



TOWN OF ESSEX
Conservation Commission

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Executive Board

Kathleen Tucker, Chairman
Jim O'Brien, Vice Chair

Regular Members

Richard Helmecki
Tom Soboleski
Elizabeth Stulga
Drina Zuvic

Regular Member

1 Vacancy

Alternate Member

2 Vacancies

Minutes of a Meeting of the Town of Essex Conservation Commission
Thursday, April 11, 2024, Room B, 7:00 pm.

1. Call to Order and Roll Call: K. Tucker called the meeting to order at 7:04pm. In attendance: R. Helmecki, J. O'Brien, T. Soboleski, E. Stulga, K. Tucker, and D. Zuvic

Members of the Public: Cameron Evangelisti, 10 Foster Lane, Ivoryton.

2. Public Comments: None
3. Review and Approve Minutes March 14, 2024: With a motion by J. O'Brien, and a 2nd by T. Soboleski, the minutes were unanimously approved.

4. Old Business

- A. Trail reports and management issues in town preserves:

1. Bushy Hill Preserve

- a. Report on Switch Back Trail Oakledge Drive Entrance: R. Helmecki said the new trail makes entry into Bushy Hill from the Oakledge entrance easier. He noticed that a tree, beside the new trail, had recently been deeply cut into with an axe. T. Soboleski, K. Tucker, and Howard Tunick, an Essex volunteer, also worked to open the switch back trail, March 18. Helmecki painted and contributed the stakes used to mark the trail.

- b. Bog Bridge and Planked Bridge: K. Tucker reported that the plank bridge abutting the Falls River is water logged and practically impassable. **Action Item:** R. Helmecki will obtain an inventory on the amount of lumber that remains to repair/replace this bridge. Former ECC member, Mark Reeves, agreed to tarp and store the lumber temporarily.

- c. Improved Bushy Hill Main Entrance Trail: K. Tucker and R. Helmecki noted the improved entrance trail due to the crushed stone that the Town Crew distributed. E. Stulga said she walked the Blue and the Red Trails last week. Ms. Stulga commented that the plank bridge is submerged and should be replaced. **Action Item:** R. Helmecki scheduled Saturday, May 4, 10am, for rebuilding the plank bridge. Helmecki proposed asking the VRHS Warriors in the Community for help in building the bridges.

d. Other: K. Tucker sent a signed contract to Howard Tree Service to remove the 3 dead entrance trees, specifying that HTS leave the woodchips for future use.

2. Canfield Meadow Woods

a. Report on Downed & Cleared Trees: T. Soboleski reported that CMW is drying out from the rain. He cut one 14" tree and one 10" tree about 2 weeks ago. He said that over the last year, April to April, ELT stewards cut and cleared about 25 trees obstructing the trails. K. Tucker said that ECC has depended on ELT to maintain Canfield Meadow Woods trails.

b. Other: Soboleski said he would like to create a new $\frac{3}{4}$ mile trail, on the Eagle Ridge side, as a Spring project. Brush clearing will be needed. Tom has talked to volunteer Howard Tunick who has experience cutting trails. Soboleski will seek approval from ELT for this project.

3. Viney Hill Brook Preserve

a. Report on Proposed Improvements to Trails Walk-through March 22: K. Tucker met with Ryan Welsh at 8am, Friday, March 22. They first discussed where crushed stone was needed and what overgrown vegetation needed to be cut at BHP; then they visited VHBP. From the passive parking area to Quarry Pond, Tucker and Welch noted that fill was needed to remedy the erosion and deep gulleys caused by road water run-off and heavy rains on this frequented trail. Tucker said that Broadwalk, from the wildflower meadow to the phragmite patch, was flooded and muddy more often than not. Ryan said the town has a new mower that can access flooded areas for grass mowing purposes but that a 5' wide bridge should be built and installed over the trenched area. The trench on Broadwalk allows upland and ground waters to flow into Quarry Pond. Ryan said the town crew could build the bridge but the lumber would be charged to ECC. Ryan will ask Carey Duques if an Inland/Wetland application is required or if the bridge needed only administrative approval.

b. Discuss Boundary Survey and Measures to Remedy Habitat Clearing: T. Soboleski offered to photograph area where the vegetation has been cut. J. O'Brien said that ECC needs to locate the survey monuments and wooden stakes. J. O'Brien and D. Zuvic suggested 1. Locating the stakes 2. Reporting the results to the Land Use Officer. R. Helmecki said that the steps entrenched in the embankment bordering an abutting property look like a gateway to Quarry Pond and that removing the steps should be a consideration. T. Soboleski said that the Town's property line goes beyond the top of the steps. T. Soboleski, J. O'Brien, and E. Stulga noted **Action Steps**: 1. Establish boundary points. 2. Post stakes. 3. Consider removing the steps. 4. Discuss findings with Land Use Officer after work party inspection on Monday, April 15, 1:30pm. T. Soboleski, E. Stulga, K. Tucker, D. Zuvic are scheduled to meet at the passive parking lot. J. O'Brien will sketch a map of the boundary points; D. Zuvic will bring a 100 ft tape measure and survey map.

c. Other: 1. Bog Bridge Project Red Trail abutting Falls River. K. Tucker suggested asking if the Town crew could bring the lumber to the site. 2. **Action Items**: Complete bridge project at BHP on Saturday, May 4 at 10am. R. Helmecki to purchase screws and obtain the secured lumber. The 2 ft and 4 ft boards should be precut.

4. Other: None.

4. New Business: K. Tucker said that the 10 Foster Lane issue was tabled awaiting further information from Town Attorney David Royston, Planning/Zoning Chairman Russ Smith, and Land Use Official Carey Duques. T. Soboleski offered the following **Action Items**: 1. ECC needs to develop a definition of a

“conservation easement.” He offered to draft one. 2. ECC needs to update the conservation easement inventories begun by Jenna Klink and Don and Shirley Malcarne. T. Soboleski will present a proposal at the May ECC meeting regarding the town’s conservation easements.

K. Tucker said that on March 17, windows were smashed on two cars parked in the VHBP Hillside Drive lot. A third unlocked car was not damaged. The First Selectman was notified and town troopers investigated. It was noted that vandalism was also reported at the Turtle Creek Conservancy parking area on March 17.

5. Financial Report YTD and Proposed Expenditures: K. Tucker reported on additional expenditures: 1. Crushed stone cost TBD; 2. A dozen ECC hats, \$240. 3. Bridge Lumber as needed; 4. Plugs and seed for wildflower meadow TBD. T. Soboleski inquired about purchasing a ECC storage shed.

K. Tucker said that we need to engage with the Valley Regional Warriors. The annual Warriors in The Community service day is scheduled for May 24th. E. Stulga will contact the VRHS community organizers.

6. Other: Meet at Viney Hill Brook Preserve passive parking area, Monday, April 15 at 1:30pm. Doane Engineering survey map and 100’ tape measure are needed.

7. Adjournment: The meeting was adjourned at 8:36pm.

Next Scheduled Meeting May 9, 2024, 7:00 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Susan K. McCann
ECC Clerk