



TOWN OF ESSEX
Conservation Commission

29 West Avenue • Essex, Connecticut 06426
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Executive Board

*Kathleen Tucker, Chairman
Jim O'Brien, Vice Chair*

Regular Members

*Richard Helmecki
Elizabeth Stulga
Tom Soboleski*

Regular Member

2 Vacancies

Alternate Member

2 Vacancies

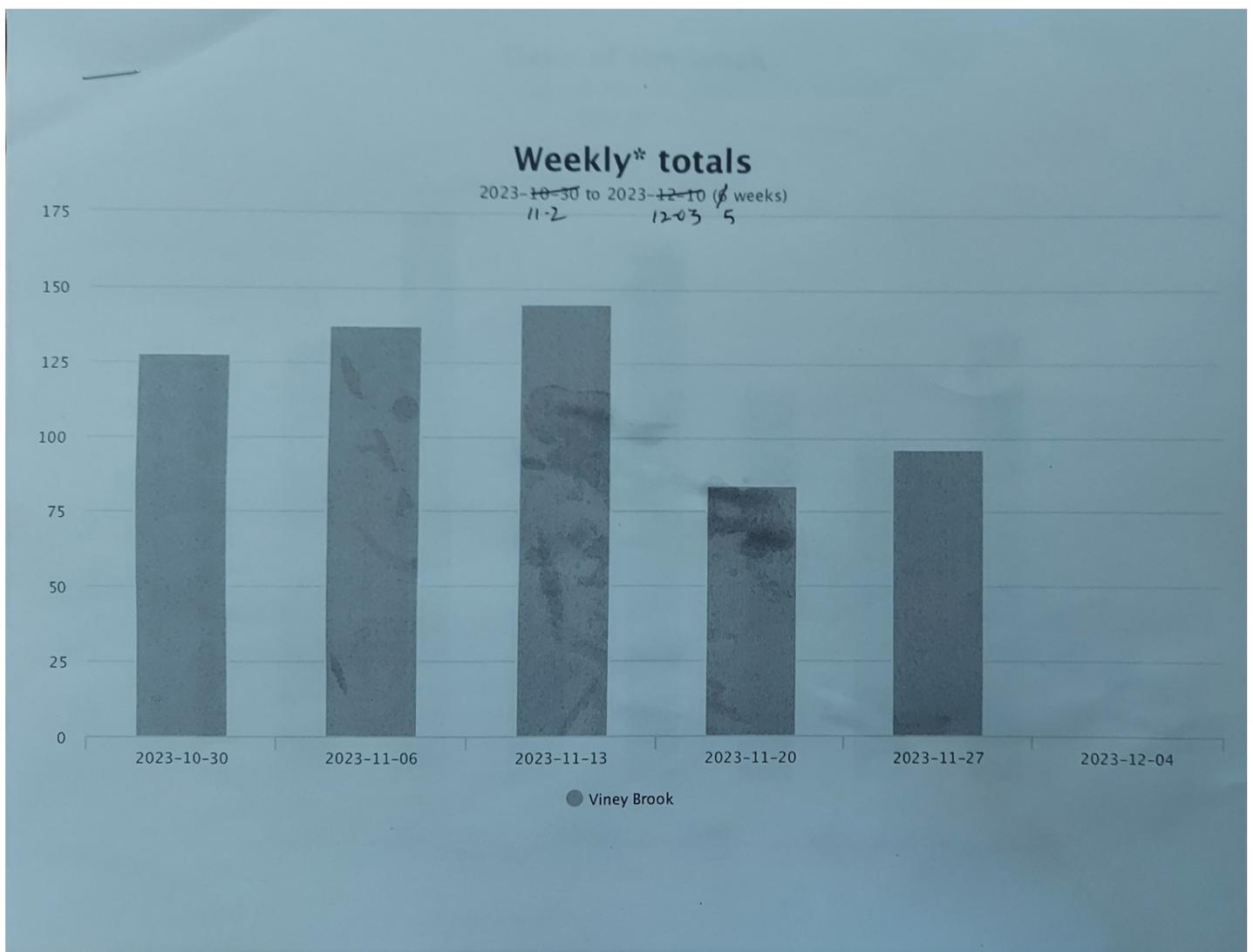
Minutes Meeting held on December 14, 2023, Town Hall Kitchen, 7:00 pm

