



TOWN OF ESSEX
Conservation Commission

29 West Avenue • Essex, Connecticut 06426
Telephone (860) 767-4340 • FAX (860) 767-8509

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 of the ECC Meeting held on **Thursday, January 11, 2024**, Town Hall, 7:00 pm

The meeting was held in the Town Hall auditorium rather than the kitchen.

1. Call to Order and Roll Call: K. Tucker called the meeting to order at 7:00pm. In attendance: R. Helmecki, J. O'Brien, T. Soboleski, E. Stulga, K. Tucker.
2. Election of 2024 Officers: ECC Chairman – With a nomination by R. Helmecki, and a 2nd by T. Soboleski, Kay Tucker was reelected Chair. ECC Vice Chairman– With a nomination by R. Helmecki and a 2nd by T. Soboleski, Jim O'Brien was reelected unanimously as ECC Vice-Chair. Two regular and two alternate vacancies remain on the commission.
3. Public Comments: Two members of the public attended the meeting: Robert Cone and Cameron Evangelisti (son-in-law of Cone). Cone and Evangelisti attended the ECC meeting to have a preliminary discussion about a discrepancy on the Essex Town map representing land belonging to the Cone and Evangelisti family at 10 Foster Lane, Lots 3 & 4, Ivoryton, CT.

With a motion by T. Soboleski, and a 2nd by J. O'Brien, the ECC unanimously approved hearing the preliminary discussion by Cone and Evangelisti prior to the approval of the Dec 14, 2023 meeting minutes and the remainder of the Agenda.

Summary of the discussion: Evangelisti reported that the Essex Zoning and Planning Commission suggested that he confer with the ECC over the issue of a Conservation Easement on his property. At issue, there are two maps in question. The 1st, earlier 1999 map, shows property lines and conservation easements; the 2nd map was adopted by the Town but fails to show the conservation easements and only shows Open Space. This 2nd map is available to the public on the Town of Essex' website. The problems that Evangelisti reported with the discrepancy in the 2nd publicly available map is that 1. People are trespassing on his property thinking it is open space and available to the public; 2. He would like to relocate and reinstall a septic system but cannot do so with the 2nd map's property outlines; 3. He would like to install a shed to house non-commercial landscaping and similar equipment.

Evangelisti said that Zoning and Planning Commission Attorney Larry Shipman agreed that the 2nd map (featured on the Town website) mistakenly marked the Open Space on the Cone-Evangelisti property, and

that the conservation easement designation is not shown. There may have been a clerical error in this demarcation. K. Tucker said that she viewed the January 2, 2024, video presentation and discussion of this conservation easement issue held by the Essex Zoning and Planning Commission. After questions from the ECC, Tucker suggested that the discussion be tabled until the next meeting on February 8, at which time, Carey Duques, Essex Department of Land Use – Planning & Zoning and Inland Wetlands will give a presentation on this issue. In the meantime, Tucker asked if commissioners could walk the property with Evangelisti’s permission.

4. Review and Approve December 14, 2023 Meeting Minutes: One correction to the minutes: Page 1, Old Business: Should read Blue and **Red** Trail. With a motion by R. Helmecki, and a 2nd by T. Soboleski, the amended minutes were approved (with one abstention by J. O’Brien, who was not present at that meeting).

5. Old Business to include: (BHP and hemlock tree take down discussed first.)

A. Review and Approve FY 2024-25 Annual Budget Request (See below.)

B. Trail reports and management issues in town preserves:

1. Bushy Hill Preserve

a. Hazardous Hemlock Take-down: On January 8, James Howard, Howard Tree Service, took down the hazardous hemlock using a Bobcat tractor with jaws shovel and a chain saw.

T. Soboleski said J Howard did a good job. (Photos by E. Stulga below.) J. Howard told commissioners in attendance that day that he could not proceed to hemlock because 1 other 30-40ft tree now precariously blocked safe passage of the Bobcat through the Red Trail. (See budget discussion below).



Front: E. Stulga (ECC); Left: K. Tucker (ECC Chair); Back middle: T. Soboleski (ECC); Right: James Howard, Howard Tree Service, Jan 8, 2024, Photo credit: E. Stulga.



James Howard, Howard Tree Service, preparing to take down the leaning, hazardous hemlock, Jan 8, 2024, Photo credit: E. Stulga



Howard Tree Service by the tree after it was taken down, Jan 8, 2024, Photo credit: E. Stulga.



K. Tucker, ECC Board Chair, and James Howard, Howard Tree Service, on the Trail of the now cleared tree, Jan 8, 2024, Photo credit: E. Stulga.



ECC Board Chair, K. Tucker, behind the hazardous hemlock leaner tree before it was taken down by James Howard, Howard Tree Service, Jan 8, 2024, Photo credit: E. Stulga.



K. Tucker, Board ECC Chair, walking along the now cleared Trail after tree removal by James Howard, Howard Tree Service, Jan 8, 2024. Photo credit: E. Stulga.

