

CONSERVATION COMMISSION
MAY 25, 2010
LONG HILL ROOM

The meeting was called to order at 7:07PM by Mary Ellen Lemay. Also in attendance were John Russell, Joanne Parsons, Dale Parsons, Don Watson, and Julie Jenkins. Guests in attendance were Pam Georges, Frank Grazynski, and Milan Bull.

Minutes from the April meeting were approved.

Pam Georges spoke about the possible relocation of the Nature and Art Center. Presently the Center is not on protected property, nor on open space. She feels the current Center is a good starting place for a Nature Center; however a new building could be built to their specifications (not a modified ranch house as it currently is). She is not opposed to the proposed site near Stern Village, approximately 380 acres with trails. Don Watson asked if the Nature and Art Center had looked at other sites within the town for relocation. Pam Georges said Dimitri Paris had done some research about that topic and would comment on it when he arrived. Pam said she would prefer the Center be located on town owned property. Currently the town pays for the building and maintenance on the property, but all other monies come from self funding by the Nature and Arts Center Commission. Pam also said that there have not been any formal negotiations with the town about relocation, selling the current Park Ranger Station, or selling the Nature and Art Center property.

Dimitri Paris arrived at 7:22PM.

Dimitri spoke to other locations for the Nature and Art Center

- Beaches – good location with easy access, utilities close, and close to a good volunteer source (Stern Village, Trumbull High School, and Hillcrest Middle School)
- Island Brook – Mostly wetlands and rock
- Unity – Not much empty space
- Twin Brooks – flooding a major problem, too developed a property to be a nature/wildlife center
- Great Oak – residential neighborhood
- Indian Ledge – no sanitary services near, traffic access is poor

Dimitri thought that the new Nature and Art Center along with the Park Ranger office would be about 5000 square feet. Don asked about funding this. Pam said construction of the building would be paid by the town through the sale of the current Park Ranger office along with the land the Center is now on. Other expenses would be paid by private funding.

Pam Georges, Frank Frazynski, and Dimitri Paris left at 7:45PM

Milan Bull, vice chair of Fairfield's Conservation / Inland Wetlands Commission, spoke about how this combining of commissions works in Fairfield. The same members are on both commissions, but the duties are split between 2 different meetings each month. The Conservation Commission meetings are primarily about open space while the Inland Wetlands meetings are about inland wetlands. There is a conservation department in town which has a manager, an enforcement officer, as well as several part-time employees. The parks in town are managed by the Parks Department. The Conservation Commission serves an advisory role, while the Inland Wetlands is regulatory. There are 11 members on the dual commission. All projects go before the Conservation Commission first and if approved, then go to Inland Wetlands before going to any other department. Milan said it has been working well in Fairfield, but he emphasized that the town takes conservation seriously, and the enforcement is also taken seriously.

Milan Bull left at 8:20PM.

Discussion ensued about Fairfield's Conservation/Inland Wetlands Commission. We would like to find out our First Selectman's position on combining these commissions and perhaps he can meet with us.

On June 16 there is a meeting with town officials about flood remediation in Twin Brooks Park. Someone in the group planned to attend this meeting.

The Pequonock River Watershed Group is reforming and looking for members. The group has been given a \$59,000 grant to develop a plan for the river and its tributaries.

June 5 is Connecticut Trails Days, and many hikes are being planned throughout the state. John Russell along with Paul Kalmeyer will be leading a hike along the east side of the Pequonock River in Trumbull.

The applications for Inland Wetlands were reviewed. It was decided that we would send an email to Inland Wetlands

about application #10-12 concerning construction. We would like to make sure there is a silt fence backed with staked hay bales during the construction of the septic system to prevent run-off.

Joanne spoke about Twin Brooks Park and the lack of correct conservation management there. The selection of plantings around the ponds (viburnum) is poor because they have to continually be trimmed which is a costly endeavor. She also mentioned that grass should not be grown down to the pond edge, and instead this area should be more natural and sustainable, with a buffer existing between the grass area and the watercourse.

Mary Ellen would like to look at a conservation area overlay district, which would create a group of regulations for conservation.

Don agreed to summarize the discussion of the Nature Center Location, and is attached to these minutes accordingly. This statement will serve as a record of the Conservation Commission discussion and recommendations, to be forwarded to interested parties for appropriate advisory uses.

The meeting was adjourned at 9:30PM.