1. Call to Order and Roll Call: K. Tucker called the meeting to order at 7:00pm. In attendance: R. Helmecki, E. Stulga, T. Soboleski, K. Tucker. Absent/Excused: J. O'Brien.
2. Public Comments: No public comments.
3. Review and Approve November 9, 2023 Meeting Minutes: With a motion by T. Soboleski and a 2nd by R. Helmecki, the minutes were approved.
4. Old Business to include trail reports and management issues in town preserves:
 - A. Bushy Hill Preserve: R. Helmecki reported that he, Myron Stacks, and Terry Stewart weed whacked undergrowth briars to widen the Blue and Ted trails for emergency vehicles to pass through. Several step-over trees and two leaner trees still need monitoring. The Wolf Tree is decaying and some of its branches are dead. Richard will contact a licensed tree arborist for an assessment of the Wolf Tree's condition. Helmecki also trimmed invasive vegetation around the pond.
 - B. Canfield Meadow Woods: T. Soboleski reported that he walked Canfield today and from the observation platform witnessed a spectacularly clear view of the Baldwin Bridge. ELT stewards are clearing fallen trees, including a tree on the Orange Trail.
 - C. Viney Hill Brook Preserve to Include:
 1. Eversource Tower Replacements abutting town's property at VHBP: K. Tucker reported that Eversource is replacing the high voltage line towers. Project should take 5 months. Workers are laying new foundations with concrete. Construction and external lighting continue after sunset, a disruption to wildlife in the preserve.
 2. Discuss Inland/Wetlands Application: Remediation to Broadwalk Trail: K. Tucker talked with town's Inland/Wetlands Officer regarding a way to make Broadwalk easier to hike when upland water drains onto or water seeps and pools on this impermeable main artery access route. E. Stulga said we should assess: 1. Quantity of crushed stone needed and cost for this project? 2. How will crushed stone impact the area? T. Soboleski said that currently the standing water on the trail, even when navigated across the bog bridges, comes up to one's heels. K. Tucker and T. Soboleski said that the area from the phragmite patch to the Eagle Scout Bridge should be measured and areas of pooled water and depth recorded.

Discussion took place about dog waste on the trails, particularly the Blue Trail from the passive parking area to Broadwalk. "Pick-up Pet Waste" signs will be ordered and installed.

D. Other: Discussion centered on asking Howard tree service to schedule a time for take down of the hazardous hemlock by the end of January.

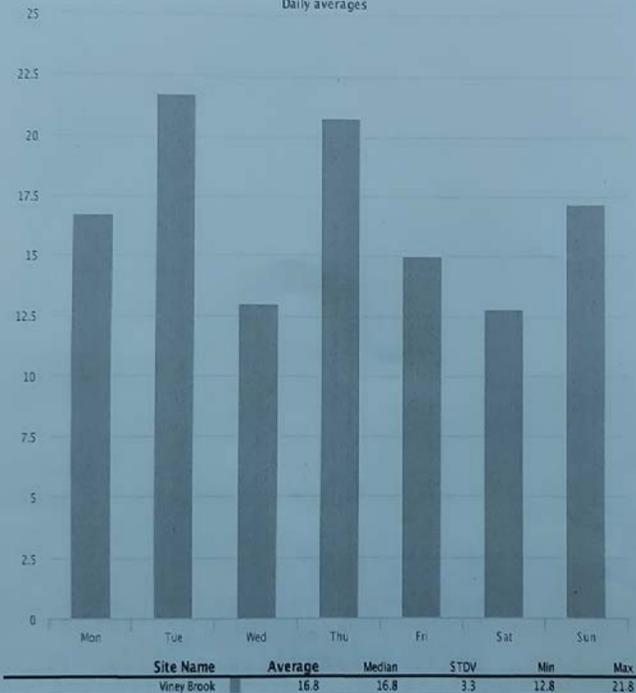
T. Soboleski presented data on the ELT digital counter placed in VHBP for 5 weeks the month of November, 2023. (See graphs below.) Approximately 17 people enter VHBP thru the passive parking area entrance per day. Two other entrance points in the passive portion of the preserve, Forest Glade and Upland Trail, were not monitored.



