

TOWN OF DURHAM
Conservation Commission
Regular Meeting Minutes
Tuesday, January 13, 2015
7:00 at the Durham Public Library

Members present: Carl Dahlman (7:05), Jon Herzig, Rick Huntley, Bill LaFlamme, Lucy Meigs (7:05), Bob Melvin, Josh Miller, and Bob Thody

Members excused: Bill Ward

Call to Order/Roll Call: Rick Huntley called the meeting to order at 7:00 PM.

Amendments to Agenda/Approval of Agenda: Bill LaFlamme, seconded by Bob Melvin to approve the January agenda as distributed, made a motion. Motion passed with abstention by Carl Dahlman.

Approval of December regular meeting minutes: Bill LaFlamme, seconded by Josh Miller to approve the December 9, 2014 regular meeting minutes as distributed, made a motion. Motion passed with abstention by Carl Dahlman.

Payment of Bills: Bob Melvin, seconded by Jon Herzig to approve payment of \$30 to Pam Huntley for secretarial services and \$1,400 to Sue White for 7 mowings of the Whites Farm property, made a motion. Motion passed with abstentions by Carl Dahlman and Rick Huntley.

Public Session: none

Request for use of Whites Farm – CATO Rocket Club, Richard Comshaw: The club is requesting continued use of Whites Farm for the third Saturday of each month. They have a few new members from Durham. They get members of the public attending launches. They will be working with Durham Cub Scouts to sponsor their rocket program. They continue to police the area for trash. There has been concern about the sound volume and he is willing to meet with the individuals to address their concerns. Rick asked how much of the announcing was critical to the safety of the launch. The safety code requires an audible countdown. Paul Gilmartin and John Corona were present to express their concerns. Paul Gilmartin of 10 John's Way, reported that about a year ago he brought a small rocket to town hall and that there is a play-by-play description about what is going on down there. He has to turn up his TV volume to hear over the announcements. This summer, a State Trooper and a rocket owner appeared in his driveway. He was told by the Trooper if he didn't return the rocket that he would get arrested. He asked the Trooper to have the rocket launch announcers turn down the speaker volume. The third incident had a small rocket with parachute wrapped around his vent pipe on the roof. He has several parachutes in the trees in his front yard. The speaker volume was never turned down. He doesn't think that just because he is a neighbor to open space that he should be treated differently. Discussion ensued. John Corona of 17 John's Way, asked why a loud speaker was needed. Richard Comshaw responded that the safety code requires a countdown so that everyone in the area is aware that a launch is about to occur. He is willing to let the club know that they can only announce the countdown. The speaker can be oriented to minimize the sound. John Corona stated that they have not had any success with getting the loud speaker turned down. Over the years they have had many rockets in their yards and on their roofs. People routinely trespass on their property to retrieve rockets. Someone put up a ladder in Mr. Gilmartin's yard to take a rocket down. Mr. Corona has never once been asked for permission to come onto his property to collect anything. One rocket that landed in the common driveway was picked up by Mr. Corona. When confronted by a State Trooper to return the rocket, Mr. Corona responded that he was holding onto it until Monday and turning into Town Hall. The

Trooper proceeded to inform Mr. Corona that he would be arrested for larceny if he did that. He stated that the loud speaker is the biggest issue. However the noise (a loud rush of air) of the launch of some of the rockets is startling. He also stated that if the activity is dangerous, then it should not be permitted. Mr. Comshaw stated that it is the policy of the club that if a rocket lands off the property that the rocket owner is supposed to talk with the club member before they leave the property. The club has reached out to several property owners and asked what the club should do about retrieving rockets on their property. The safety code states that you are to keep the rocket in the area that you are flying. If a person routinely not complying, then they are asked to not come back. Bill LaFlamme stated that in the past there was an issue with the loud speaker and it had to be set facing away from the road. There was also a limit on the size of the rockets. Discussion ensued about using decibel levels to monitor the sound and setting limits. Bill didn't know if there has been a drift away that limit. The club still has a restriction on some of the rockets and the time of day they can launch. Mr. Corona indicated that the acoustics on their properties allows for hearing voices of people talking on Whites Farm. Bob Melvin asked if the rockets were labeled with name and phone number of the owner. That has not been a requirement. Also what is the liability if a rocket goes off property and damages something on an adjacent owner's property? The club carries \$2 million in liability. The club also recommends individual flyers carry an umbrella policy. Carl Dahlman asked how many launches there were on any given day. Mr. Comshaw responded between 50-80 launches. Rick Huntley stated that there is an area further west and north of the dirt road which would be more suitable. This area is now drier since the Allyn Brook restoration. Bill LaFlamme and Bob Thody stated that we can't keep having problems for the neighbors. Bob Melvin, seconded by Carl Dahlman to approve CATO rocket club's use of Whites Farm for two launch events and to move the launch area to the far west end of the field north of the cul-de-sac, reduce the loud speaker to countdowns, rockets must have name and phone number of the owner, keep with the rocket size restriction and provide appropriate proof of insurance and indemnification., made a motion. The changes will be evaluated at the March 10th meeting. Motion passed unanimously.

