

MCC

Milford Conservation Commission Regular Meeting

Tuesday June 19, 2012. 6:00 PM

Parsons Government Complex, Conference Room C, 70 West River Street, Milford, Ct. 06460

MINUTES

Mr. Poultray called the meeting to order at 6:18.

Members attending: William Poutray (ch), William M. Blotney, Dan C. Drago, Steve Johnson, Gerard Loiselle, Oden Seaholm

Absent: Claire Casey, Keith Dunn, Maureen Mauro-Desantie

Staff attending: Meg Greene (Rec. Sec.)

Public comment

None.

Previous meeting minutes

Motions were made, seconded and carried to approve the minutes from the April 16 and May 21 meetings.

Old Business

WEPAWAUG RIVER WATERSHED ALLIANCE (WRWA)

Mr. Poutray noted that Mr. Johnson is working on River Alliance grant, proposing to use the funds for water testing equipment and public educational outreach for issues pertaining to the Wepawaug. He noted that the grant is not intended for data collection because quality assurance testing activities require certification by the state. **Mr. Johnson** added that he is also applying for a Jeniam Foundation grant, which allows more water quality analysis and can be coordinated with existing programs in Norwalk and Westport via Earthplace. He said that up to 4 attendees could do the water training program with topics including chemistry, invertebrates, sedimentation, collection and sampling. Both grants are intended as seed money for startup watershed alliances. He said training will be steeply discounted to a cost of \$125 per person and will take place on 4 Saturdays for 3-4 hours each session. He said it's probably best to send core members of Watershed Alliance and then commit to sharing information with others after the training. **Mr. Loiselle** asked if the Regional Water Authority might be able to contribute funding; **Mr. Johnson** will follow up. **Mr. Drago** raised the importance of building awareness with the public to publicize conditions in the Wepawaug and its associated ponds. **Mr. Johnson** shared that this summer, there will be a 2-week water enrichment program in the middle schools; he will help conduct sessions at Harborside School with science teacher Lisa Nori. The committee also discussed the importance of sharing such events with the media.

KEY HYUNDAI—PUBLIC ACCESS TO OPEN SPACE

Mr. Poutray said Key Hyundai is expanding its service department into an adjacent building that was formerly a fitness club. In the course of negotiations for additional parking in the area, an opportunity arose to create access to the open space at Beaverbrook. Mr. Johnson noted that Key management was enthused and that the Board of Aldermen voted to channel \$25,000 in lease money into the Open Space acquisition and maintenance fund at the suggestion of Planning and Zoning Board member Jeanne Cervin. Mr. Poutray noted that the Key owner is an avid hiker and wants to encourage use of the trail by employees. **Mr. Johnson** and owner Jeff Miriam discussed a plan to relocate a fence to allow parking to enter Beaverbrook to provide safer access and egress. He said Key is providing a right-of-way for 8-10 cars with signage and a trail head sign. **Mr. Loiselle** asked that the point of access be placed on the Open Space map. **Mr. Johnson** noted that there is now very limited access via public space. **Mr. Loiselle** asked about Tower Plaza area access; **Mr. Poutray** noted that this is not public property.

PA-490 OPEN SPACE TAX EXEMPTION

Mr. Johnson said the state created the program for residents or corporations that own undeveloped properties, allowing them to request a tax exemption of up to 90% if they provide open space. He said that to enact it in Milford, one would have to define a valuation methodology for donated properties, get the program passed by the Board of Aldermen and implemented by the Assessors office. He said It is similar to PA 490 for farmland, but has to be created and implemented on its own merits. He noted that Maureen Mauro offered to research the program and suggested the agenda item be tabled until someone can touch base with her. Discussion exposed concerns that if the program does not make the open space parcel permanent, and it was suggested that back taxes should be used to create a penalty for temporarily taking such properties off the tax rolls, then developing them.

OPEN SPACE TAX CREDIT

Mr. Poutray said corporations can contribute to open space acquisition and realize a 60% tax credit ,while the same program allows a 100% tax credit for energy conservation projects, which makes the open space option a difficult concept to present to businesses. Mr. Johnson said the mayor asked that the committee investigate this and that he will consult Tom Ivers in Community Development.

CONSERVATION COMMISSION MISSION STATEMENT

Mr. Johnson motioned to table the mission statement discussion until after New Business has been discussed, because many items are relevant. **Mr. Drago** seconded and the motion passed.

New Business

REVIEWING THE CONSERVATION COMMISSION MUNICIPAL ROLE

Mr. Poutray and **Mr. Johnson** reviewed the indexing project of all OS areas, noting that hundreds of parcels exist which are very complex to document and find accurate maps and descriptions for. Mr. Johnson noted that such parcels can be listed differently in GIS versus Assessor's records, and that many of them are also identified in separate deeds and maps. These four sources can be conflicting, including discrepancies in records on right-of-way access. However, the opportunity is to clean up the information, especially noting deeds with perpetual OS designations. He noted that the last official (albeit incomplete) Open Space Map by the MCC was in 2008, and that it didn't include the Milford Land Conservation Trust properties, state or federal OS properties, like Silver Sands. He noted statutory and charter mandates to create an inventory of OS, adding that with a map, it's possible to see how they connect. **Mr. Poutray** noted that this research is very time consuming and not a practical activity for a conservation commission. He said this fact should have a direct influence on any mission statement the commission approves. He added that the role of the Conservation Commission relative to this could be ongoing updating of the condition of various open space properties. **Mr. Johnson** stated that a 1966 ordinance created MCC to protect natural resources in 7-131a of the CT General Statutes; he agreed to email or send hardcopy of the statutes. He provided a handout from the UConn Land Use Academy on the roles and responsibilities of the commission. He noted that the statutes talk about several categories of duties:

1. Research OS land in communities
2. Keep an index of them to obtain information for proper use of areas
3. Keep records of meetings/activities and provide an annual report.

He said the annual report was done verbally in past, but that he wants to do in writing this year. **Mr. Poutray** said it can be done at the 2nd-to-last meeting of year and presented at last meeting. He reminded the group that the MCC is a Land Use board. There followed a discussion by **Mr. Loiselle** of non-land use activities that he felt were relevant, such as anti-littering, recycling, and renewable resources project. **Mr. Poutray** cautioned that as a volunteer committee, MCC has limited resources and must be cautious about thinning its efforts. He noted the need for activities such as low impact development -to avoid harming water running through open space . **Mr. Johnson** emphasized a need to refocus the committee on its core issues and understanding advisory role. He noted that many areas could be "assigned" to commissioners within a radius near their homes, thus divvying up parcels for periodic assessment. He suggested selecting key parcels to be visited monthly such as Wilcox Park, Eisenhower Park and Mondo Ponds. He felt this activity would also connect members with properties that are not all very accessible or featuring signage. This would also present an opportunity to reach out to DPW to make them aware of problems. A suggestion was made to print index cards listing things to watch out for and to include input from "Friends of... certain areas such as Mondo Pond" in hopes of developing stewardship teams and homeowner groups. **Mr. Poutray** suggested a website login for reporting updates.

OTHER AGENDA ITEMS

Other items were to be tabled to allow the chair and vice chair to attend the IWA meeting.

Adjournment was at 7:28.

Respectfully submitted,

Meg Greene, Recording Secretary