



TOWN OF ESSEX  
**Conservation Commission**

29 West Avenue ☐ Essex, Connecticut 06426  
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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  
Tom Soboleski*

**Alternate Member**

*Vacancy  
Vacancy*

Minutes from a Meeting held on November 9, 2023 in the Town Hall Kitchen at 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, K. Tucker. Absent: E. Stulga.
2. Public Comments: None.
3. Review and Approve October 12, 2023 Meeting Minutes: J. O'Brien noted misspelling on page 2, section 7, 1<sup>st</sup> sentence. "Steil" should be corrected to "Stihl" battery-operated hedge trimmer. With a motion by T. Soboleski and a 2<sup>nd</sup> by F. Hall, the minutes were approved. (Note: J. O'Brien and R. Helmecki abstained from the vote since they were absent from the November 9<sup>th</sup> meeting.)

K. Tucker asked for a motion to move Financial Report before Old Business on the Agenda. With a motion by J. O'Brien and a 2<sup>nd</sup> by F. Hall, this motion was approved.

4. Financial Report YTD and Proposed Expenditures: K. Tucker reviewed the ECC Budget Fiscal Year 2023-24 totaling \$12,125. As of October 31, \$11,434 remains after paying for the hedge trimmer and reimbursing the Essex Land Trust for the town's share of the newly printed Canfield Meadow Woods maps. ECC has contracts from All Habitat Service for Phragmite treatment (\$1500) VHBP and Mosquito abatement (\$2750) Bushy Hill; another contract is from Beaver Solutions (\$720) for maintenance and inspections of the exclusion fences Quarry Pond and the Right of Way Road Pond, VHBP. Expenditure for the clerk is approx. \$1400 total for the year. R. Helmecki noted about 400 maps remain for Bushy Preserve but that they do not show the extensive ELT Platt Property trails and will need to be updated. ECC has enough trail markers. M. Reeves discussed the need to install a bog bridge across a small creek at the bottom of the trail from the Oakledge entrance. Additional lumber must be purchased to build the bridge abutting the Falls River on the Red Trail. A make-shift plank bridge is currently in place at Bushy Hill Preserve. Discussion took place about how to bring lumber down the steeply sloped trail. Commissioners discussed drainage issues on Broadwalk from the phragmite patch to the Eagle Scout Bridge, VHBP. The trail does not drain due to impermeable fill used when built to allow Wollock's Quarry equipment and trucks to pass. Reeves suggested bringing in many multiple truck loads of crushed stone. Estimated cost \$1500. K. Tucker noted that an application to Essex Inlands/Wetlands Commission may be required; she will follow-up with Inland/Wetlands Officer.

Other proposed future projects included: removal of the dead trees, including an apple tree, at the entrance to Bushy and the hazardous leaning tree on the Red Trail; estimated cost \$2,000. K. Tucker suggested that ECC expend resources to make the wildflower meadow a pollinating pathway, since this ½ acre or so is not forested as are the other areas in the town preserves. Initial cost \$1000.

To coordinate with Ryan Welch, EDPW, to ask if EDPW is able to commit more than 8 hours per month for mowing and trimming in VHB and Bushy Hill Preserves.

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

A. Bushy Hill Preserve: EMT Access. ELT Myron Stacks is again concerned with ease of access in case of emergencies in town preserves. R. Helmecki previously met with emergency personnel, widened the trails as advised, and added the EFD trail markers suggested. R. Helmecki will follow-up with M Stacks. J. O'Brien said that Oakledge Trail is very steep and should be noted for emergency personnel.

R. Helmecki inquired about the status of the tree removal from the grant provided by Guilford Savings Bank and the RiverCog. K. Tucker said that our contract returned to Howard Tree Service asked for 48-hour notification prior to cutting. ECC is waiting for Howard Tree Service to schedule.

B. Canfield Meadow Woods: T. Soboleski reported on a 6-person ELT work party that cut down the overgrown vegetation and saplings under, and around, the Elizabeth Nussbaum Memorial Viewing Platform. This preserve looks beautiful.

C Viney Hill Brook Preserve: Inspections and Work Parties October 3, 17, 24

**October 3 work party:** Notes submitted by J. O'Brien:

Present: F. Hall, R. Helmecki, J. O'Brien, M. Reeves, E. Stulga, T. Soboleski, K. Tucker. There was some discussion on the difference of approach in trail maintenance between the Conservation Commission and the Essex Land Trust with the observation that the Land Trust has a larger group of volunteers to do field work.

The area of Phragmites along Broad Walk was reviewed and the amount of effort that is needed to control the spread of these plants was noted. During a discussion, a suggestion to put sawhorses near the bog bridges to raise them above the ground during relocation for mowing or trimming was made. This requires further discussion.

The entrance to Turtle Nesting Trail was obscured by several leaning trees which need attention.