Respectfully submitted by,
Julie Jenkins

Attachment

Location of the Trumbull Nature and Arts Center

A statement of the Trumbull Conservation Commission May 27, 2010

Mary Ellen Lemay, Chair
John Russell
Julie Jenkins
Dale Parsons
Joanne Parsons
Donald Watson, FAIA, CIP

The Conservation Commission has reviewed the preliminary proposals for relocation of the Trumbull Nature and Arts Center. The Commission undertook the review to fulfill the Commission role to advise the Town on conservation and open space issues that may or may not be impacted by the proposal.

The Nature and Arts Center is presently located on a 10+ acre Town-owned property at 7115 Main Street (Route 25). The Trumbull Nature Commission is responsible for operation of the Center. In April, 2010, the Nature Commission joined with the Town First Selectman's office and staff under leadership of Dmitri Paris, Superintendent of Parks, in a "preliminary proposal" to relocate the Nature Center to a wooded site in Beeches Park, near Stern Village. A building of approx. 5,000 SF is envisioned, including nature center facilities and offices for Park Rangers. The rationale for the proposal is to allow the Town to sell the 7115 Main Street property to private development in order to add the property to Trumbull tax roles and to provide a more suitable facility for the Nature and Arts Center, and also offices for Park Rangers. By locating Park Ranger offices in a facility combined with the Nature Center would allow the Town a further consolidation of properties, also allowing the sale of the present Ranger Station presently located at the entry of Unity Park.

In April and May, 2010, the Conservation Commission invited two presentations regarding the relocation proposal. The first presentation was by Raymond Jaroszweski, member of the Nature Commission who attended the Conservation Commission meeting on April 29. Raymond Jaroszweski presented reasons why the Nature Center should not be relocated from its present site. Among positive assets of the present property its variety of examples of habitats that provide for nature education and demonstration (wetland, pond, field, forest edge), as well as an accessible location with parking, and several years of volunteer projects already completed on the property. The Commission appreciates the concern and commitment to conservation and education represented in Mr. Jaroszweski's comments.

Dan Nelson, Chief of Staff of First Selectman's office also attended the April 29 meeting and commented about the plans. Dan Nelson stated that the proposal was in preliminary stages only, and agreed that it is appropriate for the Conservation Commission to provide review comments on the proposal related to conservation planning and open space.

A second presentation was held at the Tuesday, May 25 Conservation Commission meeting attended by Pam Georgas, Chair of the Trumbull Nature Commission and Frank Grazynski, Nature Commission member, also joined by Dmitri Paris. Pam Georgas explained that the present location of the Nature Center has shortcomings of limited acreage and a building not suited to large meetings and other nature center functions. The Nature Commission desires a new facility to expand its activities, which include educational and volunteer programs and activities. The present proposal is that the Town of Trumbull would be responsible for construction and maintenance of the new building. Park Ranger staff offices would be located within the same facility. The Nature Commission, or a separate non-profit to be formed, will be responsible for all program activities and staffing.

Dmitri Paris reviewed his analysis of other sites that were considered within the Trumbull Parks properties and the reasons he consider the single "best option" to be the selected Beeches Park site near Stern Village. Other sites considered have considerable disadvantages, e.g., Indian Ledge has existing parking and a youth club structure, but has limited access and lack of sewerage infrastructure. Twin Brooks Park is a floodplain and, in Mr. Paris's view, should not be impacted further by facilities or infrastructure. The advantages of the proposed Beeches site include accessibility by existing roads and infrastructure, walking distance to Schools for school-based programs, proximity to Beeches and Twin Brooks Parks, and location on the edge and gateway of a Town park.

In discussion that followed, members of the Conservation Commission noted that the current proposal for relocation of the Nature Center does not raise any significant or insurmountable concerns related to open space protection. Further:

- Given the importance of the Town's Parks as a unique and defining attribute of the Town, the Conservation Commission will support any and all efforts to preserve and extend conservation education and stewardship of public properties. Location of a Nature Center within a Town Park system is entirely consistent with these goals.

- Within the approximate site area identified within Beeches Park, there are options for location of a 5,000 facility and parking that deserve careful study with the goal to preserve and enhance the nature assets and conservation values of the woodland site and habitats. The Conservation Commission will be pleased to advise and comment further on these options when the proposal advances to that level of detail.

- The Town-owned property at 7115 Main Street includes a stream and pond. Any proposals for commercial development proposals for that property will be required to meet Inland Wetland and Watercourse Commission regulations. The Conservation Commission considers this property to be important in flood control and water retention within the Pequonnock River watershed, functions to be fully addressed in any future sales and development of the property.

The Commission appreciates the respectful discussion of all parties in consideration of this proposal, that, if successful, can realize benefits on behalf of the Town's stewardship, volunteer engagement and advocacy of conservation and protection of its open space resources.