

Town of Mansfield
CONSERVATION COMMISSION
Meeting of 19 September 2012
Conference B, Audrey P. Beck Building
MINUTES

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

1. The meeting was **called to order** at 7:31p by Chair Quentin Kessel. Alternate Joan Buck was designated a voting member for this meeting. {John Silander came to the meeting but was excused before it was called to order when it was clear that he was not needed for a quorum; he was to leave for Vladivostock the next day.}

2. The draft **minutes of the 18 July 2012 meeting** were approved as written; no meeting was held in August.

3. State Plan of Conservation and Development. Linda Painter informed the Commission that the State is in the process of updating its Plan of Conservation and Development, which is supposed to guide project planning and funding by state agencies. Much of the guidance will be provided by maps that place particular parcels of land in *conservation*, *development*, or *balance* zones, depending upon whether such parcels meet certain criteria. There are six conservation criteria (e.g., prime agricultural land, wetlands, critical habitat) and six development criteria (e.g., water/sewer connections, census block classified as urban, mass transit access).

The idea is to direct development projects and funding to development zones and conservation projects and funding to conservation zones. Balance zones satisfy some conservation criteria and some development criteria; projects in this zone would require balancing conservation and development. To prioritize projects and funding, conservation and development areas are further classified by how many of the conservation or development criteria they meet. Since funding is always limited, the state might consider funding only projects in “high priority” conservation or development zones that meet at least 5 of the 6 criteria for such zones.

Since the Town depends upon state funding for many projects, it is important that its own Plan of Conservation and Development be aligned with the State’s Plan, preferably by having State maps reflect the Town’s conservation and development goals.

Some concerns about the State’s zoning procedure emerged in discussion: (1) Areas classified as “high priority” development zones may not be eligible for state grants for open space purchases, although open space may be particularly valuable for residents of these zones; surely urban parks can add a great deal to the quality of life in urban areas. (2) Balance zones can lump together parcels of very different character – for example, parcels that would be zoned “high priority” conservation areas but for satisfying one of the development criteria and parcels that would be zoned “high priority” development areas but for satisfying one of the conservation criteria.

4. PZC Applications. Painter reported to the Commission on several applications before the PZC.

α. **PZC 1284-2 (Whispering Glen, 73 Meadowbrook Rd)** In 2009 the PZC approved a development with 37 condominium units on this site. The developers have reconsidered the market for large condominiums and are now asking for approval of 54 smaller units instead.

The Commission considered the original application at its meeting of 18 March 2009. Since the amended application calls for even greater density, the Commission's comments on W1424, quoted here from the minutes, are worth reiterating:

- The design of the stormwater management system should be scrutinized to insure that it is up to the task; uncontrolled runoff could erode the steep slope and dump sediment into the wetland and brook below.
- The erosion potential of the trail providing access to the conservation area could be reduced by running it along the bottom of the slope rather than half-way up.
- To enhance protection of the wetland and brook, the steep slope should be included in the conservation area.
- Given the high density of development and the potential for storm-water impacts on the slope and wetlands below, the Commission suggests eliminating those units proposed for construction within the regulated area.

b. **PZC 1312 (Healey Banquet Hall, 476 Storrs Rd)** This barn-conversion project has been approved by the IWA. The applicant is now seeking PZC approval for overflow parking on Town land and for exceptions to zoning regulations concerning set-back, building height, and the like – issues outside the Commission's purview.

c. **PZC 1246-10 (Storrs Center)** The Storrs Center developers propose to replace planned retail buildings with underground parking along Rte. 195 from Post Office Rd to the old Storrs Drug location with a small retail building at the corner, a parking lot, and then a small supermarket. Drainage and wetlands would not be affected by this change.

d. **PZC 1311 (Sauve subdivision, North Windham Rd)** This is a pre-application submission for a 3-lot subdivision off N. Windham Rd. {Lehmann participated in the 28 August Field Trip to the site; his report is attached.} The applicants propose a common driveway from N. Windham Rd. to access three lots on a plateau to the north; frontage on the road, along with wetland, an open area, and an open meadow below and west of the plateau would be dedicated open space. Kessel reported that the Open Space Committee had discussed an alternate proposal: enlarge one of the lots to include all the open space areas and protect them with conservation easements. Lehmann was not enthusiastic about this, pointing out that dedicated open space areas to the west would enhance Mansfield Hollow State Park (to which they are adjacent) and that conservation easements on private land do not afford public access. {Painter left the meeting.}

