

TOWN OF ESSEX
Conservation Commission

29 West Avenue • Essex, Connecticut 06426
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Executive Board

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

Regular Members

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

Alternate Member

Jerri MacMillian

Unapproved

Minutes

Regular Meeting

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

The Essex Conservation Commission conducted their regularly scheduled meeting on January 7, 2016 in Room B of the Essex Town Hall.

Attending Members

Kay Tucker
Frank Hall
Jeffrey Lovelace
Mark Reeves
Adrienne Forrest
Richard Helmecki
Robert Ward
Jerri MacMillian

Absent Members

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, J. Lovelace, R. Helmecki, M. Reeves, A. Forrest, R. Ward, F. Hall.

2. Public Comment

There was no public comment.

3. "Hands on the Land" Presentation and Discussion

Elaine Blanck, an educator with the Outdoor Science and Leadership Institute (OSLI) presented. The OSLI is an inquiry based science program for middle and high school students and it is located at the Incarnation Center, Bushy Hill Road, Ivoryton. This campus is located on the one-mile long Bushy Hill Lake, which is the oldest, co-ed overnight camp in America for children and young adults. The Incarnation Camp is the backbone of the Incarnation Center and the property encompasses 740 acres. The purpose of this program is to cultivate a natural curiosity and empower students to become the leaders and stewards of tomorrow through hands-on exploration of local ecology

and an inquiry based curriculum. The OSLI at Bushy Hill nurtures the preservation of the natural habitat through exposure of plants, nature and habitat utilizing the outdoors as a classroom.

E. Blanck stated that OSLI at Bushy would like to register Bushy Hill Nature Center with the Essex Conservation Commission which oversees public lands as an associated member site of Hands on the Land (HOL). She is seeking support and permission from the Conservation Commission to move forward with this initiative. HOL, www.handsonland.org is a national network of field classrooms and agency resources that connect students, teachers, families and volunteers with public lands and waterways. HOL is sponsored by Partners in Resource Education, a collaboration of five Federal agencies, a non-profit foundation, schools and other private sector partners. The HOL network also partners with the National Oceanic and Atmospheric Administration, the US Forest Service, The Fish and Wildlife as well as the National Wildlife refuge to promote environmental awareness and to urge commitment to the environmental cause by using the resources at hand. The Incarnation site will be the school member, and together, partner to be registered as a member site for HOL which means that any scientific data gathered can be used as collective data.

The National Environmental Education Foundation in partnership with Partners in Resource Educators will award grant money to HOL sites to support their efforts to deliver high quality, place-based environmental education. With funding in place, the Conservation Commission will have access to educational programming specifically geared to the Nature Preserve along with access to the national databases associated to the Preserve. 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 get involved.

R. Ward questioned if partnered with HOL, would there be any limitations and restrictions placed on the management of the land within the Preserve.

E. Blanck stated that there are no restrictions placed on the land use. HOL is not a regulatory body and the Conservation Commission will continue to regulate the management and use of the Preserve. E. Blanck stated that she is seeking permission from the Conservation Commission to register Bushy Hill Nature Preserve on the HOL website with the notation that it is the Conservation Commission who is responsible for the management of the Preserve and the trails within.

J. MacMillian questioned who it is that oversees the environmental studies associated with OSLI.

E. Blanck stated that the teachers within the OSLI oversee the environmental studies. However, as environmental stewards and teachers they are not there to disturb or to dig, but to promote and encourage the youth to make earth connections. Their studies will go into the national registry and once posted, students may go online and view the benefits of their participation. Over ten thousand youth participated on HOL last year. Students within the tri-state area as well as the towns of New London, Hartford and New Haven will be invited to participate. OSLI is currently contracted with the Essex Elementary School.

F. Hall clarified that this program promotes education with school age children and he noted the value of the Conservation Commission's association with this program, on many levels. F. Hall referenced the Viney Hill Brook Park Preserve which is within the purview of the Conservation Commission, stating that all of these properties present visual proof for students in observing the impact that the wildlife habitat has on the land.

K. Tucker summarized that E. Blanck is employed by Camp Incarnation and she lives on site and she has established this program which is offered to local youth within the community, with the hopes of expanding involvement.

