



TOWN OF THOMPSON Conservation Commission

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CONSERVATION COMMISSION

Minutes: Tuesday February 20th, 2024 - 7 PM

2nd Floor Conference Room of the THOMPSON TOWN HALL and via Zoom

1. Call to Order

The meeting was called to order at 7:00 PM by Chairman Judy Rondeau.

Members present: Norma O'Leary, Dave Clark, Pat Cheever, Judy Rondeau, Carol Smith, Susan Wheeler. Staff Present: Dan Malo (Agent), Gloria Harvey (Recording Secretary). Absent, Pete Cummins.

2. Review of Minutes - December 18th, 2023 – Special Meeting

Dave Clark made a motion to accept the Minutes of December 18, 2023 Special Meeting. Norma O'Leary seconded the motion. The motion carried unanimously.

3. Financial Matters - Discussion of FY25 Budget

The Conservation Commission discussed the FY25 proposed budget, relating to the combined Conservation & Wetlands Agent position, the proposed Land Use Clerk, reorganization of the Land Use Office space, and the Eastern Connecticut Conservation District budget item:

Three discussions regarding which account hosts the salary line item:

- A) In one account, under Land Use Department
- B) In one account, under Wetlands
- C) Split between Conservation & Wetlands

The CC felt that moving the account into the Land Use Department was premature, until the reorganization of the space was studied and implemented. The CC was concerned that regulatory responsibilities of Wetlands would drown out Conservation needs, as has happened in the past and that having a share of the salary line would help to ensure they receive attention.

A salary split between both commission budgets, weighted evenly, was supported.

The CC discussed the job description referencing 35 hours:

- A) Split, as before, 20 hours to Conservation & 15 hours to Wetlands
- B) Split evenly, 17.5 to each commission.

The CC recognized the importance and need for more hours to support the regulatory functions of the Wetlands Commission and understood that those hours needed to come from somewhere. **An even split was supported.**

Shared Clerk for Land Use:

While not a budget item for the CC, the Commission felt that a shared, part-time Land Use Clerk would be an integral part of Town operations, to help organize the permit and enforcement workflows, improve customer service, and allow for the Zoning Officer and Wetlands Agent to focus on technical aspects of their work. **They supported creation of this position.**

Reconfiguration of the Land Use Office Space:

The CC felt strongly that the Town's Land Use roles should be housed in the same office/area of the building to improve efficiency and communication. **They supported the study of reorganization of the physical space used for Land Use.**

Eastern CT Conservation District, the CC discussed options:

- A) Acceptance of the proposed move of \$1000 ECCD line to Conservation
- B) \$1000 ECCD line split between both commissions
- C) \$1000 ECCD remaining in Wetlands Commission Budget

The CC discussed the merits of Town support of ECCD. Speaking to her previous experience in the Town's Wetlands Agent role and as a former employee of ECCD, CC Chair Judy Rondeau felt, as did other members, that the relationship with the ECCD was traditionally more involved with the Wetlands Commission, the most complex of their services being site plan review of complicated town projects. The services ECCD offers can benefit all commissions, departments, and residents. The need for their guidance will come into play as the product of updated zoning regulations are realized. Ultimately, it would make sense for this budget item to be relocated to a Department line, though that is better off as a future discussion. **Presently, to resolve this budget question, the CC recommends the line remain within the Wetlands budget.**

Dan will update both Commissions FY25 budget worksheets reflecting the CC comments and will present them to the BOS/BOF at 6:00 PM on 2/22/24. All Commission members are invited to attend this meeting. The CC proposed a joint Special Meeting of the Conservation & Wetlands Commissions with the administration to discuss their needs and expectations, and to hear the concerns of the Wetlands Commission regarding the combined position which they believe that a discussion like this makes sense to establish expectations for the shared Agent.

Carol Smith read the Conservation budget into the record: The Commission budget from July 1, 2023 to January 25, 2024 has an available balance of \$12,372.28 and has expended 69.0% of the budget.