Days of the week

2023-11-01 to 2023-12-05

Daily averages

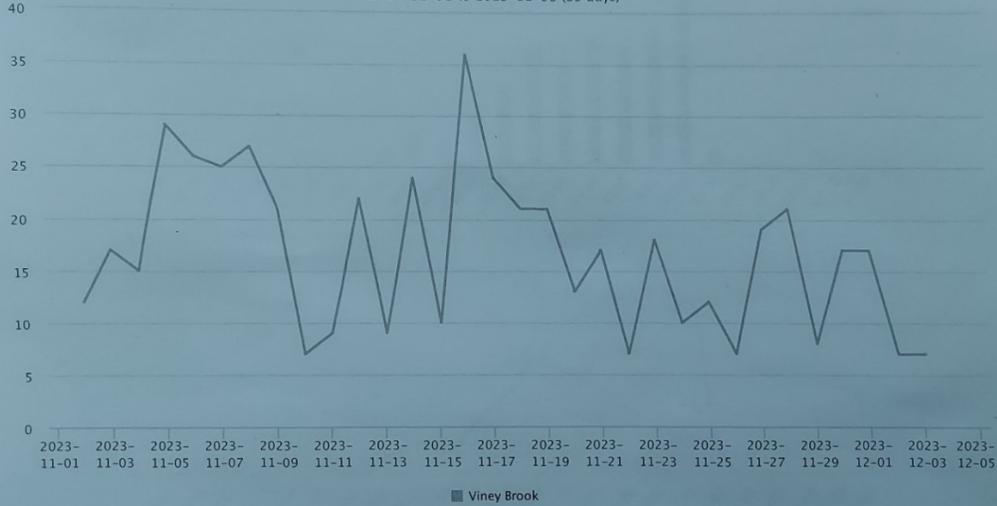


Daily

Day	Viney Brook			
2023-11-01				
2023-11-02	12			
2023-11-03	17			
2023-11-04	15			
2023-11-05	29			
2023-11-06	26			
2023-11-07	25			
2023-11-08	27			
2023-11-09	21			
2023-11-10	7			
2023-11-11	9			
2023-11-12	22			
2023-11-13	9			
2023-11-14	24			
2023-11-15	10			
2023-11-16	36			
2023-11-17	24			
2023-11-18	21			
2023-11-19	21			
2023-11-20	13			
2023-11-21	17			
2023-11-22	7			
2023-11-23	18			
2023-11-24	10			
2023-11-25	12			
2023-11-26	7			
2023-11-27	19			
2023-11-28	21			
2023-11-29	8			
2023-11-30	17			
2023-12-01	17			
2023-12-02	7			
2023-12-03	7			
2023-12-04				
2023-12-05				

