



TOWN OF ESSEX
Conservation Commission

Executive Board

Kathleen Tucker, Chairman
Jim O'Brien, Vice-Chairman

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

Regular Members

Frank Hall
Richard Helmecki
Mark Reeves
Vacancy
Vacancy

Alternate Member

Vacancy
Vacancy

Meeting Minutes

January 12, 2023, Kitchen, 7:00 pm

1. Call to Order and Roll Call: K. Tucker called the meeting to order at 7pm.
In attendance: F. Hall, R. Helmecki, J. O'Brien, M. Reeves, K. Tucker.
2. Public Comments: None.
3. Review and Approve December 8, 2022 Meeting Minutes: With a motion by J. O'Brien, and a 2nd by F. Hall, the minutes were unanimously approved.
4. Budget Proposal Fiscal Year 2023-24: K. Tucker led the budget proposal process. Discussion

took place that while the ECC oversees 3 Preserves that are used on a daily basis, especially during the time of Covid shutdowns, the ECC is underfunded due to the many unforeseen acts of nature. Trees are uprooting or splitting, and insect diseased trees now also need to be cut down and removed. Conservation commissioners can take care of some of the work. It is not sustainable or safe to rely on us to manage the 3 Preserves with a "flat" budget. M. Reeves said that "we are budget sufficient for maintenance but capital requirements are not being met." Budget request for this current year, 2022-2023, of \$13,200 was reduced to \$12,125. Capital requirements that are necessary: repairing the bridges at Bushy Hill Preserve; licensed take-down of damaged, dangerous trees, and volunteers using powered landscaping equipment on a regular basis, has safety and financial risks. M. Reeves said that volunteers should not be expected to supply and use heavy power equipment. F. Hall noted that the ECC can handle basic maintenance, yet, there has been an increase in high winds, causing more trees to fall, and therefore, heavier power equipment maintenance is required on the trails. Commissioners supply their own hand-held loppers, clippers, rakes, and hedge trimmers. M. Reeves said that "Nature does not respect our tight municipal budget. To maintain trails, we have to deal with trimming undergrowth, cutting grass, maintaining trails, reducing invasive plants, and dealing with a greater number of fallen, diseased or uprooted trees. A brief walk through the Preserves will show what is happening out there. We are supposed to maintain Preserves that are safe and meet expectations of Essex residents. Our budgets have been stagnant but nature is not. Commissioners are not able to increase the hours of volunteer physical service that will be required to keep the Preserves safe."

J. O'Brien suggested that we invite the First Selectman and Board of Finance to tour our Preserves.

Photos from the Preserves

Photo 1:

Hazardous Hemlock: Bushy Hill Red Trail infected woolly adelgid 1990's. **Photo credit: R. Helmecki**



Photo 2

R. Helmecki chain sawing wind damaged limb Bushy Hill entrance trail, Dec. 2022. **Photo credit: F. Hall**



Photo 3: AKA Tucker Pond--Beaver dam impounded 2018-19 from upland water flow and ground seepage; drought 2022, Clarks' Custom Services moved sticks and mud, allowing water to drain into Quarry Pond; Broadwalk Trail again passable from Wildflower Meadow to Quarry Pond.

Photo credit: J. Lovelace



Photo 4: Another uprooted, leaning tree Red Trail, Jan. 2023. Hazardous Hemlock seen in background.

Photo credit: R. Helmecki



Photo 5: Bog bridge abutting Falls River, Red Trail Bushy Hill; A. Schumacher, Eagle Scout Project 20 years ago; ECC must reconstruct and repair often due to frequent pedestrian traffic and flooding from Falls River. **Photo credit: R. Helmecki**



A. Financial Expenditures Year to Date 2022-23

K. Tucker reported the following: 1. Since the beaver lodge in Quarry Pond appears to be dormant, discussion took place if ECC could contract for an on-call service, rather than regular service, with Beaver Solutions for this pond. M. Callahan, Beaver Solutions, answered that the beaver population rises in the spring and that it could actually become more costly to not have regular service. Beaver Solutions contract of \$648 authorized.

Remaining funds authorized as follows:

All Habitat for mosquito larval treatments \$2500; \$1500 for continuing phragmite eradication (\$300 increase).

Clark's Custom Services \$435 will be used to dormant mow the wildflower meadow; \$2051 regular mowing through June 2023.

Lumber for Bog Bridge repairs.

5. Old Business to include trail reports and management issues in town preserves:

A. Bushy Hill Preserve: R. Helmecki said that on December 10, he, K. Tucker, and F. Hall cut up the tree across the Blue Trail. Today, he walked the trails and saw that another large tree has cracked at its base and is leaning close to the Red Trail. Take-down by licensed arborist is required for two hazardous trees on the Red Trail. J. O'Brien suggested that ECC ask Director R. Welch if this type of expense could be included in the Department of Public Works budget. K. Tucker said there is still a dead apple tree in the Bushy Hill Preserve parking lot.

R. Helmecki showed a picture of a battery-operated counter (not a camera) that ELT has placed on the Platt Property Red Trail to register the number of visitors accessing ELT Platt Property Trails.

K. Tucker received an email from Leif Owens, ELT, that a “You are Here” kiosk has been installed between the Red and Green trails.

ELT has asked ECC to download the new ELT Bushy Hill Preserve Map onto the town’s website.

J. O’Brien offered to get instructions on how to do so.

B. Canfield Meadow Woods: J. O’Brien summarized the ELT reports and that all is going well.

C. Viney Hill Brook Preserve: F. Hall emailed the following report prior to the meeting and presented it as well: “On Tuesday, 1-10-23, Dana Hill, Volunteer and I walked the following trails: Quarry Pond-Blue, Broadwalk-Orange, Wollock’s Pond Loop-Green, Upper Turtle Nesting area-Red, Uplands Woods-White, and Forest Glade-Purple. All of the beaver exclusion fences and pond levelers were functioning as designed. In the prior week, there was almost an inch of rain in this area, and while the trails were damp, they were all passable. However, there is evidence of Beavers on the north side of Wollock’s Pond due to fresh mud around the exclusion fence (note attached pics of lodge and tree stump). Also, we cleared a branch that had fallen near the entrance to Forest Glade Trail. I replaced 8 maps at the Kiosk at the entrance. The area adjacent to the ROW path appeared to have been mowed by the DPW. No other problems noted.” **Photo credit: F. Hall**



K. Tucker added that a purple marker at the entrance to Forest Glade is obscured by brush and needs to be relocated, that an obsolete yellow trail marker should be removed, and that the stacked bog bridges (Broadwalk) should be replaced on the ground now that Broadwalk is again water saturated.

She also noted that a rock cairn is being created by unknown hikers around a double-trunk tree in Forest Glade Trail.

D. Other: M. Reeves is working on a template for use by Clark's Custom Services, which would include various work areas and projects.

6. New Business: None.

7. Other: K. Tucker e-mailed ECC information to three hikers hoping to interest them in volunteering for commission vacancies.

J. O'Brien reported that he will be absent for February's meeting.

8. Adjournment: With a motion by M. Reeves, and a 2nd by R. Helmecki, the meeting was adjourned at 8:32pm.

Next Scheduled Meeting February 9, 2023, Kitchen, 7:00 PM

Respectfully submitted,

Susan K. McCann
ECC Clerk