Proceeding north on Broadwalk it was noted that widening Broadwalk to the west near the intersection of the Quarry Pond Trail would be advisable. Proceeding north on Broadwalk to the Eagle Scout Bridge and up to the CL&P ROW has encroaching growth on the west side of the trail.

The group turned east on the Quarry Pond Trail across the Eagle Scout Bridge and stopped at the pond leveler. The trail needs widening. The pond leveler needs cleaning. The remainder of the Quarry Pond Trail needs widening with briars and excessive plant growth making the trail unappealing to hikers and walkers.

A suggestion was made that the use of trail counters could provide data that might be valuable in determining where trail maintenance is most needed.

The group returned to the passive parking lot. It was noted that this portion of the Quarry Pond Trail is eroding, most likely from stormwater runoff. Some remedial work to repair the trail and make some improvements to reduce the potential for erosion seems warranted.

Following the trail review, one group went to the Upland Woods Trail to make some improvements. Another group went to Bushy Hill to remove two trees blocking the trails.



**October 17 work party:** R. Helmecki, E. Stulga, and K. Tucker weed whacked and hedge trimmed the overgrown vegetation around Quarry Pond (photo above). The trail needed to be widened, and the brambles, overhanging tree limbs and tree saplings cut down. Richard also weed whacked around the boundary fence at the passive parking area.

**October 24 work party:** Leif Owens from ELT, T. Soboleski, and K. Tucker met to determine where best to position the trail counter on loan to the town of Essex from ELT. The device is not a camera; the counter only counts the amount of activity that enters and exits the trail. The counter will remain in place through November. Leif suggested daily monitoring of the counter. An abutting neighbor volunteered to inspect throughout the month to see that the counter was intact.

T. Soboleski and K. Tucker then walked Quarry Pond, Broadwalk, and the Green Trail around Wollock's Pond. The Essex Department of Public Works had cut back some of the overgrown vegetation on this

narrow, scenic trail. It was passable but the sink holes on the trail were noticeable. R. Welch, EDPW, in an e-mail to K., suggested that he meet with ECC to relocate the trail around Wollock's Pond.

T. Soboleski later reported that "my land trust preserve manager, Leif Owens, and I installed a trail counter at Viney Brook (see photo below). It's on a tree near the start of the trail as shown below. This location was agreed to by Leif and I and Kay on a previous walk the week prior. The data we get back will be quite detailed, broken down by week, days of the month, and hours/day. Should be interesting to see what it tells us."



Soboleski reported that 3 counters with software cost \$2500 and that UCONN offers a trail monitoring service that he will explore.

F. Hall submitted read the following report:

"On Tuesday, 11-8-23, I conducted a Site Visit at VHB Park. I walked on the following trails: Boardwalk, Turtle Nesting, Quarry Pond, Uplands Woods, and Forest Glade. All trails were in good shape and clear except for Forest Glade Trail which has a limb across the trail closest to the entrance to the Wildflower Garden. It is too heavy for one person to move. It can be cut with a chainsaw. It can be stepped over easily. Wildflower garden has been mowed. Pond Levelers are in operation at Quarry Pond and near ROW road."

D. Other: K. Tucker reported on an advertised event to be held in VHBP by the Old Lyme Roger Tory Peterson Audubon Society. Advertised as an Audubon Society member and non-member paid walk, the Director of the Old Lyme Audubon Society was contacted for information. He said the event was no longer advertised and would not be held in VHBP.

6. New Business:

A. Commissioner Resignation and Reappointment: 1. Mark Reeves' term expires December 1. Mark asked not to be reappointed but said he would be willing to volunteer occasionally. K. Tucker thanked him for his hard work and faithful attendance. 2. Jim O'Brien agreed to be appointed for another 3-year term (December 1, 2023-2025). Jim must be sworn in by the Town Clerk prior to the December 14 ECC meeting.

B. Other: Naturalist and former First Selectman Phil Miller to lead an ELT walk through the Falls River Preserve on the Sunday of Thanksgiving weekend, November 26, 10:30 am.

7. Other: K Tucker attended the Menunkatuck Audubon Society "Dark Sky" lecture at the Deep River Library. Take away remarks: 1. Artificial light is disruptive to all animals' (including humans) circadian cycles and sleep patterns; artificial light has become a health concern; 2. Artificial light extending from the shoreline is preventing boaters from seeing the incoming channels; hazardous to boaters; 3. Without artificial lights humans can see in the dark as well as (for example) rabbits or whippoorwills; 4. Dark sky resorts are becoming popular tourist designations.

Essex to hold annual holiday party at the Griswold Inn on December 11<sup>th</sup>. Invitations will be e-mailed.

9. Adjournment: With a motion by M. Reeves and a 2<sup>nd</sup> by F. Hall, the meeting was adjourned at 8:24pm.

Next Scheduled Meeting December 14, 2023, 7:00 pm

Respectfully submitted,

Susan K McCann  
ECC Clerk