5. IWA referral: W1501 (Block, 8-22 Hanks Hill Rd) An old 12x60 ft 'mobile home' has been removed and a pad prepared for a new 27x48 ft modular unit (which, in virtue of its shorter length, would be a little farther from a drainage stream). Like all the other units in this development, this one would be served by UConn water and sewer. The Commission agreed unanimously (**motion:** Dahn, Lehmann) that no significant impact on wetlands was likely.

6. Annual Report. With insertion of "together with the Conservation Commissions of Ashford and Willington" between "and" and "hosted" in the third bullet under "Accomplishments", the Commission unanimously approved (**motion:** Buck, Dahn) the FY2011-12 Report drafted by Linda Painter and thanked her for preparing it.

7. Updates. Kessel reported that EIEs for the 4-Corners Water & Sewer Project and UConn's Hazardous Waste Transfer Station are still forthcoming.

8. Adjourned at 8:44p. Next meeting: 7:30p, Wednesday, 17 October 2012.

Scott Lehmann, Secretary, 20 September 2012; approved 17 October 2012

Attachment: Field Trip Reports

28 August Field Trip

W 1500 (Tolis, Hickory La). An above-ground pool & deck is proposed on a level terrace near the house. The edge of the terrace is formed by a stone retaining wall, below which lawn slopes to wetlands (about 80 ft from the proposed pool at the closest point). A catastrophic failure of the pool wall that quickly emptied 1K ft³ of water into the wetland might not be good for it, but this seems too unlikely to worry about.

PZC 1311 (Sauve, North Windham Rd). A 3-lot subdivision will be proposed for a 10.7-acre site fronting on Windham Rd; this was a pre-application visit. Existing buildings on North Windham Rd. would be demolished; a common driveway would access three lots on a plateau in the east central portion of the property; stone walls would be undisturbed, save for one driveway cut. The well-planned tour climbed to the plateau and circled the area proposed for development. On the west, the plateau slopes steeply down to wetland and two attractive open areas adjoining Mansfield Hollow State Park; this portion of the property would be open space. On the southeast, the plateau also slopes steeply down to an isolated piece of the Park on the north side of North Windham Rd. The plateau appears to have been logged within the past five years or so, and what remains there is mostly low-value pine. In my view, the area proposed for open space is the area of greatest conservation-value. The only suggestion I'd make is to protect the steep slopes west and southeast of the plateau with conservation easements.

12 September Field Trip

W 1501 (Block, 8-22 Hanks Hill Rd) The proposal is to replace a single-wide (12 ft) modular unit with a double-wide (24 ft) one. The new unit is shorter and would therefore be slightly farther from a drainage ditch behind it that carries runoff from Hanks Hill Rd and beyond into a wetland below. Like the other units in this "mobile home" park, this one would be connected to UConn water and sewer. By the time of the site visit, the old unit was gone and a widened pad was ready for the new one. It's hard for me to see a significant wetlands impact from this project, especially if impact is reckoned relative to the old installation.

PZC 1284-2 (Whispering Glen, 73 Meadowbrook La) The housing slump has led the developers of this parcel to reconsider their PZC-approved proposal to construct 30-some large townhouse units and to propose 54 smaller ones instead. Relative to the original plan, the development's layout, landscaping, and open space dedication seem unchanged, but units are smaller and some "active" recreation facilities (for horseshoes & volleyball) have been added. The developer did not show up for our visit; we walked the length of the area to be developed on an old driveway, but did not see much of interest (the area is now pretty jungly). There may be a question of whether provision for open space and recreation is sufficient, given that more people will be housed in the development. However, the portion of the property of greatest conservation-value – the area along Conantville Brook – is already included in dedicated open space.

Scott Lehmann, 13.IX.12