E. Blanck indicated that the OSLI was created in November, 2015. At this time there is a school from northern CT and a school from Bronx, NY comprised of 20-30 high school students who will stay overnight during the month of May, 2016. E. Blanck stated that moving forward, programming will be conducted in the spring and in the fall. She stated that the OSLI is under the umbrella of Incarnation Center.

This OSLI program is funded by a foundation, however in addition to the grant money for which OSLI will apply, the program is seeking funding for other programs from the parents, the PTA or other outside sources who are interested in the program.

E. Blanck stated that she is the point of contact for the school and any communication may occur via email. She stated that the Essex Land Trust has indicated that they would become involved with the OSLI pending the Conservation Commission's partnership.

K Tucker stated that the Commission will discuss this proposal, make a decision and inform E Blanck via email. If the Conservation Commission agrees to participate in this program, E. Blanck will then go ahead and register this program online. E. Blanck suggested that Commissioners visit www.handsonland.org which details the benefit of membership, etc.

J Lovelace stated that he will investigate the HOL.org website and report to the Commission at the February meeting.

4. Old Business to include:

A. Trail Reports and Projects

1 Viney Hill Brook Preserve

R. Helmecki reported that he and K Tucker cut down Autumn Olive in the wildflower section of Viney Hill Brook Preserve at the end of November. Eli and Ben Clark were on site working along the perimeter of the fence.

J. Lovelace reported that in January there was a large pile of brush left remaining in the area of the gate in the Broadwalk section of Viney Hill Brook Preserve.

K Tucker presented an invoice in the amount of \$525.00 from Clark's Custom Service for cutting back the brush.

F. Hall reported that he was at Viney Hill Brook Park and he stated that the beavers have significantly cut back an 18" Locust tree on the east side of the pond, since January 1st. It was noted that the beavers may have gone into hibernation as the pond is frozen. There are other trees on the east side of the pond that the beavers have been working on as well.

A. Forrest will drop off trail maps for the boxes.

F. Hall indicated that there has been very little beaver activity at Wollock's Pond and no significant activity north of the CL&P access road.

K. Tucker stated that when she and R. Helmecki spoke with Eli and Ben Clark at Viney Hill Preserve, they reported that six or so beavers swam toward them.

K. Tucker commended M. Reeves for his participation in working with the Town Crew who laid down asphalt in the passive area parking lot.

2. Bushy Hill

No report.

3. Canfield-Meadow Woods

R. Ward stated that Canfield Meadow Woods has been heavily used and it appeared to be very full every time he visited in the last few weeks. There were many cars in the parking lot.

B. Financial Expenditures

K. Tucker reported that she will authorize the Treasurer's office to pay the bill in the amount of \$525 to Clark Custom Service.

K. Tucker reported that of the \$10,525 allotted in the 2015/2016 fiscal year budget, the Commission has expended a total of \$6,439 to date. There is a balance remaining of \$4,086. A contract from All Habitat has been received for phragmite treatment in the amount of \$500; Japanese Knotweed removal in the amount of \$800; and \$350 for the DEEP Permit, for a total of \$1650. There will be an additional cost incurred of \$500 to cut back the Knotweed for a total of \$2,200 in anticipated expenditures through the spring. The cost of the recording clerk will incur approximately \$1,000 leaving a balance of \$341 left remaining in the Commission's budget to the end of fiscal year. K. Tucker stated that the Commission will contract with Beaver Solutions, LLC for routine maintenance in March or April, and there was discussion about drawing those funds from the beaver escrow fund. The Commission will incur a \$100 fee for Shirley Malcarne who updates the easement and right-of-way inventory.

F. Hall suggested that additional maps for the Preserve be printed if there is a remaining balance.

There is a \$725 balance remaining in the escrow account of which the Commission has expended \$250. The Commission will be requesting another \$450 from that account.

There was a brief discussion related to the maintenance of the exclusion fence as well as the Clark's Custom Services proposed work to be done at Bushy Hill Nature Preserve. M. Reeves suggested that the Commission obtain a proposal for the cost of the maintenance for Clark's services at Bushy Hill.

