

EAST LYME COMMISSION FOR THE CONSERVATION OF NATURAL RESOURCES
REGULAR MEETING - VIA ZOOM
MAY 12, 2021

Present: Art Carlson, Chairman
Penny Heller
Don Danila
Laura Ashburn
Mark Christensen

FILED

May 21 20 21 AT 11:35 AM/PM
Laura Ashburn
EAST LYME TOWN CLERK

Also Present: Harvey Beeman, Alternate
Ron Nichols, Alternate
Rose Ann Hardy, Ex officio

CALL TO ORDER. Chairman Carlson called the East Lyme Commission for the Conservation of Natural Resources Regular Meeting of May 12, 2021 to order at 7:00 p.m.

MOTION (1): Mr. Danila moved to seat Ron Nichols for Mark Christensen. Seconded by Ms. Ashburn. (4-0) Unanimous

- I. **PUBLIC DELEGATIONS.** There were no guests.
- II. **MINUTES -March 10, 2021.** Mr. Carlson asked for additions, deletions, or corrections to the March 10, 2021 Minutes of the East Lyme Commission for the Conservation of Natural Resources.

The following correction was noted: On page 2 under Old Business, item B the last sentence to be revised as follows: "Mr. Carlson stated there are pitch pines at Darrow Pond".

MOTION (2): Ms. Heller moved to accept the March 10, 2021 East Lyme Conservation of Natural Resources Minutes, as amended. Seconded by Ms. Ashburn. (5-0) Unanimous

III. **NEW BUSINESS**

- A. **Review of Goodwin Trail Activities.** Mr. Carlson reported he and Mr. Beeman met, and Mr. Beeman agreed to be Chairman of a subcommittee to manage trails in general and the Goodwin Trail in particular. The Goodwin Trail is heavily used.

IV. **OLD BUSINESS**

- A. **Updates to Open Space Plan Land List/East Lyme Land Trust Purchases.** Mr. Carlson reported ELLT have two purchases underway. One is the Katz's property consisting of 300 acres. The second is the Hathaway property. The Hathaway property is rated as the number one priority to preserve in Town as shown in the POCD.
- B. **SustainabilityCT Program: East Lyme Pollinator Pathway Project.** Ms. Heller reported the Pollinator Pathway Project is now posted on the SustainableCT crowd funding website. They are seeking donations of about \$6,000 which will be matched by the SustainableCT program. Ms. Heller is very impressed with their willingness to manage several outreach projects. They are getting school students involved, establishing a pollinator meadow at the Samuel Smith House,

and have begun working on the roundabout near Riverhead Lumber Yard. They are also coordinating with the Parks and Recreation Department for future projects. Mr. Nichols asked if they have identified the locations throughout Town? Ms. Heller stated their first approach is to ask every homeowner to participate in establishing their own pollinator garden. Ms. Ashburn stated they are encouraging homeowners to plant native pollinators. They are also looking at pieces that are owned by the Town. They have completed seeding a meadow behind the East Lyme Living Garden. Ms. Ashburn added it takes two to three years to establish.

- C. Pitch Pine Park at Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve.** Ms. Heller reported a donation of seeds was received from Wild Ones, a group working out of Connecticut College, which was used to seed pollinator plants around the pitch pine at Veterans Field.

Ex officio Rose Ann Hardy joined the meeting.

Ms. Hardy reported that the BOS will be considering which projects the Town should fund with the substantial COVID Relief monies expected from the State in coming months. Ms. Heller reported we have been trying to fund a "Complete Streets Program" for over a year. This is a national program to make streets accessible to pedestrians and bicyclists. We will need to work with the State but this funding source would be appropriate. However, Ms. Hardy stated that the Town's water and sewer system also needs improvement. Ms. Ashburn stated sustainability infrastructure could be redesigned by Town staff viewing the national program webinars. The state bicycle plan involves mostly Niantic but the Flanders section of Town should be included.

Mr. Nichols stated we are assuming the majority of East Lyme residents are willing to pay for open space. The question on the November ballot could be "Are you willing to fund open space?"

Commission member Mark Christensen joined the meeting.

Ms. Hardy suggested that instead of a Referendum, which costs money, that at each of the polling places at the fall election we can have a survey asking how much money would the voter be willing to pay for open space. After the results are determined, you can request a special Town Meeting for that topic. Only certain things can be added to a regular election. Ms. Ashburn suggested an on-line survey.

- D. Discussion of Darrow Pond Forestry Report.** (See attached Report) Mr. Carlson met with Dave Putnam today. He is dedicated to keeping Darrow Pond natural. He is using guidelines for passive recreation and using the recommendations on management the natural way in the Forestry Report.

Ms. Hardy reported the Board of Selectmen received a presentation. She was concerned about including a parking lot with 40-50 cars. Mr. Carlson stated hopefully there will be no asphalt parking lots. It will be kept as natural as possible. He stated 100s of people use the trail and the facilities that exist. There are birding people visiting. Ms. Hardy suggested using stimulus money for this. Mr. Carlson felt a plan was needed. Ms. Heller added the Planner should work under Parks and Recreation. Mr. Carlson felt it should be kept as it is minimizing its care. Mr. Nichols asked if Mr. Carlson checked with Mr. Goeschel about where the Forestry Report is kept. Mr. Carlson replied it's on the Town website.

