

Town of Mansfield
CONSERVATION COMMISSION
Special Meeting of 18 August 2020
Coordinated at the Council Chambers, Audrey P. Beck Building
(Yet-to-be-approved) MINUTES

Members present (at some distance): Miranda Davis (Alt), Quentin Kessel (from 2:55p), Scott Lehmann, Chadwick Rittenhouse, Michael Soares. *Members absent:* Mary Harper, Erin King, Will Ouimet (Alt.), John Silander. *Others attending:* Jennifer Kaufman (Wetlands Agent), Linda Painter (Planning Director).

1. The meeting was **called to order** at 2:35p by Chair Michael Soares. In the absence of several Commission members, Davis was entitled to vote at this virtual meeting, facilitated by Go-To-Meeting software. During the corona virus pandemic, all meetings of Town bodies will take place remotely, by executive order of the Governor. They must be recorded using equipment in the Council Chambers and therefore must be held at a time when it is available.

2. The **draft minutes** of the special meeting of 31 March 2020 were approved as written.

3. Proposed Amendments to Mansfield Zoning Regulations. The PZC has proposed amendments to Articles 4, 7, 8, & 10 of the Mansfield Zoning Regulations. The amendments relate mostly to multi-unit housing and are mostly editorial rather than substantive: replacing roman numerals with base-10 arabic numerals, clarifying existing language, reorganizing information, eliminating redundancy, etc. More substantive changes include:

- For Age Restricted Housing (ARH), Design Multiple Residence (DMR), and Pleasant Valley Residence/Agriculture (PVRA) Districts:
 - Eliminate certain specific development standards to give the PZC more discretion in acting on applications. (Existing clauses in the zoning regulations already empower the PZC to impose such standards where appropriate.)
 - Permit 1- and 2-family dwellings that are not part of a larger multi-unit development.
 - Limit such districts to properties on arterial or collector streets.
- Special provisions for all multi-family and group dwelling developments that encourage a mix of sizes and types of housing (e.g., 1- and 2-family dwellings along with larger buildings with apartments of various sizes) and inclusion of affordable housing.
- More explicit instructions for calculating allowable housing density for a given parcel, including bonuses for affordable housing.

According to Linda Painter, the more substantive changes aim to encourage multi-unit development that is attractive to families and residents of all ages, not just to students.

The procedure (p.19) for calculating the developable land area of a parcel (which is needed to calculate its allowable housing density) requires subtracting any portion of the parcel within FEMA's 100-year floodplains. Rittenhouse noted that FEMA's maps are out of date and asked whether the Town shouldn't update them, perhaps by incorporating Julia Rogers' streambelt maps into the regulations. Painter thought there was enough overlap between flood plain and wetlands to catch development proposed for areas outside the Town's flood hazard zone (based on FEMA's maps) that are now at risk of flooding from more extreme weather.

At the end of discussion (2:55p), Painter signed off. A public hearing on the amendments will be held on 8 September 2020.

4. Regional Economic Development Strategy. *A homegrown approach to strengthening the*

region: action plan for economic vitality (AdvanceCT, June 2020) proposes strategies for economic development in the towns of Bolton, Coventry, Mansfield, and Tolland. Among other things, the report notes that local environmental amenities like parks & preserves, lakes, trails, open farmland, et al. can be economic assets, drawing visitors (and some of their disposable income) to the area, and has suggestions for promoting and profiting from them (e.g., agri-tourism). Comments on the report should have been submitted by 21 August, but a public information session will be held on 16 September 2020.

5. Amendments to the Town's Wetlands Map. Clear Mountain Capital has applied to the IWA for changes in the Town's map of wetlands and watercourses for four parcels off Rte. 44 and Cedar Swamp Rd. This is a technical issue, typically resolved by consensus between the applicant's soil scientist and the scientist hired by the IWA to check his or her work.

6. Land Swap: Town & Joshua's Trust. Joshua's Trust has proposed giving the Town an isolated 1.854 acre parcel off Jacob's Hill Rd & Britony Dr that borders the Town's Sawmill Brook Preserve in exchange for the Town's 1.19 acre lot on Crane Hill Rd, through which the Nipmuck Trail provides access to the Trust's Wolf Rock Preserve. The exchange would consolidate both Preserves and simplify their management. After brief discussion, the Commission unanimously agreed (**motion:** Lehmann, Rittenhouse) to endorse this land swap, provided that restrictions are attached to preserve each parcel from development.

7. Membership. Lehmann's current 3-year term – his fifth – on the Commission ends on 31 August 2020, and he has decided it's time – or past time! – to step aside to make room for someone with a fresh perspective. Kaufman, Soares, & Rittenhouse thanked him for his service, insisting that he'll be missed, and Kessel asked that the minutes include what he characterized as “an inadequate tribute to Scott Lehmann, the Mansfield Conservation Commission Secretary extraordinaire: The Commission has never had a wordsmith with Scott's unusually accurate linguistic skills. Our words cannot express our gratitude for his years of contributions, secretarial and otherwise, to the Commission.”

Kaufman will ask continuing Commission members to consider serving as Secretary. Lehmann suggested that it might be helpful to whoever it is, if Commission members came to meetings with brief written contributions to likely motions.

8. Communications.

- Kaufman encouraged Commission members to go to the Agenda Center (mansfieldct.gov/agendacenter) to get minutes from the IWA and committees whose work relates to the Commission's concerns. Soares suggested that a list of such committees would be useful.
- Recent storms have damaged trees covered by conservation easements, which generally do not permit their removal, even where they are a hazard. Kaufman reported that residents of Adeline Place on Meadow Brook La have sought permission to remove damaged trees in a narrow strip – protected by a conservation easement – along the road. She has asked the PZC to recommend that the Town Council adopt a protocol for removing hazardous trees within Town-held conservation easements. Soares asked if thought had been given to replacing such trees. Kaufman agreed this would be appropriate in some cases.
- John Silander has recommended reading “30 years of land cover change in Connecticut, USA,” which may be accessed at clear.uconn.edu/publications.
- Kaufman suggested checking out a discussion at desegregatect.org of the role of minimum lot sizes in segregating housing and making affordable housing scarce in Connecticut.

9. Next meeting: Wednesday, 16 September 2020.

- The massive packet for the 18 August meeting chronicled in these minutes includes a wetlands application from Haven Campus Communities for a mixed-use development on Rte 195 beyond 4-Corners. Consisting of seven buildings and a 5-story parking facility, it would be constructed on parcels now occupied by the old Rosal's building, Holiday Mall, and the former Storrs branch of the O. L. Willard Co, all of which would be demolished. This will be the main item on the agenda for the 16 September meeting. An IWA Field Trip is scheduled for 3:30p, Thursday, 10 September 2020.
- Kessel asked that a motion on impervious surfaces that he has drafted be added to the agenda for the September meeting.

10. Adjourned at 3:54p.

Scott Lehmann, Secretary, 23 August 2020.

