

TOWN OF ESSEX
Conservation Commission

Executive Board

*Kathleen Tucker, Chairman
Jeffrey Lovelace, Vice Chairman
Frank Hall, Secretary*

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

Regular Members

*Richard Helmecki
Adrienne Forrest
Robert Ward
Mark J. Reeves*

Alternate Member

Jerri MacMillian

Unapproved

Minutes

Regular Meeting

**Thursday, February 4, 2016 at 7:30 P.M.
Town Hall, 29 West Avenue - Room B**

The Essex Conservation Commission conducted their regularly scheduled meeting on February 4, 2016 in Room B of the Essex Town Hall.

Attending Members

Kay Tucker
Frank Hall
Richard Helmecki
Mark Reeves
Adrienne Forrest

Absent Members

Jeffrey Lovelace
Jerri MacMillian
Robert Ward

Staff: Stella Beaudoin, Recording Secretary

Audience: There were no audience members.

1. Call to Order

K. Tucker called the meeting to order at 7:30 p.m.

Seated for the meeting were K. Tucker, R. Helmecki, M. Reeves, A. Forrest, F. Hall.

2. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

3. Old Business

a. Discuss "Hands on the Land" Presentation and Discussion

At the January 7, 2016 meeting of the Essex Conservation Commission, Elaine Blanck, who is an educator with the Outdoor Science and Leadership Institute (OSLI), presented to the Commissioners. The OSLI, which is located at the Incarnation Center, Bushy Hill Road, Ivoryton is an inquiry based science program for middle and high school students and provides a hands-on exploration of local ecology and an inquiry based curriculum. The OSLI at Bushy Hill would like to register Bushy Hill Nature Center with the Essex Conservation Commission, who oversees public lands, as an associated member site of Hands on the Land (HOL).

F. Hall stated that he has researched the website for Hands on the Land, (HOL) which is a national organization, and indicated that he is in favor of the Commission's involvement.

M. Reeves stated that the presentation put forward at the January 7th Conservation Commission meeting by Elaine Blanck was good and he noted the merits of encouraging young people to get involved.

F. Hall stated that HOL is required to be affiliated with some level of a municipality. The research conducted with students at the Bushy Hill Nature Center and surrounding Preserve property, will then be uploaded onto the HOL website creating national recognition.

R. Helmecki stated that he did not have a chance to look at the website.

K. Tucker spoke with Jim Denham, President of the Essex Land Trust and he was favorable to an affiliation with the HOL program, providing there are no financial or other commitments involved with the affiliation. The program coordinator, E. Blanck will be requested to provide a monthly report to K. Tucker in her capacity as Conservation Commission Chair and to J. Denham as President of the Essex Land Trust.

MOTION made by F. Hall to allow the Bushy Hill Nature Center to register the Essex Conservation Commission on the Hands on the Land website; **SECONDED** by M. Reeves ; **Voting In Favor:** K. Tucker, R. Helmecki, M. Reeves, F. Hall, A. Forrest; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None **Approved:** 5/0/0.

b. Discuss parameters for multi-year plan regarding the Conservation Commission and the three open-spaces assigned the Commission to oversee and maintain

F. Hall initiated a discussion among the Commissioners encouraging their thoughts as to the purpose of their role and the creation of a multi-year plan. F. Hall stated that the key role of the Conservation Commission is the maintenance and preservation of those properties that the Commission oversees; Bushy Hill Preserve, Canfield Meadow Woods and Viney Hill Brook Preserve; and part of that process is ensuring that those properties are properly maintained and accessible to the public.

F. Hall stated that the other issue is to ensure that the right-of-way's and easements are properly adhered to by neighboring properties and further, it is the role of the Commission to provide some form of education to the residents of the Town on the issue of conservation which could be accomplished through a variety of sources; i.e., presentations at the Essex Town Hall or a film series, to educate the public on topics related to conservation.

M. Reeves commented on pending Capital Improvement projects and questioned if there are other special projects that the commissioners would like to do. R. Helmecki, J. Lovelace and M. Reeves looked at the Bushy Hill Nature Preserve meadows a few weeks ago and in considering that space questioned if there is a viable public benefit to enhancing the meadows. M. Reeves suggested that the Commission attend a public meeting and inquire if the four to five acre of land could be cleared so as to create a park-like space for the public to enjoy.

M. Reeves stated that another project would be to inform and instruct on the beaver activity by turning that landscape into an educational site. M. Reeves indicated that similarly, as related to Canfield Meadow Woods, Commissioners should consider what could be done to enhance that preserve in order to bring in more people. M. Reeves stated that a public information campaign would be worthwhile in that it would keep in the forefront, topics on which the public should be apprised.

R. Helmecki stated that main priority is to have the Preserves open for people to enjoy and for the Commission to lean more toward offering educational programs.