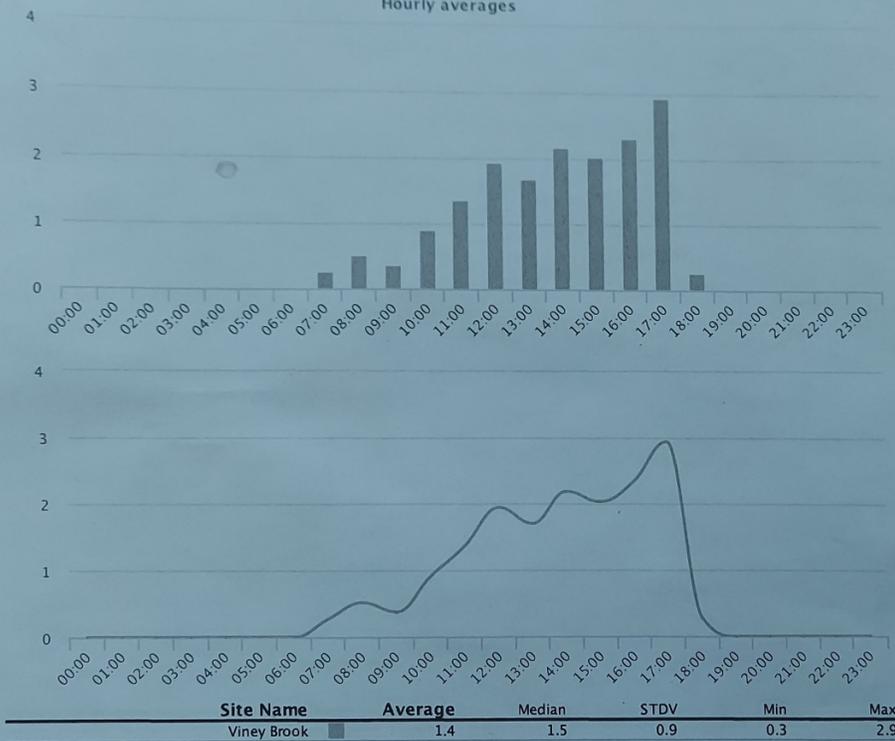
Daily totals

2023-11-01 to 2023-12-05 (35 days)



Hours of the day

2023-11-01 to 2023-12-05
Hourly averages



Site Name	Average	Median	STDV	Min	Max
Viney Brook	1.4	1.5	0.9	0.3	2.9

Soboleski also reported that he did some maintenance work in VHBP using ELT's battery-operated tool.

Frank Hall wrote the following, on December 12th:

Walked this afternoon. Replaced 3 trail maps at the Kiosk. Usually keep at least 10 maps there. All trails walked (Broadwalk, Turtle Nesting Area, Quarry Pond, Upland Woods and Forest Glade) were passable but wet in the areas which do not drain after heavy rains. Wollock's Pond Loop was not included. The pond levelers in Quarry Pond and abutting the ROW road were operational with a high volume of water passing through. Three tree trunks (6-9" diam) were down on Forest Glade Trail near the vernal pond and need clearing.

T. Soboleski followed up on F. Hall's report as follows: The trees that Frank identified above are now cleared. Plus, one old tree on White Upland trail and one additional one on Forest Glade (purple).

6. New Business:

A. Approve ECC Annual Calendar January 2024-January 2025: With a motion by T. Soboleski and a 2nd by R. Helmecki, the calendar was approved.

K. Tucker will formally write Howard tree service to schedule a time to remove the hazardous hemlock BHP.

B. Discuss ECC Goals 2025: Construct new bridges, remediation of Broadwalk, VHBP.

C. Other: K. Tucker said that F. Hall resigned his ECC appointment on November 10, due to personal family reasons; Frank's resignation was accepted by the First Selectman. (Currently there are 2 Regular and 2 Alternate Member vacancies on the Commission.) Kay noted that F. Hall served the commission for 9 years, which included scheduled public beaver viewing walks, and thanked him for his dedicated service. For the time being, Frank expects to continue to replace the kiosk trail maps and report on conditions in VHBP as a volunteer only.

7. Financial Report YTD and Proposed Expenditures: K. Tucker said that the goal is to build 3 new pedestrian bridges and to construct bog bridges, as needed. Additional lumber will be purchased for these projects. FY 2023-24 budget is \$12,125; the ECC Budget for 2024 is expected to remain the same. Tucker will work with Ryan Welch, EDPW, on hours of maintenance needed to keep trails open and invasives cleared in FY2024-25.

8. Other: Elect 2024 Officers in January. Schedule ECC winter work party maintenance.

Noted: Kathy Connelly to offer a Solstice Walk on December 21, from 2:30-4:30pm, in the Old Saybrook side of The Preserve. T. Soboleski shared that ELT would like to offer a snow walk in Canfield Meadow Woods on January 20, 2024. Details to follow.

9. Adjournment: With a motion by R. Helmecki, and a 2nd by T. Soboleski, the meeting was adjourned at 8:35pm. Next Scheduled Meeting January 11, 2024, 7:00 pm

Respectfully submitted, Susan K. McCann, ECC Clerk