V.REPORTS AND COMMUNICATIONS

- A. Communications.** Mr. Carlson reported he was not aware of any correspondence.
- B. Agribusiness Subcommittee.** Four topics were reported: Two new members have joined the subcommittee. "Farm Day" will be held Saturday, July 17th, 10 am -3 pm, at the Samuel Smith Farmstead. We plan on having oxen, horses, sheep, goats, chickens, and possibly someone with Alpaca wool. The event will showcase just what it takes to keep animals and how life revolved around not just getting food for oneself, but food for animals as well. The EL Zoning Commission recently approved a Special Permit for livestock at a back lot on Cardinal Drive with about 15 acres. The subcommittee supported this endeavor. The EL Giving Garden, which began with the subcommittee members, has started a new fundraising campaign that will be buoyed by their new 501 nonprofit status. This means larger corporate donors will be likely to send substantial donations. Several workdays have taken place with the participation of many volunteers.
- C. Chairman's Report.** Mr. Carlson showed a poster reminding motorcyclists or ATVs riders that they are not allowed on the Goodwin Trail, in particular, and other trails in general. There was a consensus of the Commission that signs should be posted. He was in contact with a boy scout troop and they wished to work on three Eagle Scout projects.
- D. Ex-Officio Report.** Ms. Hardy reported we are reviewing requests for the use of stimulus money. We have a request from Niantic Main Street because of the impact on local businesses. We are also considering several infrastructure projects listed above.

ADJOURNMENT

MOTION (3): Mr. Danila moved to adjourn the May 12, 2021 East Lyme Commission for the Conservation of Natural Resources Regular Meeting at 8:10 p.m. Seconded by Ms. Heller. (5-0), unanimous.

Respectfully submitted,

Frances Gheri, Recording Secretary

April 15, 2021: Meeting with Mike McDowell at EL Parks and Recreation Office at 10:00 AM. Purpose is to find out more about the start of planning for the Town owned part of the Darrow Pond open space property. The total area at Darrow Pond is approximately 300 acres, and approximately 100 Acres of that is available for the Town to use, and the balance of 200 Acres is protected by a conservation easement currently managed for the Town, by the Friends of Oswegatchie Hills Nature Preserve. This organization has performed the annual open space property boundary inspections, since 2014, and the reports are submitted annually to the First Selectman.

Meeting notes:

A committee has been established by the East Lyme Parks and Recreation Commission to help receive and review survey comments and determine the best uses of the 100-acre town owed portion of the Darrow Pond area.

The committee is called the Darrow Pond Recreation Area Committee. It has 13 members in total, comprised of two members from the Parks & Recreation Commission, eight members from the East Lyme community, and three staff members (Mike McDowell, Dave Putnam, and Gary Goeschel). A list of the committee members is part of this report. The minutes from the March 11, 2021 meeting of the EL Parks & Recreation Commission indicate that Todd Donovan volunteered to chair the new committee.

The Darrow Pond survey will remain open to continue receiving input from residents through the end of June, so as to be able to receive input during the East Lyme Farm Market event on June 24th.

To date, there have been 400 plus responses received as to the types of interest in ways to utilize the property. Popular activities noted so far include the following:

Hiking (69%),
 Cycling (37%);
 Disc Golf (31%);
 Kayaking (42%);
 Dog Park (21%);
 Camping (15%);
 Fishing (25%);
 Rock Climbing (18%);
 Nature Preserve (44%)

One element that has been recognized is the need to expand the parking lot capacity, which is now very limited to at most, about 10 cars.

Also, the Board of Selectmen must still officially name the Parks and Recreation as the manager of the Town Owned 100-acre portion.

The new committee will utilize the 2012 report prepared by the Darrow Pond Open Space Committee. This committee reviewed recommendations for ways to utilize the Town Controlled part and the Permanent Easement part of the Property, and the report summarizes those recommendations. The Town Controlled part had 7 elements that were rated for levels of potential interest. As follows:

- Fishing (6 Yes/ 1 No);

- Kayaking/Canoeing (3 Yes/4 No);
- Horseback Riding (7 Yes/0 No);
- Swimming (0 Yes/5 No);
- Docks (1 Yes/ 4 No);
- Ice Skating/Ice Fishing (4 Yes/ 1 No);
- Tobacco Products & Alcohol (0 Yes/ 5 No).

Two issues/concerns were identified in the report: Control of Invasive Plant Species; Current Easement Restrictions. The pond must be protected from any invasive organism on the bottom of boats/kayaks.

A potential source of funding that should be pursued, is the federal Covid-19 Relief Grants coming to East Lyme, via the State of Connecticut. This also applies to NRWC and FOHNP. Notes by Ralph Bates, April 15, 2021.

Darrow Pond Recreation Area Committee April 2021

Parks and Recreation Commission Members:

Todd Donovan

Pat Larkin

Resident Members:

Bonnie Dombrowski

Christine Naktenis

Jill Johnson

Megan Hatt

Nila Kaczor

Marc Salerno

Bruce Dasinger

Richard Williams

Staff Members:

Mike McDowell

Dave Putnam

Gary Goeschel