

Town of Mansfield
CONSERVATION COMMISSION
Meeting of 17 February 2016
Conference B, Audrey P. Beck Building
MINUTES

Members present: Aline Booth (Alt.), Quentin Kessel, Scott Lehmann, Michael Soares.

Members absent: Joan Buck (Alt.), Robert Dahn, Neil Facchinetti, Grant Meitzler, John Silander.

Others present: John & Beth Hankins, Lon Hultgren, Ken Feathers & Jim Morrow (Open Space Preservation Committee), Jennifer Kaufman (Wetlands Agent).

1. The meeting was **called to order** at 7:33p by Chair Quentin Kessel. Booth was designated a voting member for this meeting.

2. The **draft minutes** of the 20 January 2016 meeting were approved as written.

3. **Biking in Town Parks.** Mountain biking is now prohibited on trails in Town parks & preserves, save for Schoolhouse Brook Park. John Hankins, who maintains the Nipmuck Trail in Mansfield, would like to see more Town-owned parkland opened to bikes, particularly areas that would enable riders to make extended circuits on connected trails, such as the Wolf Rock area and the Fifty-foot, Coney Rock, & Dorwart complex. In his experience, use helps to maintain trails, and opening additional trails to bikes would increase traffic on them. A policy of generally allowing bikes on town trails would also reduce confusion about where they are or are not permitted. Kaufman added that the Town has no enforcement mechanism for its current policy and might achieve greater compliance by replacing signs prohibiting bikes with signs that make expectations for their use clear (e.g., yield to pedestrians). Lon Hultgren reported that the Town is beginning to work on a Bicycle/Pedestrian Master Plan, which will need to consider and recommend policies for bike use of town trails.

In the free (& nonlinear) discussion that followed, various concerns were voiced and suggestions made:

- Kessel worried about bikes chewing up wet areas. Hultgren noted that all the biking magazines preach against using bikes on soft ground; such good advice, however, is often ignored. John Hankins suggested this be viewed as a maintenance problem, rather than a use problem (e.g., wet areas can be bridged).
- Ken Feathers thought trail infrastructure would need to be upgraded to make bike use sustainable in wet areas, on steep slopes, etc. A survey of trails should be undertaken to determine what work would be needed.
- Kaufman said the Town needs volunteers to monitor and maintain trails. John Hankins was sure that bikers would help with this, if wider use of trails were permitted.
- Kessel wondered about the Town's liability for injuries, if bicycles are allowed on more trails.
- Soares noted that the areas mentioned by John Hankins for wider bike use are not wholly Town-owned. Joshua's Trust may not welcome bikers on its trails at Wolf Rock or Coney Rock, and owners of private land over which the Nipmuck Trail runs may also object. They should be consulted before opening more Town trails to bikes. {The Connecticut Forest and Park Association's 2005 *Connecticut Walk Book East* states (p.xi) that, save where posted for multi-use on DEP property, "use of the Blue-Blazed Hiking Trails by motorized vehicles, bicycles, horses, or other four-footed animals (except leashed dogs) is not permitted without the express authorization of the property owner."}

- Lehmann expressed misgivings about a more liberal policy, noting that, in his experience, it's rare for bikers to yield to pedestrians on trails in Schoolhouse Brook Park, as they are supposed to, and that renegades have constructed their own extensive trails in the Park with jumps, passages through stone walls, etc.

John & Beth Hankins then left the meeting (at 8:35), Hultgren having had to leave somewhat earlier.

4. Draft Zoning Regulations. Kaufman distributed a memo dated 01/05/16 from Planning Director Linda Painter soliciting comments on draft amendments to the zoning regulations; those regulating connections to the new water supply system and storm-water management were attached. The former limit development of rural residential property in the vicinity to what was previously allowed, regardless of whether tapping into the new Connecticut Water Company pipeline would allow more intensive development. Soares & Feathers suggested that such 'overlay zoning' include low-density areas served by existing water mains, areas in which development will not longer be water-limited once the new water flows.

Booth wondered why the Zoning Focus Group has not been consulted in the process of drafting these amendments. Members of this Group – Greg Padick, Ed Pelletier, and Booth herself, among others – know a lot about zoning in Mansfield and could contribute valuable insights and advice. Kessel asked Kaufman to convey to Painter the Commission's suggestion that she reach out to this Group.

5. Four Corners Sewer Project. The Executive Summary for the EIE on the Four Corners Sewer Project was included in the packet for this meeting, but the Commission did not act on it. {The DEEP comment period closes on 03/18/16; any Commission comments would need to be submitted to the Town Council in time for review at its 03/14/16 meeting.} Kaufman distributed a useful map, identifying properties that will be served by the new sewer lines and assessed for their cost. Kessel noted that assessments levied on undeveloped land, of which there is quite a bit in the 4-corners area, could force owners to develop it (or to sell to others who will do so), an unwelcome consequence. {The August 2015 draft EIE, p.47, takes the position that the sewer project will promote clustered development and that the Town can protect other values in the area through zoning and wetlands regulations (a significant portion of the undeveloped land there is wetlands).}

6. Monitoring Conservation Easements. The Commission's plans for monitoring town-held conservation easements are now on hold. The State's Freedom of Information Commission may classify monitoring of an easement by two members of the Commission a "meeting" of the Commission that requires public notice and is open to the public. Kaufman has asked the Town Attorney to look into this.

7. IWA referrals. Consideration of W1561 (Raphaelson, Dog Lane: 2-lot subdivision) has been pushed back. The field trip originally scheduled for 02/10/16 will be in March, presumably before the Commission's meeting on 03/16/16.

8. Project Greenspace. After some discussion, the Commission decided not – at this time – to urge the Town Council to support legislation proposed by Connecticut Audubon that would permit towns to set up local conservation funds, financed by a conveyance fee on the sale of residential property. This initiative does not appear to be well-organized, there is no website where one can get more information about it, and any enabling legislation will probably go nowhere in a short legislative session focused on state budget woes.

9. Adjourned at 9:21p. Next meeting: 7:30p, Wednesday, 16 March 2016.

Scott Lehmann, Secretary, 18 February 2016; approved 16 March 2016.