



MIDDLEFIELD CONSERVATION COMMISSION

405 Main Street

Middlefield, Connecticut 06455

Meeting Location: Middlefield Community Center

Minutes of the February 28, 2022 Regular Meeting

Call to Order

Chris Hurlbert, Chairman, called this meeting of the Conservation Commission to order on February 28, 2022, at 7:05 p.m. held at the Middlefield Community Center.

Members Present

Commission members present were Chris Hurlbert, Jerry Finch, Robin Heath, Brian McDermott, and Steven Wolk. David Cekala arrived a few minutes later shortly after starting New Business discussion and was present for the remainder of the meeting. Also present was Barb Cabelus to record the minutes.

Public Comment

No members of the general public were present. Barbara Cabelus notified the Conservation Commission she would no longer be taking the minutes of the Commission after this meeting, and she would advise Judi Rand at the Town Hall.

Approval of Agenda

Robin Heath made a motion to approve the Agenda, seconded by Chris Hurlbert, and carried.

Approval of Minutes

As there were no copies present of the minutes of the previous meeting, no motion was made to approve the previous minutes.

Old Business

None.

New Business

Trolley Trail Hiking Path Expansion

Chris Hurlbert stated there is a big push to get the Trolley Trail from Peckham Park hooked up to the open space on Strickland Road and they are talking about a bridge. Jerry Finch asked where this request originated and suggested taking whoever is asking for a walk out there from any time mid-December to right about now and see what a bridge would look like come springtime.

Brian McDermott noted that the bridge would need to be about 100 feet wide from high water mark to high water mark. As it would be going across state property that is what would have to be done, and he did not think it was feasible.

Jerry Finch expressed concern about trash that currently accumulates at the park. He said he has a buddy who weekly crosses the bridge from Route 147 into the park who typically picks up at two trash bags of garbage every week in the park. Jerry expressed concern that opening up yet another area (by connecting the end of the Trolley Trail to the Strickland Road side of the River) would encourage even more trash.

Brian McDermott reiterated a bridge to cross that waterway would have to be very long, at least 100 feet wide, to get from high water mark to high water mark because it is at least 100 feet wide because it is so flat, and how would you get any piece of equipment down there except maybe in August? He also pointed out that the piece you would need to cross is an island, it is soaked because there is the small brook from Lyman's that runs behind it and then the Coginchaug. How are you going to get to that island to sink any poles unless you do it by

hand? Robin Heath noted the project would require the Army Corps of Engineers' approval anyway. Jerry Finch noted you cannot even paddle down this river anymore, to which others agreed, and stated that putting a bridge in there would collect even more debris. It was noted that the largest of the bridges that was on the far end of the Trolley Trail (nearest the River) was only 3-4 feet above the water line and got washed away to about 100 yards up along the Trail.

Steven Wolk noted that in reference to who is pushing for this, he believed it was the Lions Club trying to get it off the ground, and the Park and Recreation director (Hannah Malcolm) who is a Lions Club member is spearheading this inquiry. Jerry Finch suggested sending a letter to invite her to the next Conservation Commission meeting.

Brian McDermott stated such a bridge would be going across onto State property, the funding to even get this project started is likely to be phenomenal because the Army Corps of Engineers would have to be involved. There is no funding for that, and this could be a \$100,000+ project.

Chris Hurlbert noted it would need to be at the high water mark plus (at the 100-year high water mark), so the bridge might need to be even longer than the roughly estimated 100 feet. Members discussed how the trail floods out about 3 or 4 times per year. To get that trail dry you might have to come back a half mile.

Steven Wolk asked what is the rate of usage if you did build it (a bridge connecting both sides of the river)? Brian McDermott noted that access to each side of the river is possible by either walking the Trolley Trail on one side, or if you want to get to the other side you drive to the Strickland Road access on the other side of the river. Members discussed that the small bridges on the Trolley Trail get flooded over during parts of the year and the largest bridge at the far end of the Trail which was washed out would still have to be replaced as well, so the Trolley Trail side up to the river is not accessible year round. A project to connect both sides of the river would likely need to be handicap accessible, so to get handicap access high enough to be over the water would need about a 100-foot ramp.

Chris Hurlbert posed the question, do we want to draft an opinion from the Conservation Committee that this project is not feasible? Jerry Finch was concerned that someone could take the liberty of just putting some poles in the ground and start building. Brian McDermott stated this would have to be approved by the Town and the Conservation Commission would know ahead of time because of who would have to be involved, and was not for emergency access. According to Brian McDermott, Hannah Malcolm indicated the Lions Club was going to reach out to the State for information. Commission members stated the State will is going to say 'high water mark' and may even require we take out the existing bridges.

Robin Heath asked, if we wrote a letter saying we did not think it was a feasible thing to do, where would we send it? According to Brian McDermott, as far as we know, the project was not being started, it was just being researched by an ad hoc committee. So Chris Hurlbert suggested the Conservation Commission should go on record the project is not thought to be feasible. It was suggested the Commission draft a letter and send a copy to Hannah Malcolm to present to the ad hoc committee that had asked about expansion of the Trolley Trail, and more importantly to our acting First Selectman, Robert Yamartino. General discussion indicated that Park and Rec does not own the Trolley Trail, and State grant money at Peckham Park was only for the playground and skateboard park areas. The new field at Peckham Park was paid for with Town money.

Chris Hurlbert asked for an official vote on that the Trolley Trail hiking path expansion/bridge project was not feasible economically and not recommended as it would effectively put another dam across the River. Members discussed that persons with common sense, once they see the detail of what would be required, would agree this project would not happen. It would involve a lot of money, money which might be better used elsewhere. Jerry Finch and others questioned who would be responsible for ongoing maintenance and the associated cost of such a bridge and the cost of replacing it if it got washed out. It is not in the Park and Rec budget or any other Town budget.

Chris Hurlbert said he would keep an ear out for the next Park and Recreation communication and the next time there is a call out for this he would go to the next Park and Rec meeting to express the Conservation Committee's opinion on the matter of expanding the Trolley Trail with a bridge to the open space property on Strickland Road.

Racetrack Hollow Brush Pile near Trolley Trail

Jerry Finch brought attention to the right of way and path from Racetrack Hollow toward the Trolley Trail. He had observed there is a very large (75-yard) pile of brush on Town land that is being accumulated along this path, and it is so large that it makes one think it is someone with a commercial interest dumping brush and garbage there. It was proposed to take a walk through when the weather breaks and revisit this concern at a future date.

New Chairman Position

Chris Hurlbert advised he is stepping down from the Conservation Commission Chairman position due to other obligations including Park and Recreation, but he would continue as a member of the Commission. Chris stated Robin Heath was willing to step up as the new Chairman. Members expressed agreement.

Chris Hurlbert made a motion that Robin Heath become the new Chairman of the Conservation Commission. Brian McDermott seconded the motion; all voted in favor, and the motion was carried.

Other

School Street Open Space Property - Path Mowing

Steven Wolk advised the path to property on School Street needs to be brush hogged before Spring. It is a 50-acre property, and if given another year to grow it will not be possible to get in there to do it. This being a granted property, we have to let in out-of-towners for hunting, and it was out-of-towners who mentioned it needed to be done. It was discussed the Town would need to do this if the individual with a tractor and a brush hog who has mowed it in the past is unable or unwilling to do it this year. The question remained how long it might take the Town to be able to find the time to do so.

Next Meeting

The date for the next meeting was not discussed.

Adjourn

Robin Heath made a motion to adjourn this February 28, 2022, meeting of the Conservation Commission at 7:35 p.m., seconded by Chris Hurlbert, and carried.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Cabelus

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