R. Helmecki gave the following report on BHP: On Dec 30, 2023, he walked the Red, Blue, and Yellow Trails, and did some trail maintenance. On Jan, 10, 2024, he went with Dan Epstein from Bartlett Tree Service to assess the condition of the Wolf Tree. Dan will research the tree further. Earlier today, Jan 11, R. Helmecki walked on the Blue and Red Trails. He said that the west side of the Blue Trail looked like a river due to all of the current rain. Discussion took place between him and K. Tucker if large pieces of lumber could, as in years past, be placed across the trail to divert water run-off and control erosion.

b. Parking Area: T. Soboleski reported that Leif Owens, ELT, received an e-mail from a member of the public who complained that it is too hard to park at BHP without scraping the bottom of their car. There is a lip/space between the road and the parking area due to erosion. K. Tucker said that Ryan Welch, EDPW, will dump gravel to fill the space between Bushy Hill Road and the parking area.

c. Wolf Tree (See above.)

d. Other: J. O'Brien reported that Oak Ledge Drive parking area and alternate trail to Bushy Hill Preserve are clear and accessible, that a bog bridge is needed to cross the stream at the bottom of the trail, and that creating a switch back trail to make this trail less steep is doable 2024.

2. Canfield Meadow Woods: T. Soboleski said that he walked in CMW. The Red Trail is like a running stream. There are 2 places where trees have fallen down. He will cut them.

He also reported that on Jan 6 at 11am, Bruce Comstock, Centerbrook resident, called to report he was sitting on a bench in the Margaret Canfield trail when he heard a disturbance and saw 5 or 6 coyotes attacking a boxer dog. B. Comstock scared off the coyotes but the boxer was wounded. Comstock walked North on the Trail and found the dog's owner, who called her husband and then took the dog to the vet. Soboleski sent an email to ELT President, Jeff Coyle. Notices went up about the attack telling the public to make noise if you see a coyote and do not approach.

3. Vine Hill Brook Preserve: K. Tucker asked commissioners to choose one template regarding pet waste removal. With a motion by J. O'Brien and a 2nd by T. Soboleski, the ECC agreed to purchase #1 template to be installed at the entrances to Forest Glade and Upland trails and at the passive parking area. The cost for 3 signs, \$80.



Review and Approve FY 2024-25 Annual Budget Request: K. Tucker said that ECC is asking \$12, 200 (a \$75 increase over FY 2023-2024). T. Soboleski asked about the necessity to pay for mosquito treatment. K. Tucker replied that this is necessary due to the stagnant pond at BHP. Commissioners agreed to forego inspections/treatments for FY 2024-25 and to analyze the necessity of these treatments. The following was agreed upon for the proposed budget (see next page):

Staffing:

STAFFING:

Part Time Payroll

Board Clerk	Hourly	Estimate based on 12 meeting per year
		1500

Budget Line Backup (explain changes and/or purpose of large budget items)

All Habitat Services, Inc.	2500	Phragmite Treatments
Beaver Solutions, Inc.	1000	3 Exclusion fences & Inspections
Maps & Signage	500	3 Separate Maps
Tree Removal	1500	Hazardous tree take down and arborist professionals
Battery Operated Equipment Purchase & Repairs	1500	Chain saw, loppers, weed whacking equipment
Bridge Building Lumber	1200	Lumber, screws. Stakes Propagating wildflower
Meadow Improvements	1000	seeds, plugs, plants
Forest, Meadow and Bog Management Consult.	1000	Professional advisor on invasives vegetation control
Miscellaneous	500	Crushed stone, etc.
	12,200	

T. Soboleski will inventory lumber remaining for FY 2023-24; J. O'Brien will contact UCONN Extension Services to learn what services may be available to the ECC.

- C. Foster Lane Conservation Easements (see above)
- D. Other: There was no other business.

6. New Business

- A. Schedule VHBP Broadwalk Trail Inspection Remediation:
ECC to meet **Monday, Feb 12, noon.**

7. Financial Report YTD and Proposed Expenditures: \$600 Howard Tree Service (to be reimbursed by RiverCog and generous grant from Guilford Savings Bank); \$400 emergency tree removal; \$80 Computer Signs.

Proposal for Howard Tree Service to remove 3 dead trees at the parking area at the Bushy Hill Preserve was tabled to be reviewed at the Feb 8 meeting. T. Soboleski and R. Helmecki will meet to assess 3 dead trees and take-down proposal.

K. Tucker asked RiverCog to consider granting an additional \$150 for the emergency removal of another hazardous tree that had cracked and leaned over the Red Trail. Grant awarded ECC stated up to \$750 to crash and cut the hemlock. Howard Tree Service removal quote was \$600. RiverCog to meet January 18, and will consider ECC's additional fund request.

With a motion by E. Stulga and a 2nd by J. O'Brien, the ECC authorized K. Tucker to write the required report, including E. Stulga's photographs, and to submit both to RiverCog in fulfillment of the Grant Awarded the Town of Essex, ECC applicant.

T. Soboleski recommended that ECC purchase an inexpensive shed to house ECC equipment and lumber. E. Stulga agreed. Soboleski will research.

8. Other: There was no other business.

9. Adjournment: With a motion by R. Helmecki, and a 2nd by E. Stulga, meeting adjourned at 9:15pm.

Next Scheduled Meeting February 8, 2024, 7:00 pm

Respectfully submitted by

Susan K. McCann
ECC Clerk