C. Budget for Fiscal Year 2016-2017

K. Tucker stated that the budget was set at the previous meeting. The total proposed is \$12,700, which K. Tucker noted is a lean budget.

A. Forrest suggested setting aside small funds to be devoted for educational purposes.

R Ward suggested creating a new category within the budget for education.

J. Lovelace suggested a dialogue between the Principal of the Essex Elementary School to inquire if a science teacher might wish to take on the beaver project. J. Lovelace suggested a one-week course on beavers which would involve the children visiting the site and witnessing first-hand the beaver lodge, etc.

M. Reeves suggested that K. Tucker present to the Selectmen and to the Board of Finance and explain the change in the scope of the Conservation Commission's functions and operations and mission as it is related to the use and care of the Preserves, and further inform that the Commission would like to make Viney Hill Brook Park an educational site.

J. Lovelace suggested that the Commission involve the Garden Club with the OSLI effort.

K. Tucker will earmark an additional \$200 to be devoted to this new budgetary lined item.

MOTION made by M. Reeves to approve the 2016/17 Budget as presented and forward to the Board of Finance; **SECONDED** by F. Hall; **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.

D. Other

K. Tucker stated that the unleashed and not-at-heel dogs have become a real problem within the trails and questioned if the Conservation Commission, in conjunction with animal control might wish to make a statement for the Town's website stating that dogs must be on a leash or at heel. K Tucker noted that she has received many phone calls from people who have been attacked by dogs on the trails.

M. Reeves suggested that the Commission place something in Essex Events.

R Ward suggested the use of the verbiage “on leash or under control”.

M. Reeves will draft a statement and pass along to the Selectmen with the request that it be placed on the website.

J. Lovelace reported that the 10th annual New Years Eve walk was a success. There were 20 participants. M. Reeves presented on the installation of the flexible pipe and F. Hall presented on the history of the beavers. The walk started at 10am and concluded at noon.

5. New Business

There was no new business.

6. Review and Approve December, 2015 Meeting Minutes:

MOTION made by J. Lovelace to approve the December, 2015 Regular Meeting Minutes with the following amendments; Page 2 under Old Business: “K Tucker emailed the First Selectman’s office”; Page 2, “It is apparent that the beavers have attempted to bring in large *branches*”; Page 4, “Members agreed to earmark \$4,750 toward mowing.” **SECONDED** by M. Reeves; **Voting In Favor:** K. Tucker, J. Lovelace, R. Helmecki, M. Reeves; **Opposed:** None; **Abstaining:** A. Forrest, R. Ward, F. Hall; **Approved:** 4/0/3.

7. Inlands/Wetlands Report

J. Lovelace reported that the Commission approved a Permit for Application No. 15-18, Stevens and Associates for Pam Carrol, 39 Main Street, Essex to locate a new driveway off Pratt Street to a point 6 feet from a small wetland area, and a new septic system to a point 73 feet from same wetland area.

J. Lovelace reported that the IWWC elected D. Lampan as Chair and F. Szufnarowski as Vice Chair.

8. Correspondence

K. Tucker reported that the IWWC issued a Permit for Application #15-15, Conservation Commission, Town of Essex, Cedar Grove Terrace, Map 68 Lot 1. This is an application to replace the PVC pipe with a flexible pond leveler pipe and exclusion fence structure in Quarry Pond at Viney Hill Brook Park.

K. Tucker commented on the R Ward’s November meeting presentation: “Should we develop a defining vision and multi-year plan for Essex Conservation Commission and individual Preserves?” An example of what that plan might look like. R. Ward researched towns from Greenwich to Harwinton and he presented a slide show on his research regarding the Commission’s ongoing discussion related to developing a multi-year plan for the Essex Conservation Commission.

K Tucker inquired if members would like to consider different parameters to begin individual discussion on their vision. Topic to be continued for further discussion.

9. Adjournment

MOTION made by J. Lovelace to adjourn the regular meeting at 9:00pm to the next regularly scheduled meeting which will be conducted on February 4, 2016 at 7:30pm, Essex Town Hall, Conference Room B, 29 West Avenue, Essex, CT; **SECONDED** by F. Hall; **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