comment 3.
6. “There is no evidence of old foundations or any other remnant suggesting habitation or structures supporting agriculture.” (p.4) This is not quite accurate: there is an old hand-dug well lined with stone and covered by a slab of rock located near the wetland-with-pond off Coventry Rd (it is approximately on a line running N from our house to the pond).

### Suggestions:

My understanding is that site analyses such as this are required in part to permit input from the PZC and other parties early in the development planning process. So here are two suggestions:

1. Lest this parcel go the way of so many others, I urge the PZC to push for clustered development on it, so that large unfragmented areas of open space remain. Common driveways should not be permitted unless development is truly clustered.
2. There are two areas that seem to me particularly worth protecting as dedicated open space (leaving aside the extensive wetlands, which should not be on the table for development):
  - a. The rocky outcrop, roughly in the middle of the parcel, mentioned at the end of the “Some background” section above. This is near the hemlocks of which the Site Analysis recommends: “Use the group of hemlock trees in the design layout” (p.4). The wooly

adelgid may do these trees in, but the rocky outcrop will be there for a long time; get rid of a bit of poison ivy and it would a great spot for kids to play, and indeed for anyone to enjoy the cycle of the seasons (just now, you will probably flush woodcock if you pick your way through the jungle below the scarp).

b. The hill at the corner of Browns and Coventry Rds. This affords a prospect out over the Mountain Dairy fields across Browns Rd. Judging by its exposed ledge and relatively small trees, the hill is bedrock covered with a relatively thin layer of soil..

While neither of these spots is adjacent to other Town open space, anyone walking the trails that connect Chatham Dr & Mansfield City Rd to Coventry Rd could easily access them via a pleasant stroll on Coventry Rd.

## **Attachment 2.**

From: Neil Facchinetti [[nfacch@me.com](mailto:nfacch@me.com)]  
Sent: Friday, March 27, 2015 10:40 AM  
To: Quentin Kessel; Kessel, Quentin  
Subject: next meeting, etc.

Dear Quentin,

I will be out of town for the week of our April meeting.

For the May meeting Gregg Haddad has said he will provide me with answers to the following questions on current safeguards against pesticides at the UConn farm:

- \* What will be the sampling schedule for private and farm wells in the future? Will tests be conducted more frequently than once a year in the late fall or winter? Will expanded tests of private and farm wells be extended into future years, taking advantage of the \$100,000 allocated to safety assessments at the farm? Will surface water (the irrigation pond) be tested, as Professor Wargo recommended?
- \* How will the following DEEP conclusion be addressed?: “Some of these pesticides [applied at the farm] are proprietary new compounds or experimental mixtures of registered pesticides without federal registration for the use being tested. These new compounds frequently do not yet have laboratory analytical methods available for detecting them in groundwater. The names of proprietary compounds have not been released and so would also not be able to be definitively identified by a laboratory analysis.”
- \* Are you planning any further legislative or oversight initiatives on these matters this year?

In the Hartford Courant this morning an interesting article made me wonder whether the Clipper application against fanwort in Eagleville lake, and its downstream migration, might be detrimental to a threatened native plant called estuary pipe wort or Parker’s pipe wort. (please see attached article below) Perhaps the Conservation Commission should alert the town to this potential threat if it proves to be significant after further investigation of literature on the subject. I read that this threatened native plant is almost always found in wetland environments, but I do not know whether it is sensitive to Clipper’s herbicidal mechanism of

action. I suppose we would need a plant physiologist to know for sure.

Best regards, -Neil