

Parks and Natural Resources Committee

Monday, August 17, 2020 7:00 PM

[Virtual Meeting <https://mansfieldct.gov/video>]

**Special Meeting**

**Minutes -- DRAFT**

**1. Call to order**

The meeting was called to order at 7:05 PM

**Roll Call**

Attending: Jim Morrow (Chair), Ken Feathers (secretary), Quentin Kessel (Cons. Com. Rep.), Tom Harrington, Sue Harrington

Not present but on committee roster: Michael Soares, Vicky Wetherell, Juliana Barrett (alt.), Miranda Davis (announced as a new alternate member of the committee)

Town Staff Present: Jennifer Kaufman

**2. Opportunity for Public comment**

No members of the public were present.

**3. Approval of Minutes**

1. The Minutes of the February 18, 2020 meeting were approved (moved S.Harrington, seconded T.Harrington)
2. The March 12, 2020 field trip did not have a quorum, and is characterized as notes rather than minutes, with no approval therefore necessary.

**4. New Business**

1. *PZC-initiated Amendments to Mansfield Zoning Regulations*

Town Staff indicated that the committee was provided with these amendments for its information, but they were not explicitly referred for formal comment because the sections to be amended do not have any content directly associated with the committee's specific charge.

Town Staff provided an overview of the objective, which is to encourage multifamily housing units to have a mix of occupants, not be single purpose, and to facilitate aging in place for occupants.

The committee discussion did note that lifestyle changes in use of bicycle, e-bike, and similar alternate transportation modes may suggest that the requirements for parking of these items should be increased from what is proposed.

The committee was reminded that there is a public hearing on these amendments scheduled for Tuesday September 8, 2020, and encouraged to send a representative.

2. *Regional Economic Development Strategy*

Morrow indicated that he responded to the Economic Development Strategy with a comment that called to their attention that they had omitted the EOS VoAg program in their listing of resources.

3. *Proposed Land Swap with Joshua's Trust*

The Town was approached by Joshua's Trust regarding a land swap in the Sawmill Brook / Wolf Rock area. Details may be found in the Agenda, but in summary: Joshua's Trust proposes to swap a small parcel they own that is surrounded by town-owned land of Sawmill Brook Preserve for the town-owned road frontage parcel that provides access to the Wolf Rock preserve to consolidate management with the rest of Wolf Rock Preserve. The objective of this swap is to simplify management of both parcels.

After discussion, the committee unanimously adopted a motion (moved Morrow, seconded S. Harrington):

***The PANR Committee recommends, with the inclusion of a conservation restriction and reversion clause to ensure the parcel on Crane Hill Road is not developed, that the town implement the land swap proposed by Joshua's Trust and summarized in an August 10, 2020 Agenda Item Summary to the Town Council from the Town Manager.***

4. *Fall Parks Events*

The upcoming parks events listed in the fall Parks and Recreation brochure were summarized. Town Staff indicated that, to address COVID-19 health issues, all events require preregistration, are limited in enrollment, and attendees are required to wear masks.

Upcoming events include

Taste of Mansfield

Bats at Moss Sanctuary

Plein Air Painting in the Parks

The Scheduled Walktober Events include

Over in the (Merrow) Meadow, led by Sue and Tom Harrington

50 foot with a view, led by Sue and Tom Harrington

Guided Hike at Simpson-Wood preserve, led by Jim Morrow and Charlotte Pyle

5. *Membership*

Miranda Davis was announced as a new alternate member of the committee. Her introduction will be at a future meeting when she is in attendance.

**5. Continuing business**

1. *Simpson-Wood Preserve Update.*

Town staff reported that a trail map and brochure language are available in draft form, included in the packet. The committee members were encouraged to review the draft and provide comments directly to Town staff.

There was some discussion of the need to photo-document, for preservation/protection, the native American features that are present on the parcel.

2. *Management Plans*

There has been no progress on the management plans since the last meeting.

3. *Dog Park (not listed on agenda)*

The field trip found that there may be issues with placing a dog park at the Bicentennial Pond location that was evaluated. As a result, it appears that the next step is to review all town owned parcels to see how they may meet the expressed criteria needed for a dog park. No timeline for this effort was proposed.

**6. Communications**

1. *Various communications*

Town Staff advised that the Committee's packet would no longer include agendas from other committees, but that they could be found on the Town Agenda Center, and committee members could also individually subscribe to the list serves of other committees of interest to them.

2. *Conservation Easement Restrictions Related to Tree Removal*

Town Staff advised the committee of a time-critical action taken by the PZC and Town Council to modify the process for approval of tree removal in areas of town-held conservation easements. Under the existing process the town council appears to need to approve in writing any tree removal, and, with

recent natural tree mortality, this could result in a significant future burden on the town council. The revised process will delegate to the town tree warden ability to authorize removal of trees deemed hazardous. No ground disturbance (such as stump removal) will be allowed, and cost is the responsibility of the property owner.

The committee discussion generally concurred with this process change. There is a clear rubric for delineating hazard trees, which will limit capricious cutting. The discussion suggested that the leaving of snags, with the hazard top removed, and also the leaving of logs/biomass in the conservation area, may be appropriate for wildlife habitat. It was suggested that doing so might reduce costs of tree removal and therefore be a win-win.

3. *CLEAR Land Cover Change in CT Report*

The committee was informed of a recent report about 30 years of land cover change in Connecticut, available in the agenda, and also online from CLEAR.

4. *Member Updates (not listed on agenda)*

Sue Harrington advised that there was an exciting diversity developing in Merrow Meadow, supporting many types of flowers and insects. She noted that there was similar diversity developing in the town-owned parcel on the corner of Spring Hill Road near the Middle School, and suggested that a loop trail installed there might make this an accessible and exciting study area for Middle School students.

Sue also indicated that she is working on a family activity book for use with town parks and preserves to support the need for more out-of-classroom and out-of-school learning activity during the COVID 19 health situation. She will make a draft available for Town Staff to forward to the committed for input.

**7. Executive session in accordance with CGS section 1200(6)(D)**

There were no issues requiring an executive session, and none was held

**8. Future Meetings**

Due to the need to use the Council chambers to allow broadcast to meet the Governors executive order requirements for public meetings and scheduling conflicts with that resource, increased flexibility will be necessary for future meeting times.

**9. Adjournment**

The meeting was adjourned at 8:00 PM by consensus (moved T.Harrington, seconded Morrow)

Respectfully Submitted  
Ken Feathers, Secretary