

**MIDDLEFIELD CONSERVATION COMMISSION**

***405 Main Street***

***Middlefield, Connecticut 06455***

***Meeting Location: Peckham Park Pavilion***

Minutes of the April 26, 2021 Regular Meeting

Call to Order

Chris Hurlbert, Chairman, called this meeting of the Conservation Commission to order at 7:04 p.m. held at the Peckham Park Pavilion.

Chris Hurlbert stated Donna Golub (Town Clerk) advised no voting should be done at this meeting of April 26, 2021; therefore no motions nor votes were taken.

Members Present

Commission members present were Chris Hurlbert, Jerry Finch, David Cekala, Steven Wolk, Thomas Capega, Robin Heath, and Brian McDermott. Also present were guest presenter Jen Huddleston and Barb Cabelus to record the minutes.

Public Comment

Jen Huddleston joined the meeting to discuss projects she is working on and to see if this Commission might be able to join forces on some of these projects.

Removing invasive plants: The **first project** Jen presented was **the removal of invasive plants** which are outcompeting native plants and have no natural controls. Jen explained many invasive plants are or have been imported and are sold as decorative plants at garden centers. The invasive plants destroy the native species which supply food and habitat for creatures and insects. Some of the most invasive plants now in the area which need to be removed are **Garlic Mustard, Asian Bittersweet, Burning Bush, Norway Maple, Japanese Honeysuckle, Japanese Knot Weed, and Lesser Celandine.**

Thomas Capega commented that the property along Route 147 between Miller Rd. and Strickland Rd. also needs clearing to allow access for hunting and fishing. He and his brother had cut some trails last year to provide some access to the river, but it needs more work. He said he had called the DEP to ask if DEP would be stocking between Routes 147 and 68 on the Coginchaug River. He noted the fish stocking program had dwindled considerably over the past 10 years and is expecting answers from DEP for next year's stocking program.

Jen Huddleston commented any amount of people that can help with the removal of invasive plants would be appreciated. It was suggested the Boy Scouts/Girl Scouts, 4-H groups, and Coginchaug high school seniors might be called upon to help, and Conservation Commission members might also be able to assist. Cleanup/removal date(s) need to be determined.

Jen Huddleston will email Chris Hurlbert regarding an invasive plant clean-up day schedule and the Conservation Commission can help spread the word to its members, Park and Recreation, and others.

Reduce solid household waste and promote home composting: The **second project** presented by Jen Huddleston noted how the **Transfer Station** was going to change because the MIRA plant in Hartford that currently accepts Middlefield's solid waste is shutting down around July 2023. Thus the Town may need to transport its solid waste out of state which would increase fees for residents. While Middlefield is doing very well with yard waste composting, she asked **how we could reduce the amount of solid household waste being thrown in the trash and promote home composting.** Brian McDermott suggested a **pay-per-bag program** to reduce the amount of household waste. Jen noted that many other communities are also being faced with these issues. She stated some communities have proposed charging fees to the manufacturers of plastic or bulky products (like plastic packaging or mattresses) if the manufacturers do not take the packaging/item back at the end of its useful life, but noted this may be out of our realm.

Jen Huddleston presented the idea of a **community composting program** with an added bin or trailer at the Transfer Station to dump solid organic household waste. Then a hired company could haul the material to a composting facility. There is a facility in Southington which takes

organic waste (including oil, grease, bones) and does the composting. The Town could buy back finished compost to either give away or sell to residents.

Jen Huddleston mentioned an **alternative idea** similar to what Middletown is currently doing. She stated Middletown **hires Blue Earth Composting** to come twice weekly in summer and once weekly in winter to haul their organic solid waste bin to Southington, where the bin is emptied and washed out. That is a service that Middletown pays for annually.

