

Town of Mansfield
CONSERVATION COMMISSION
Meeting of 18 May 2011
Conference B, Audrey P. Beck Building
MINUTES

Members present: Joan Buck (Alt.), Robert Dahn, Peter Drzewiecki, Neil Facchinetti (Alt.), Quentin Kessel, Scott Lehmann. *Members absent:* John Silander, Frank Trainor. *Others present:* Grant Meitzler (Wetlands Agent).

1. The meeting was **called to order** at 7:33p by Chair Quentin Kessel.
2. The draft **minutes of the 20 April 2011 meeting** were approved as written.
3. **IWA referral W1477 (Walker, Riverview Rd.)**. The applicants propose a free-standing photovoltaic system mounted on a frame supported by ten concrete piers. The proposed location – the only place on the property clear of shading trees – is about 50 ft from the Natchaug River. According to Meitzler, there is little danger of flooding along this stretch of the river, as it is below the Mansfield Hollow Dam. The Commission agreed unanimously (**motion:** Dahn, Buck) that no significant impact on the river is likely, provided construction is as specified in the application.
4. The Commission's comments on **UConn's Draft Water Supply Plan** (March 2011), composed by Kessel as authorized at the Commission's 20 April meeting, were included in the Town's 26 April letter to UConn. Kessel also attended the Willimantic River Alliance's 11 May forum on the draft, where he heard a presentation by a representative from Milone & MacBroom, UConn's consultants.
5. Kessel met **Linda Painter, Mansfield's new Town Planner**, at a reception on 16 May. He will invite her to the Commission's September meeting. Retiring Town Planner Greg Padick will be honored at a dinner on 08 June, but well-wishers will have to cough up \$25 to attend.
6. A bill to extend provisions of the **Recreational Land Use Statute** (CGS §§ 52-557f *et seq.*) to municipalities (and their agencies, such as Hartford's Metropolitan District, which supplies water to the city) has passed the General Assembly. This statute limits the liability of owners who permit recreational use of their land free of charge. The Connecticut Supreme Court quixotically ruled in *Conway vs. Wilson*, 238 Conn. 653 (1996), that municipalities do not qualify as land-owners under the statute; this bill would make clear that they do.
7. **Agronomy Farm**. Storrs Heights residents concerned about the impact of turf research at the Agronomy Farm on water quality and quantity met with the Dean of the College of Agriculture & Natural Resources on 21 April. Facchinetti reported that the Dean has agreed to two of their recent requests – engaging a hydrologist to evaluate Robbins' 2008 study of the impact of farm pumping on neighborhood wells, and supplying a map of the locations and concentrations of pesticide applications – but that this is as far as he is willing to go. (For details, see Facchinetti's report, attached.) The Neighborhood Association is now considering recommending that residents take individual action to monitor and treat well water.
8. **Adjourned** at 8:27p.

Scott Lehmann, Secretary, 23 May 2011; revised 27 May 2011; approved 20 July 2011.

Report to the Conservation Commission on the UConn Agronomy Farm Expansion

Neighbors to the farm met with the Dean of Agriculture on 21 April 2011, at which time he gave us his “final word” in response to our latest set of concerns:

1. He will not formally agree to a pumping limit. Last summer and fall during a dry period, pumping amounted to 21,600 gallons per day, but he said they are able to pump up to 50,000 gallons per day before encountering a DEP requirement for a permit.
2. He will not authorize the monitoring of private well levels; he said this would expose UConn to an unacceptable level of liability.
3. He did agree to hire a hydrogeologist to evaluate the 2008 study by Dr. Robbins, which was undertaken to evaluate the impact of farm pumping on private wells nearby. On 10 May 11, I met with Jason Coite, Steve Olsen and this new hydrogeologist, who holds a masters degree in environmental engineering from the University of New Haven and did graduate studies with Dr. Robbins. We had a frank discussion on the ethics of the situation, and I described, again, how the Robbins study was deficient in several respects: too brief, not enough water pumped, new production wells not in place, and conducted in an extremely wet period. The Dean has been informed about our objection to using a former graduate student of Dr. Robbins to review the Robbins study.
4. The Dean, Jason Coite, and the farm manager will not concede that their monitoring wells are inadequate for protecting our water levels and that the parameters are arbitrary for reducing and stopping pumping from the production wells, which are 15 and 25 feet respectively. These thresholds of 15 and 25 feet were not advocated in the Robbins report.
5. The Dean refuses to test for all pesticides used at the farm, even though nitrogen was detected in one shallow test well (3.4mg./L) which could indicate pesticide migration. After reviewing the Material Safety Data Sheets (MSDS) for the farm pesticides, we found that probable carcinogens are being used at the farm.
6. The Dean refuses to test for pesticides before and after the growing season. He will only test in the fall despite the possibility that the spring thaw could promote pesticide migration toward our private wells.
7. After repeated requests, the the Dean has agreed to provide us with a map detailing the locations and concentrations of pesticide applications, similar to a report the farm manager produced in 2007. We anticipate this report in the summer.
8. Recently we received an abbreviated list of current research projects at the farm.
9. We have not been able to obtain assurances from the Dean that recent budget cuts would not affect the implementation of safeguards at the farm. Necessary upgrades of monitoring for water levels and pesticide contamination cannot be guaranteed.
10. A tour of the pesticide storage facility at the farm revealed that upgrades are needed to improve fireproofing and spill containment.

Neil Facchinetti, 18 May 2011