



TOWN OF ESSEX  
**Conservation Commission**

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**Executive Board**

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

**Regular Members**

*Frank Hall*  
*Richard Helmecki*  
*Mark J. Reeves*  
*Elizabeth Stulga*  
*Vacancy*

**Alternate Member**

*Vacancy*  
*Vacancy*

Minutes of the Essex Conservation Commission Meeting  
Sept. 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: F. Hall, R. Helmecki, J. O'Brien, M. Reeves, T. Soboleski, E. Stulga, K. Tucker.
2. Public Comments: No public comments.
3. Welcome New Member Tom Soboleski: K. Tucker welcomed T. Soboleski as our new commissioner and E. Stulga presented him with an ECC cap.
4. Review and Approve August 10, 2023 Meeting Minutes: With a motion by J. O'Brien and a 2<sup>nd</sup> by E. Stulga, the minutes were approved.
5. Old Business to include trail reports and management issues in town preserves:
  - A. Bushy Hill Preserve: R. Helmecki and K. Tucker reported that tire tracks from the Oakledge entrance reveal bike riding in the preserve. R Helmecki placed a No Bike sign at the Oakledge entrance. ELT steward emailed that he would follow-up as he thought he knew the name of the teenager riding his bike there.
    1. Oakledge Drive Entrance: ELT President, Jeff Croyle, forwarded a report from a local resident that people park in the limited Bushy Hill Parking Lot, then walk Bushy Hill Road rather than in Bushy Hill Preserve. Resident suggested that Oakledge Drive parking area be enhanced and advertised as an alternative for preserve hikers. K. Tucker and E. Stulga cut back the overgrown vegetation on the Oakledge Drive Trail, August 19. The trail is wider and passable from the sloped entrance, down to the brook, and up a steep slope onto the blue trail. This is a challenging trail entry point into Bushy Hill Preserve but is clearly marked.

R. Helmecki reported that the wooden sign post at the entrance way has rotted; he will install a metal post. K. Tucker asked J. O'Brien to review the survey of the property abutting Oakledge Drive trail. The town owns a portion of the property in front of the town's designated parking area there and boundary lines should be clarified. M. Reeves discussed creating a bog bridge over the small brook so the trail can be more easily

traversed. ECC future projects include: 1. Building a bog bridge. 2. Reviewing Oakledge Drive Town Survey. 3. Installing a metal signpost for the entrance.

B. Canfield Meadow Woods: T. Soboleski reported that he spent several hours in CMW on behalf of ELT as he needed to prepare a report for them. He said that the trails are in good condition. Noticeable are the wilted leaves of the beech trees evidence of the nematode infestation affecting all beech trees in New England. Tom will follow-up with ELT and the Essex Fire Department on ways in which the trails, which are narrow and winding, can be accessed for emergency purposes. Tom said that some towns are sending up drones to locate emergencies such as forest fires.

C. Viney Hill Brook Preserve:

1. Kay summarized the history of Viney Hill Brook from active quarry to passive preserve. It was discussed that VHBP has deteriorated and that budgets do not go as far as they used to for needed maintenance. Ticks and poison ivy are evident along the grassy, overgrown trails. ECC needs a plan to reclaim the trails and to remove downed trees on a limited budget. Commissioners "sweat equity" is limited as well. The Department of Public Works can assist by mowing the meadow and entryway 1x per month and chainsawing fallen trees as needed. M. Reeves said he reviewed with Ryan Welch and two other members of the EDPW the trails and overgrown areas needing attention. Mark thinks that much more work is required to bring the passive preserve back to the way it was when the area was first developed.

J. O'Brien said that Forest Glade Trail is overgrown; the trail is obscured and signage is not easily sighted. He recommended that the ECC include the Forest Glade Trail as part of a group walk.

D. Other to include:

1. Status of Bushy Hill Preserve Grant: E. Stulga contacted Howard's Tree Service asking when they can schedule a take down. No date as yet determined. Howard's is not licensed by the state as a professional arborist, a requirement of the Grant award. Margot Burns, coordinator of COG and the grant award, will ask the committee on September 21, if ECC can use a licensed tree service, rather than a licensed arborist, for this one time take down.

6. New Business to Include:

A. Schedule Walk-Through and Work Party: Commissioners will meet on **Tuesday, October 3, 2pm, at the passive parking lot; wear caps, bring notepads**. The purpose is to decide which areas need the most maintenance and to prioritize our ability to remedy the clean-up required. M. Reeves suggested taking photos.

B. Other: None.

7. Financial Report YTD and Proposed Expenditures:

There is \$12,009 in the budget. All Habitat was paid for mosquito treatment on August 22. The clerk has been paid YTD. With a motion by J. O'Brien and a 2<sup>nd</sup> by T. Soboleski, commissioners approved the expenditure of up to \$350 on a battery-operated hedge trimmer and back-up batteries. R Helmecki will purchase.

8. Other: None.

9. Adjournment: With a motion by M. Reeves and a 2<sup>nd</sup> by T. Soboleski, the meeting was adjourned at 8:39pm.

**Next Scheduled Meeting October 12, 2023, 7:00 pm**

Respectfully submitted,

Susan K. McCann, ECC Clerk