Public Works Open Space Project Update – FY 15/16 Capital Budget Revisions – Kurt Bober: not present.

Property Steward Reports/Parcel Status Updates

- Whites Farm – Jack Stahl: no report.
- Pent Road – Melynda Naples: no report.
- Howd Road – Josh Miller: Rick Huntley spoke with Dave Stygar at DEEP about the money from the Howd Road lease. The lease money is not required to be used exclusively at Howd Road. The boundary signs still need to be posted. The area needs to be assessed for the possibility of allowing bow hunting for deer.
- Pisgah Mountain and Cream Pot Valley – Bill LaFlamme & Rick Huntley: Rick Huntley reported that David Brown of the Middlesex Land Trust is still interested in continued coordination for trails, mapping, and maintenance. The Middlesex Land Trust may be interested in pursuing acquisition of the 2 private parcels that are adjacent to the Cream Pot Valley open space. Rick is still working on a trail through this area. There are a couple of hiking clubs that will be hiking this area over the next month or so. Lucy Meigs reported there is a deer carcass dumped down the old road toward the stream. Lucy reported that people were skating on Whitney Pond. Signs need to be posted. Any member available can meet January 25th at 9 AM on Cream Pot Road. Jon will send out a reminder.
- Curtis Woodlands – Mark Smolley & Charles Ingold: Charles reported 4-WD vehicle activity on the field. It entered through the gap in the west side between the stone wall and the fence. Another piece of fence should be installed across the gap. All signage is still up. He will continue to remove the invasive plant species from the 3-acre section he has been working on. There is not much oriental bittersweet in the 3-acre section. The commission thanked Charles for all the work he has done so far on the invasive species.
- Portion of Wimler Property with Public Access – Dick Porter: no issues to report.
- Sawmill Road – Ray Koba: Ray Koba will try to attend the next meeting. Laura Francis was contacted by Joel Camassar who was interested in being a steward. Rick suggested dedicating this property in memory of Carl Otte. This would be planned for the spring.

Current and New Business

Status/review of proposed open-space regulations revisions: no update.

Status of Review of Plan of Conservation and Development: no update.

Index of all open areas as mandated by the Connecticut General Statutes, Section 7-131a (b): Rick talked with Dan Beret the GIS person at the River COG about the dark green on the open space maps that are labeled as easements. These areas are both easements and fee for conservation. Dan also stated that they are in the process of finishing up the property assessors map project. Once this project is completed we should have a better assessor's map capability online.

Budget Request for 2015/2016 Fiscal Year: The budget request has been submitted. No funds were requested for the Consultant or the Printing & Stationary line items. The rest of the line items remained the same.

Sign for Memorial Tree Grove: Rick Huntley contacted Torrance Downes with the River COG to do design work for the sign. It would be a large panel design with a photograph of the area and an insert with an outline of the trees. There would be a legend with the outline indicating the species and who the tree was for.

Status of ERT Requests: The request for a Curtis Woodlands comprehensive management plan has been signed and will be mailed. There was discussion as to whether or not the field is large enough to support grassland bird habitat. That is one of the considerations in the management plan request.

Website Content for Conservation Commission: Plans include basic open space maps, better description of the hunting lottery and maps that have recreational value.

Report of Co-Chairmen:

- The dead tree at the end of the cul-de-sac on Whites Farm needs to be removed. Public Works indicated that they would do this. Bob Melvin, seconded by many, to authorize the chairman to contact Public Works to remove the dead oak in the cul-de-sac on Whites Farm and if it is not accomplished within 30 days then the tree warden will be contacted to contract the removal of the tree, made a motion. Motion passed unanimously.
- The Conservation Commission received a \$300 donation toward open space from Durham Manufacturing. In speaking with Maryjane Malavasi, they have been historically making the donation and it has been put into the reserve account. Rick has asked Maryjane to put it into the Friends of Conservation account so that it is more available. He also found out that money was donated in memory of Carl Otte. It was called the Carl Otte Natural Resources account in his obituary back in 1996. There was \$1,350 in the account and a group contacted the family so a large portion was used to purchase the large evergreen that is on the town green. Rick has asked that a member of the Conservation Commission be part of the committee that decides how the funds would be spent. There is around \$300 in the account now.
- Two parcels of land have been donated to the town. The parcels are located between Park Place and Route 77. The Selectman's Office would like the Agriculture Commission and the Conservation Commission to coordinate management of the parcels. The parcels border the Coginchaug River.
- There are two conferences coming up in March for those interested in attending. The Connecticut Conference on Natural Resources is Monday, March 16, 2015 at the University of Connecticut. The Connecticut Land Conservation Council Conference is March 21, 2015 at Wesleyan University.

Jon Herzig commented that asking the Boy Scouts to help remove invasive plants from Curtis Woodlands. Charles indicated that removing bittersweet vines would be easy. This would be a good community service project.

Adjournment: The meeting adjourned at 8:45 PM.

Respectfully submitted,

Pam Huntley
Recording Secretary