K. Tucker stated that he Essex Land Trust posts minimal signage on those properties within their purview. Camp Incarnation has erected glossy, large beautifully painted signs which designate and educate. K. Tucker suggested that the Commission decide in which direction members wish to go in terms of signage.

K. Tucker indicated that it was previously suggested that the Conservation Commission expand their purview to the acquisition of land. K Tucker stated that the Conservation Commission has always deferred to the Essex Land Trust, an entity who has actively purchased properties and who possesses the knowledge on the acquisition of land. Additionally, it is difficult for the Conservation Commission to negotiate the purchase of land when the Commission is required to navigate through several Boards in order to obtain permission. The Essex Land Trust retains more authority in the acquisition of land.

M. Reeves suggested that the Commission identify the access points and the conservation easements and set up a maintenance program.

Members agreed to table further discussion to the March 3, 2016 Conservation Commission meeting.

c. Trail Reports and Projects

1. Bushy Hill Nature Preserve

R. Helmecki commented on the clear cutting work commissioners conducted on two separate occasions within Bushy Hill Preserve. On one of the cuts involving a general clean up, all of the logs were removed. On the second cutting, Commissioners cut further back, however it was agreed that the wood that was cut was to be left onsite and allowed to naturally decay, however in the location of the discarded wood, there are large briars and overgrowth. It was previously determined that it would be difficult to bring in machinery to clean up the area and R. Helmecki suggested that the Commission hire someone to come in and mow and brush hog the area.

R. Helmecki stated that he spoke with Eli and Ben Clark, Clark's Custom Services who provided an estimate of \$1150 to clear the first section and they stated that subsequent to that clear cut, it will be much less labor intensive to come in a few times a year to mow. Brush clearing of the second field will be done at the same price of \$1150, however because there is a lot of fallen timber, they propose to stack the wood, relocate the logs and fallen trees and perform brush clean up at a proposed cost of \$700 to stack the wood and clear the logs. To cut down brush and rake out the root bed, Clark's Services estimate will be at a cost of \$570. Clark's services provided an estimate of \$3570 to complete this project.

2. Viney Hill Brook Preserve

F. Hall visited Viney Hill Brook Preserve and he reported that the Pond leveler and fence are performing well. The beavers have not hibernated to any great extent this year and it is apparent that they have been nibbling on some trees.

F. Hall stated that the wind-blown tree on the east side of Quarry Pond, which is situated 50 feet north of the trap rock walkway, is falling down and presents a safety hazard. K. Tucker will write to the Board of Selectmen and inform that the tree is presenting a public safety hazard and request that the Public Works Department cut it down.

M. Reeves suggested that the Commission spend a few months developing a campaign related to the restoration work that needs to be accomplished and the proposed vision on the meadow, and prepare a presentation for the Board of Finance.

3. Canfield-Meadow Woods

No report.

d. Financial Expenditures

As of January 31, 2016 the Commission has expended \$7,175 which leaves a balance to June 30, 2016 which is fiscal year-end, of \$3,350. The Commission is contracting with All Habitat for removal of Knotweed and phragmite at Bushy Hill Preserve. There will be a remaining balance of \$1,150 after the All Habitat contract. M. Reeves noted that the Commission had earmarked funds to be utilized toward the meadow, however that funding was absorbed by the ongoing maintenance and control surrounding the beaver population at Bushy Hill Nature Preserve.

K Tucker suggested that the Commission formulate a plan to present as soon as possible to the Board of Finance related to the funds needed in order to accomplish the necessary projects.

R. Helmecki and M. Reeves will schedule time to speak with N. Needleman to discuss the procurement of funds to support the list of items within and outside of budget that must be accomplished.

e. Other

There was no other business.

5. New Business

There was no new business.

6. Review and Approve January 7, 2016 Meeting Minutes:

MOTION made by M. Reeves to approve the January 7, 2016 Regular Meeting Minutes with the following amendments; Page 2; second full paragraph to read: "E. Blanck stated that the goal is to register Essex as a national presence, and more particularly, Bushy Hill Nature Preserve, which can open up to other educational institutions that we *wish to* (remove "get involved") *involve*."; Page 5 under IWWC Report: "Dan *Lapman*".

SECONDED by R. Helmecki; **Voting In Favor:** K. Tucker, A. Forrest, F. Hall, R. Helmecki, M. Reeves; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None; **Approved:** 5/0/0.

7. Correspondence

There was no correspondence.

8. Adjournment

MOTION made by F. Hall to adjourn the regular meeting at 9:00pm to the next regularly scheduled meeting which will be conducted on March 3, 2016 at 7:30pm, Essex Town Hall, Conference Room B, 29 West Avenue, Essex, CT; **SECONDED** by M. Reeves; **Voting In Favor:** K. Tucker, J. Lovelace, R. Helmecki, M. Reeves, A. Forrest, R. Ward, F. Hall; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** None; **Approved:** 7/0/0.

Respectfully submitted,
Stella C. Beaudoin
Recording Secretary