Jen also suggested residents would need a **small composting canister** for their home kitchens to dump at the composting bin at the Transfer Station. The sale of the composting cans could raise money and be promoted to get every resident to have one and get on board with composting organic household waste

The third idea for organic solid household waste is for the **Town to take care of its own compost or find a local individual interested in a business/paid opportunity** to take care of the Town's composting including hauling, aerating, etc. According to Jen, a hauler she had spoken with told her the cost is about \$7,000 per year for just the hauling charges, not including any additional services. She suggested the Town could buy back the finished compost to make it available for residents' use either for a fee or to give away to residents.

Tool sharing program: A third project idea Jen Huddleston presented as a waste stream removal/community program—a tool sharing program--a like a **“Library” of donated tools, equipment or household items** that residents could “check out” from a warehouse or building when they needed a tool or item, and return it within a specified/scheduled amount of time, having the “Library” open a couple of times per week. Liability was discussed as an issue of concern. It was noted that a waiver signed by users of the service might eliminate this issue. It would need to be decided what types of items could be offered safely. Jen explained other communities are doing this successfully and could be a source of information on ways to implement such a program. Jen had no particular building in mind yet, and no viable ideas for a location to warehouse the items were immediately forthcoming. She was optimistic item donations from the community would be plentiful.

#### Approval of Agenda

No motion nor vote was taken to approve the Agenda, as noted above.

#### Approval of Minutes

No motion nor vote was taken to approve the Minutes of the previous meeting held on September 28, 2020.

## New Business

### Discussion on ideas for new projects

Chris Hurlbert introduced ideas for new projects to help raise public awareness of the Conservation Commission and what it does and to promote community involvement.

Chris Hurlbert suggested a **Foraging Demonstration or Walk**. He asked Jen Huddleston if she knew anyone who might lead such an event, which she did. Scheduling date(s) for a foraging event would depend on the season and what was available to forage, as well as the availability of Jen's contact. Chris Hurlbert will contact Jen to discuss further.

A catch-and-release **Fishing Derby** for the local kids, perhaps in conjunction with Park and Recreation, was discussed. Suggestions for a pond location were Powder Ridge, the skating rink on Strickland Rd., or on one of the golf courses. (It was determined the golf course would not be an option). Stocking the pond was also discussed.

Chris Hurlbert noted a **cleanup date along the Coginchaug River** from Cider Mill Rd. to Miller Rd. needed to be determined. Thomas Capega asked if there was any Town money to help with this and remove some of the trees across the river; Brian McDermott stated no Town money was available, but suggested a separate new project commission be created for which some money might then be allocated. Jerry Finch said the area was so overgrown perhaps some logging could be done and make some money from the project. Jerry also suggested getting a group of people together to remove the trees blocking the river and which are changing its course, or talking to someone about getting it logged out. It was thought the best time of year to do a cleanup along the river is late March/early April after the Spring flood waters.

Chris Hurlbert brought up having a **cleanup day of the roads** to help involve the community. Liability issues were discussed, no date was determined.

**Building and distributing duck boxes, bird houses, and bat houses** - Chris Hurlbert suggested thought these types of programs could get residents involved. Jerry Finch has been putting out **duck boxes**. The Lions Club is working on **bat houses**. David Cekala discussed how **bee keeping** could be a beneficial program and is relatively low cost to get started.

Review Properties: Thomas Capega stated the open land off Route 147 has not yet been voted on to allow hunting between Route 147 and Miller Rd., a total of about 17 acres. The State owns five acres in that area that allow bow hunting on the West side of the river. Chris Hurlbert suggested this could be of interest to Ducks Unlimited for a land grant to preserve it as open space, hunting. He proposed the Conservation Commission should get a copy of an aerial map of this area and vote at the next meeting on restrictions of what the Commission would allow on the property. Thomas Carpega had a copy of the map present which some members reviewed.

Next Meeting: Date of the next meeting was not discussed.

### Adjourn

Chairman Chris Hurlbert adjourned this April 26, 2021, meeting of the Conservation Commission at 8:00 p.m. As noted above, no motion was made, nor vote taken.

Respectfully submitted,

Barbara Cabelus