Chairman Judy Rondeau asked for a motion to insert election of officers as a line item in the agenda. Norma O’Leary made a motion to add election of officers to the agenda as Item 4 with the remainder of the items on the agenda following numerically. Dave Clark seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

4. Election of Officers

Discussion on the election of officers took place and it was the consensus of all present to keep the current slate of officers.

Dave Clark made a motion to keep the current slate of officers. Sue Wheeler seconded the motion. The motion was unanimously approved.

5. Correspondence

- Yale-Myers Forest presenting maple workshop, Saturday 2/24/2024 in Eastford, CT
- CT Land Conservation Council 2024 State Conservation Policy and Funding Priorities
- Wildlife Highlights February 2024
- Free webinars for Basic Training for Land Use Commissioners
- Hiking Archaeological Ruins in Southern New England presented by Friends of the Office of State Archaeology, April 14, 2024, Farmington High School.
- Email - Lights out Connecticut developed a draft for dark sky exterior lighting zoning regulations for comments and suggestions. Release for final version is April 1, 2024.
- Request for involvement of Audubon members and supporters to get involved on key issues in 2024 that will protect Connecticut’s bird and other wildlife at the 2024 session at the Capitol in Hartford, CT.
- Connecticut Audubon Society Legislative Goals and Newsletter
- List of Cemeteries
- List of Grants to seek

6. Agent Report

- Dan reported that things have slowed in the winter and he has been dealing with administrative work and the budget. He suggested Commission members keep an eye on what is going on for Conservation, showing the Commission is actively participating in some legislative issues.
- He is building a spreadsheet tracking cemeteries, conservation easements, grants to seek and conservation topics.

7. Old Business

a. Discussion – Commission Bylaws

The Commissioners discussed the Bylaws and made the following amendments to the Bylaws:

- Article 3 – Mission - add language to enhance the CC mission by adding "conducting educational outreach to citizens and raising awareness of natural resources.
- Art 7 - Section 5 - add recording before the word secretary
- Article 8 section 1 – add if January meeting doesn't happen it should be moved to next regular scheduled meeting.
- Article 10 – Hearings – The Commissioners stated with the advent of Zoom recordings, asked what's a legally required resource for recording meetings. It was agreed to update the language to just "evidence shall be recorded." Dan will research and update bylaws and redline the changes.
- Article 11 – Questioned if the word "legal" means to put in a newspaper. Concern was raised about the future existence of newspapers and how legal notices will continue to be published. Dan commented that this is a statewide concern and the state is working on modernizing public noticing notices.

7. New Business - None

8. Citizens' Comments - None

9. Members' Forum

- Norma O'Leary stated she hoped that the discussion by the Commissioners this evening would be received by the Administration in such a way that they will understand what the Commission's needs are.

10. Announcements

a. Resignation of Conservation & Wetlands Agent, effective 3/1/24.

Dan Malo, Conservation Agent, announced he accepted a full-time position with the Town of Woodstock, CT., which will require a different set of roles. He said his departure is bittersweet in leaving the town of Thompson and was grateful for an opportunity to serve the town. The effective date of his departure is March 1, 2024. The Commissioners thanked him for his years of service and for all he has done for the Commission. Dan explained that the Town of Woodstock is offering him a full time 32 hour a week position with growth opportunities, paid training and certification, a secretary and a salary more than he's dreamed.

Dan also stated that the land use offices should be together and when they are in different parts of the building someone is always left out of the loop. He further stated that the BOS and HR recognize a lot of inefficiencies of offices all over the town hall. He proposed moving the IWC office into the Emergency Management Room.

b. The next scheduled meeting is Monday March 18th, 2024 - 7 PM.

Dan will try to organize a joint Special Meeting between the IWC and CC so both Commissions can understand the respective workflows and job requirements.

11. Adjournment

With no further business to discuss, the Chairman adjourned the meeting at 8:30 PM.

There was no ZOOM recording due to technical issues in the ZOOM platform.

Disclaimer: These minutes have not yet been approved by the Inland Wetlands Commission. Please refer to the next meeting's minutes for approval of, and/or amendments to these minutes.

Respectfully submitted,
Gloria Harvey, Recording Secretary