

Town of Mansfield
CONSERVATION COMMISSION
Meeting of 16 November 2011
Conference B, Audrey P. Beck Building
MINUTES

Members present: Peter Drzewiecki (from 8:05p), Neil Facchinetti, Quentin Kessel, Scott Lehmann, John Silander,. *Members absent:* Aline Booth (Alt.), Joan Buck (Alt.), Robert Dahn, Frank Trainor. *Others present:* Matt Hart (Town Manager), Allison Hilding (resident), Grant Meitzler (Wetlands Agent), Linda Painter (Town Planner).

1. The meeting was **called to order** at 7:36p by Chair Quentin Kessel and its agenda reordered to accommodate guests.

2. **Public Comment.** Allison Hilding brought to the Commission's attention a CEQ initiative to establish conservation easements on appropriate state-owned land to help achieve the state's announced goals of (1) preserving 2K acres of farmland annually and (2) ultimately protecting 21% of the state's land area as conservation lands. She urged the Commission to nominate state-owned land in Pink Ravine and along Cedar Swamp Brook and the Fenton River for such easements.

3. **Discussion with Town Manager & Town Planner.** Matt Hart & Linda Painter reviewed developments of interest for the Commission:

- Phase 1A of the **Storrs Center** project is well under way: the developer is working on the Dog Lane building, site work on the parking garage has begun, and bids for road work will soon be solicited. The aim is to complete phase 1A by July 2012, at which point old buildings on the site – Storrs Automotive, the Store 24 complex, Phil's – will be demolished to make way for new construction. The Town is developing an open-space plan for the project, so that trails in its conservation area connect with others in Town to the extent possible. Kessel observed that the University should be included in this kind of planning, as there are a number of trails, formal and informal, on its land.
- The bond issue for planning water & sewer connections to **Four Corners** failed for lack of sufficient turnout in the 08 November 2011 election; it will be on the ballot again next November. If approved then, the project could conceivably be completed in 2014, provided the required survey of options is completed – and the best alternative identified – soon. The area will remain an economic dead zone until sewers are available; its poor soils cannot handle leachate from septic systems. Kessel asked if current Town regulations are sufficient to prevent strip development in the area once water and sewer goes in. Painter responded that, in her view, the poor economy gives the Town time to review its regulations and to make any necessary changes.
- Council approval for reactivating the **Economic Development Commission**, moribund since the 1980s, will be sought. It would promote retaining existing businesses and attracting new ones. The "Local First Mansfield" pilot program initiated by the Downtown Partnership to encourage holiday shopping at local businesses is an example of the sort of thing a resurrected Commission could do.
- CL&P's **Interstate Reliability Project** is moving toward consideration by the Connecticut Siting Council; does the Commission wish to make any additional recommendations on this project to the Council? Kessel observed that, inasmuch as CL&P has rejected suggestions that this electricity 'pipeline' to SW Connecticut be routed along I-90 and I-91 rather than through NE Connecticut, the only opening for recommendations at this point appears to be mitigation (e.g., decreasing the footprint of the new lines by combining them with the old ones on higher towers, rather than clearing

more of the right-of-way for a second column of poles). Painter indicated that CL&P had revised its original proposal somewhat to reduce impact; she will make the most recent version available to the Commission.

- A workshop to inform Commissions, Boards, and Committees of their legal duties concerning **Freedom of Information** has been scheduled for Thursday, 01 December 2011. Representatives of the Commission, preferably its Chair & Secretary, should attend.

Kessel then brought up some additional matters:

- In April 2009, the Commission agreed to submit any **comments to outside agencies** to the Town Planner for review at least 24 hours before sending them out. Is this arrangement still acceptable? Painter expressed reservations about the 24-hour period: she will do her best, but reviewing a proposed communication in so short a time may sometimes be impossible. Hart suggested e-mailing the communication to both the Town Planner and the Town Manager to increase the likelihood of a quick review.
- Kessel asked if the letter he has drafted to DPH regarding **Ponde Place's appeal** of its ruling against utilizing monitoring wells as supply wells is acceptable. Hart agreed that it was. With a slight change of wording, the letter was approved; it is attached.
- Jessie Shea has proposed replacing paper meeting packets with **electronic packets** to save time and expense. Kessel indicated that the Commission is OK with this, provided members who want paper packets can continue to get them. He suggested that the electronic packet be book-marked.
- A recent case of tree-cutting along the Willimantic River (item 4, minutes of 17 August 2011) suggests that **River Overlay Zones**, modeled on those proposed for Chaplin, could be useful in protecting streambelts by regulating streamside development. Painter suggested writing a letter to PZC to this effect.

Finally, Silander asked about the status of Mansfield's own 'Road to Nowhere' – the fabled Tech-Park connector between UConn and Rte.44. Hart indicated that this project seems to be moving ahead, now that state bonding has been approved for the Tech Park.

4. IWA referrals. The Commission agreed that there was no need to comment on **W1488**, which revises language in the Town's wetlands regulations so as to extend the life of certain wetlands permits, inasmuch as this change is mandated by state statute.

5. Dark Skies. William Shakalis has arranged for the Conservation Commissions of Ashford and Willington to co-sponsor a showing of "The City Dark" on 03 February 2012 at E.O. Smith (if its auditorium is available).

6. Agronomy Farm. According to Facchinetti: "At its annual meeting on October 30, 2011, the Storrs Heights neighborhood association recommitted itself to protecting its water supply against inadequate safeguards at the UConn research farm. The association directed its ad hoc Farm Water Committee to continue advocating for safe and sufficient supplies from water resources we share with the UConn farm."

7. The draft **minutes of the 19 October 2011 meeting**, with improved spelling of Facchinetti's surname in several places, were approved.

8. Adjourned at 9:09p.

Scott Lehmann, Secretary, 18 November 2011; approved 21 December 2011.

Attachment: Letter to DPH regarding Ponde Place

November 16, 2011

Mr. Eric McPhee
Supervision Environmental Analyst
Connecticut Department of Public Health
Drinking Water Section

Re: PURA Docket Number 11-09-14

Dear Mr. McPhee:

The Mansfield Conservation Commission continues to be concerned with the proposed Ponde Place development in Mansfield. In particular, the draw-down of ground water for the development will produce a "cone of depression" that is likely to affect the local residential wells and renew the movement of the chemically contaminated plume from the old University of Connecticut landfill.

We endorse the November 14, 2011, letter from the Eastern Highlands Health District to you, which amplifies many of our concerns. Attached is a portion of the minutes of our April 15, 2009 meeting and we would like Section 3d., W1428 (Ponde Place, Northwood Rd.) entered into the public record. The questions we posed at that time have never been fully answered.

Sincerely yours,

Quentin Kessel, Chair
Mansfield Conservation Commission